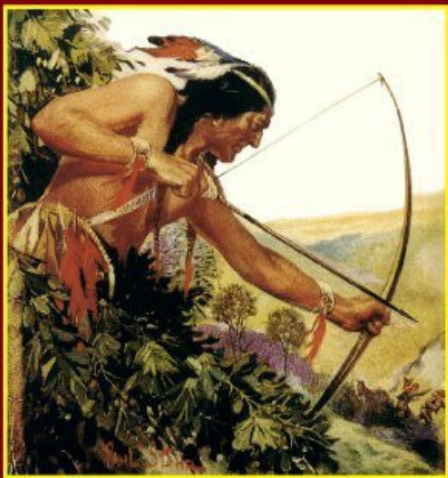


The Westerns



Edgar Rice Burroughs

The Westerns of Burroughs

Edgar Rice Burroughs

4 Books

The Deputy Sheriff of Comanche County
Apache Devil
The Bandit of Hell's Bend
The War Chief

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The Deputy Sheriff of Comanche County

Edgar Rice Burroughs

I--THE LINE FENCE

A LONE rider drew rein before a gate consisting

of three poles cut from straight pine saplings. He leaned from the saddle and dropped one end of each of the two upper bars to the ground, stepped his horse over the remaining bar and, stooping again, replaced the others. Then he rode slowly along a dirt road that showed little signs of travel.

As he rode he seemed but an animated part of the surrounding landscape, so perfectly did he harmonize from the crown of his Stetson to the light shod hoofs of his pony.

Everything that he wore seemed a part of him, as he seemed a part of his horse. His well worn chaps, his cartridge belt and holster, his shirt and bandana, like the leather of his horse trappings, were toned and mellowed by age and usage; yet they carried the same suggestion of strength and freshness and efficiency as did his bronzed face and his clear, gray eyes.

His mount moved at an easy, shuffling gait that some horsemen might call a rack, but which the young man would have described as a pace.

The horse was that homeliest of all horse colors, a blue roan, the only point of distinction in his appearance being a circular white spot, about the size of a saucer, that encircled his right eye, a marking which could not be said to greatly enhance his beauty, though it had served another and excellent purpose in suggesting his name - Bull's Eye.

At first glance the young man might have been found as little remarkable as his horse. In New Mexico there are probably thousands of other young men who look very much like him. His one personal adornment, in which he took a quiet, secret pride, was a flowing, brown mustache with drooping ends, which accomplished little more than to collect alkali dust and hide an otherwise strong and handsome mouth, while the low drawn brim of his Stetson almost accomplished the same result for the man's finest features --a pair of unusually arresting gray eyes.

The road wound through low rolling hills covered with stunted cedars, beyond which rose a range of mountains, whose sides were clothed with pine, the dark green of which was broken occasionally by irregular patches of quaking aspens, the whole mellowed and softened and mystified by an enveloping purple haze.

The road, whose parallel twin paths suggested wheels of traffic, but in whose dust appeared only the spoor of hoofed animals, wound around the shoulder of a hill and debouched into a small valley, in the center of which stood a dilapidated log house.

"This here," said the young man to his pony, "is where we were headed fer. I hope the old man's in," and as though to assure him of the fulfillment of his wish, the door of the cabin opened and a large, droop-shouldered, gray haired man emerged.

"Ev'nen, Ole," said the rider.

"Ev'nen," said the older man, rather shortly, as the other stopped his horse and swung from the saddle. "What you doin' here?"

"I come to see you about that line fence, Ole," said the young man.

"Gol durned if you aint as bad as your pa," said the older man. "I aint heared nuthin' else but that durned line fence fer the last twenty years."

"You and the old man fit over that fence for eighteen years up to the very day he died, but I'll be doggoned if I want to scrap about it."

"Then what you doin' up here about it?" demanded the other.

"I aint up here to scrap with you, Ole. I just come up to tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"You aint doin' nuthin' with that land. You aint never done nuthin' with it. You can't get water on to it. I can and there's about a hundred acres of it that lies right for alfalfa and joins right on to the patch I put in last year."

"Well what you goin' to do about it? It's my land. You sure can't put alfalfa on my land."

"It aint your land, Ole, and you know it. You put

it ain't your land, Ole, and you know it. You put your line fence in the wrong place. Maybe you did it accidental at first, but you know well enough that you aint got no title to that land."

"Well I got it fenced and I have had it fenced for twenty years. That's title enough for me," growled Gunderstrom.

"Now listen, Ole; I said I didn't come up here figurin' on quarrelin' with you and I aint a goin' to. I'm just tellin' you, I'm goin' to move that fence and put in alfalfa."

Olaf Gunderstrom's voice trembled with suppressed anger as he replied. "If ye lay a hand on that fence of mine, Buck Mason, I'll kill you."

"Now don't make me quarrel with you, Ole," said the young man, "cause I don't want to do nuthin' like that. I'm gonna move the fence, and I'm gonna say here that if anybody gets shot, it aint me. Now let's don't chew any more fat over that. What do you hear from Olga?"

"None of your durn business," snapped Gunderstrom.

Mason grinned. "Well, Olga and I grew up together as kids," he reminded the older man, "and I'm just naturally interested in her."

"Well, I'll thank you to mind your own business, Buck Mason," said Gunderstrom surlily. "My girl

aint ter no low down cowman. Me and her maw was nuthin' but trash. We seen it once when we went to Frisco and I aint never been nowhere since, but I made up my mind that my girl was gonna be able to herd with the best of 'em. That's why I sent her East to school - to keep her away from trash like you and the rest of the slab-sided longhorns that range in Comanche County.

"My girl aint gonna know the dirt and sweat and greasy pots in no cowman's kitchen. She aint gonna have no swells high hattin' her. She's goin' to be in a position to do the high hattin' herself. God and her mother give her the looks; the schools back in the states can give her the education, and I can give her the money; so she can herd with the best of 'em. My girl's gonna marry a swell; so you needn't waste your time asking no more questions about her. You aint never goin' to see her again, and if you do she won't even know you."

"Come, come, Ole," said Mason, "don't get so excited. I wasn't aimin' on bitin' Olga. She was a good kid; and we used to have a lot of fun together; and, say, if Olga marries a duke she wouldn't never high hat none of her old friends."

"She won't never get a chance while I'm alive," said Gunderstrom. "She aint never comin' back here."

"That's your business and hers," said Mason. "It aint none o'mine." He swung easily into the saddle. "I'll be mosevin' along. Ole. So long!"

"Listen," cried the older man as Mason wheeled his horse to move away. "Remember what I said about that line fence. If you lay a hand on it I'll kill you."

Buck Mason reined in his pony and turned in his saddle. "I hope there aint nobody goin' to be killed, Ole," he said quietly; "but if there is it aint goin' to be me. Come on, Bull's Eye, it's a long way back to town."

But Buck Mason did not ride to town. Instead he stopped at his own lonely ranch house, cooked his supper and afterward sat beneath an oil lamp and read.

The book that he was reading he had taken from a cupboard, the door of which was secured by a padlock, for the sad truth was that Mason was ashamed of his library and of his reading. He would have hated to have had any of his cronies discover his weakness, for the things that he read were not of the cow country. They included a correspondence course in English, a number of the classics which the course had recommended, magazines devoted to golf, polo, yachting, and a voluminous book on etiquette; but perhaps the thing that caused him the greatest mental perturbation in anticipation of its discovery by his candid, joke-loving friends was a file of the magazine *Vogue*.

No one knew that Buck Mason pored over these

books and magazines whenever he had a leisure moment; in fact, no one suspected that he possessed them; and he would have died rather than to have explained why he did so.

He had led rather a lonely life, even before his father had died two years previously; but perhaps the greatest blow he had ever suffered had been the departure of Olga Gunderstrom for the East, nearly six years before.

She was sixteen then, and he eighteen. They had never spoken of love; perhaps neither one of them had thought of love; but she was the only girl that he had ever known well. When she had gone and he had commenced to realize how much he missed her, and then gradually to understand the barrier that her education was destined to raise between them, he began to believe that he loved her and that life without her would be a drab and monotonous waste.

Perhaps it was because he was a little bashful with women and guessed that he would never be well enough acquainted with any other girl to ask her to be his wife. He knew that he and Olga would get along well together. He knew that he would always be happy with her, and he thought that this belief constituted love; so he determined to fit himself as best he might to appear well in the society that he believed her superior education destined her to enter, that she might not ever have cause to be ashamed of him.

It was a pathetic little weakness. He did not think of it as pathetic but only as a weakness, and he was very much ashamed of it. Like most quiet men, he had a horror of ridicule; and so he always kept his books and his magazines locked in his cupboard, nor ever took one out unless he was alone, except that when he took one of those long, lonely trips, which were sometimes made necessary in pursuance of his office as deputy sheriff of Comanche County, he would carry one of his books along with him; but never the book of etiquette or a copy of Vogue, each of which he considered a reflection upon his manhood.

In another lonely cabin, several miles away, Olaf Gunderstrom had cooked his own frugal meal, washed his dishes and gone to bed.

He was an eccentric old man, and he had permitted his eccentricities to become more and more marked after the death of his wife and the departure of his daughter for the East.

Possibly the wealthiest man in the county, he lived in the meanest of cabins, notwithstanding the fact that he had a comfortable, if not luxurious home in the county seat; and always he lived alone. His ranch and cow hands had their headquarters on another one of his ranches, several miles from Gunderstrom's shack. He rode there every day, and sometimes he ate dinner with them; but he always returned to his lonely cabin for his supper.

His only pleasures in life were directing his business, computing his profits and dreaming of the future of his daughter; and, before he fell asleep this night, his mind thus occupied with his daughter, he was reminded of the visit of Buck Mason in the afternoon.

"Always a askin' about Olga," he soliloquized grumblingly. "Never see that fellah that he aint askin' me about Olga. Guess he thinks I can't see right through him like a ladder. He'd like to marry Ole Gunderstrom's daughter. That's what he'd like to do and get his paws on all my land and cattle; but he aint aggonna get Olga, and he aint even goin' to get that quarter section. I've had a fence around that for--more'n twenty years now; and I guess if that don't give me no title, nuthin' else does. Buck Mason! Huh!" he snorted in disgust, and with Mason still in his thoughts he fell asleep.

II--WHO KILLED GUNDERSTROM?

THE NIGHT wore on, its silence broken once by the hoot of an owl and again by the distant yapping of a coyote; and Olaf Gunderstrom slept.

Toward midnight subdued sounds floated up from the twin trails that wound in from the highway--the mellowed creaking of old leather mingled with the

removed creaking of old leather, mingled with the breathing of horses--and then darker shadows moved beneath the moonless sky, slowly taking form and shape until they became distinguishable as five horsemen.

In silence they rode to the shack and dismounted where a long tie rail paralleled the front of the building. They moved very softly, making no noise in dismounting, nor speaking any words. They tied their horses to the tie rail and approached the door of the cabin. To the mystery of their silent approach there was added a sinister note by the handkerchiefs . tied across their faces just below their eyes. Men come not thus at night in friendliness or well meaning.

Gently the leader pushed open the door, which was as innocent of bar and lock as are most cabin doors behind which no woman dwells.

Silently the five entered the single room of the cabin. The leader approached the wooden cot, roughly built against one of the cabin walls, where Gunderstrom lay asleep. It was dark within the cabin, but not so dark but that one familiar with the interior could locate the cot and the form of the sleeper. In the hand of the man crossing the room so stealthily was a long-barreled Colt.

The silent intruder could see the cot and the outlines of the blur that was the sleeper upon it; but he did not see one of Gunderstrom's boots that lay directly in his path, and he stepped partially upon it

and half stumbled and as he did so, Gunderstrom awoke and sat up. "Buck Mason!" he exclaimed. "What do you want here?" and at the same time he reached for the gun that lay always beside him.

There was a flash in the dark, the silence was split by the report of a pistol and Olaf Gunderstrom slumped back upon his blanket, a bullet in his brain.

For a few moments the killer stood above his prey, seeking perhaps to assure himself that his work has been well done. He did not move, nor did his companions, nor did the dead man upon the cot. Presently the killer leaned low and placed his ear upon the breast of Gunderstrom. When he straightened up he turned back toward the doorway.

"We'd better be on our way," he said, and as the five men filed out of the cabin and mounted their horses, no other words were spoken. As silently as they had come they disappeared along the twin trails that led down to the highway.

It was nine o'clock in the morning. The sheriff of Comanche County sat in his office. He had read his mail and was now immersed in a newspaper.

An old man, leaning in the doorway, spit dexterously across the wooden porch into the dust of the road and shifted his quid. He, too, was reading a newspaper.

"Seems mighty strange to me," he said, "that

seems mighty strange to me," he said, "nobody aint caught these fellers yet."

"There don't nobody know who they be," said the sheriff.

"I see by the papers," said the old man, "that they think they got a line on 'em."

"They aint got nuthin' on 'em," snapped the sheriff. "They don't even know that it's the same gang."

"No, that's right," assented the old man, "but it sure does look suspicious. Robbin' and murderin' and rustlin' breakin' out all of a sudden in towns here where we aint had none o' it for years. Why say, in the last year there's been more Hell goin' on around in this neck of the woods and over into Arizony than I've saw all put together for ten year before."

At this juncture the telephone bell rang and the sheriff rose and walked to the instrument, where it hung against the wall.

"Hello," he said as he put the receiver to his ear, and then, "The hell you say!" He listened for a moment longer. "Don't touch nuthin' leave everything as it is. I'll notify the Coroner and then I'll be out as soon as I can."

He hung up the receiver and as he turned away from the instrument Buck Mason entered the office. "Mornin', sheriff!" he said.

"Good morning, Buck!" returned the sheriff.

"Who's killed now?" demanded old man Cage, who, having heard half the conversation and scenting excitement, had abandoned his post in the doorway and entered the room.

Buck Mason looked inquiringly at the sheriff. "Somebody killed?" he asked.

The sheriff nodded. "Tom Kidder just called me up from the Circle G home ranch. He says they found old man Gunderstrom shot to death in his shack over on Spring Creek."

"Gunderstrom?" he exclaimed. "Why I see -," he hesitated. "Do they know who done it?" The sheriff shook his head. "Perhaps I better get right over there," continued Mason.

"I wish you would, Buck," said the sheriff. "Got your horse?"

"Yes."

"I got to pick up Doc Bellows; and you can be there, if you cut across the hills, long before I can shag Lizzie around by the roads."

"I'll be gettin' along then," said Mason, and as he left the office and mounted his horse the sheriff strapped on his gun and prepared to go after the coroner.

"Looks to me like that hit Buck pretty hard." said

old man Cage. "Warnt he kinda soft on that Gunderstrom heifer?"

Bull's Eye carried his master at an easy lope across the flat toward the hills, where there was a stiff and rocky climb to the summit and an equally precipitous drop into Spring Valley, where Gunderstrom's shack lay a scant five miles from town by trail.

Uncle Billy Cage had resumed his position in the doorway of the office as the sheriff departed to look for the coroner. Half way to his car, the officer stopped and turned back. "If you aint got nuthin' else to do, sorta hang around the office until I get back, Uncle Billy. Will you?" he asked.

"I'll stay here as long as I can, sheriff," replied the old man. "May be I better go and fetch my bed."

"Shucks. I won't be gone long," the sheriff assured him.

"I don't know about that," replied Cage. "It's twenty mile of rough road from here to Gunderstrom's shack, and Lizzie aint what she used to be."

"Shucks. I could take her over the horse trail, Uncle Billy, if I wasn't afraid of scaring Doc Bellows," replied the sheriff with a grin.

As Buck Mason rode up to the Gunderstrom shack he was greeted by Tom Kidder, foreman of

shack he was greeted by Tom Kidder, foreman of the Circle G outfit, and two of the cowhands. The three men were squatting on their heels in the shade of a tree near the shack; and as Mason approached, Kidder rose. "Hello, Buck!" he said.

"Hello, Tom!" replied Mason. "How's everything?"

"Oh, so so," replied the foreman. "I reckon the sheriff told you."

"Yeah, that's why I'm here. You fellers aint been messin' around here none, have you?"

"No," replied Kidder. "When the old man didn't show up at the home ranch this morning, I rode over. I went in the shack, and when I seen there wasn't nuthin' to be done for him I rode back to the ranch and called up the sheriff. There aint been nobody in the shack since."

"Got any idea who done it?" asked Mason.

"No," replied the foreman. "There's been horses in and out from the highway recently. You could see that plain in the dirt; and there were horses tied up to his hitchin' rail last night, but I didn't mess around here any after what the sheriff told me. So everything's about like it was after the old man croaked."

"I'll take a look around," said Mason, who had dismounted.

Dropping his reins to the ground, he approached

Dropping his hands to the ground, he approached the shack. He moved slowly and deliberately, his keen eyes searching for any sign that the soft earth might give back to him. For several minutes he scrutinized the ground about the hitching rail, and then he entered the shack.

Inside he disturbed nothing, but examined everything minutely. For a brief moment he paused at the side of the cot, looking down into the upturned face of the dead man, the ghastliness of which was accentuated by the wound in the center of the pallid forehead.

Whatever thoughts the sight engendered in the mind of Buck Mason were not reflected in his calm, inscrutable gaze.

At Mason's feet lay the boot upon which the murderer had stepped and stumbled; and to it the eyes of the deputy dropped, casually at first and then with aroused interest. He stooped down then and examined it closely, but he did not touch it. After a moment he straightened up and left the shack, pausing again to make another examination of the ground about the hitching rail.

As he joined the men beneath the tree they looked at him inquiringly. "Well," asked Kidder, "what do you make of it?"

Mason squatted down upon his heels, his eyes upon the ground. "Well," he said, "there were five of them. At least there were five horses tied to the

hitching rail last night, and that's about all we have to go on."

"About all? What do you mean?"

"There aint much more except that it don't look like a case of robbery. As far as I can see there wasn't nuthin' touched in the shack."

"A lot of folks thought the old man kept money hidden here," said Kidder.

"Yes, I know that," replied Mason, "and I expected to find the shack all torn to pieces where they searched for it."

"Mebbe he give it to 'em," suggested one of the cowhands.

"I reckon you didn't know old man Gunderstrom very well then," said the foreman. "In the first place he never kept no money here, and in the second place he wouldn't have told them where it was if he had."

"I think he had started to reach for his gun," said Mason.

"Mebbe that's why they bored him," suggested the cowhand.

"Maybe," assented Mason.

"This'll be tough on the girl," said Kidder.

Mason made no comment. His eyes were searching the ground all about the three men, though they did not know it.

"I reckon she'll live through it," said the cowhand, "especially after she gets a slant at her bank balance. She'll be the richest gal in a dozen counties."

"There'll be plenty hombres campin' on her trail now," said the foreman, shooting a quick, shrewd glance at Mason.

"Did the old man have any squabbles with anybody lately?" asked the deputy sheriff.

"He was a hard man to do business with," replied Kidder; "and there's lots of folks around here that didn't have much use for him, but there aint no one that I know of that had any call to kill him."

"Did he have any new business deals on with anyone that you know of?"

"I didn't know nuthin' about his business," replied Kidder; "he kept that to himself. But I've seen signs around the shack before that there'd been fellers up here at night. I don't know who they was or what they come for, and I never seen 'em. I just seen horse tracks around once in a while; and I knew fellers had been here, but it was none--of my business, and I kept my mouth shut."

"I ara gonna see 'em," said the cowhand.

here comes a car," said the cowhand.

"That'll be the sheriff and the coroner," said Mason.

"Lizzie made pretty good time," said Kidder. "They must have packed her on their shoulders and run."

"She's hittin' on two and a half," said the cowhand; "which is better than I ever seen her do before."

As the car wheezed to a stop, the fat and jovial Doc Bellows lowered himself ponderously to the ground; and after the brief greetings of the cow country he asked a few questions.

"When you go in the shack," said Mason, "I wish you'd both notice that boot of Ole's that's lying in front of the cot. You seen it, didn't you, Kidder?" The foreman nodded. "Well," continued Mason, "guess all of you'll remember where you seen it; and then, sheriff, I wish you'd take care of it and not let nobody touch it."

"Is that a clue?" demanded the sheriff.

"I don't know that it amounts to nuthin' " replied Mason, "but I'd like to have the chance to follow it up."

"Sure," said the sheriff.

"All right then, I'll be gettin' along," replied the deputy. "There aint nuthin' more I can do here," and as the other men entered the shack he mounted and

as the sheriff then entered the shack he remained and turned Bull's Eye's nose down the road toward the main highway.

It was late when the sheriff returned to his office, but Uncle Billy Cage was still there.

"There weren't no call for you to stay all night, Uncle Billy," said the sheriff.

"I wanted to see you," said the old man. "I got some important news for you, but by gum I don't believe it."

"A% hat is it?" demanded the sheriff.

"About an hour after you left the telephone rung and some feller at the other end that talked like he had a harelip said, 'Is this the sheriff's office?' and I said, 'Yes'; and he said, 'Do you want to know who killed Gunderstrom?' and I said, 'Sure'; and he said, 'Well, it was Buck Mason,' and then he hung up."

"I don't believe it," said the sheriff.

"Neither do I," said Uncle Billy Cage.

III--BRUCE MARVEL

THE TF RANCH in Porico County, Arizona, had
"The TF Ranch in Porico County, Arizona, had

tallen upon bad days. For three generations its great ranges, its wooded mountains, its widely scattered streams and water holes had remained in one family; but the males of the third generation, educated at Eastern colleges, softened by contact with the luxuries of large cities, had left their vast principality in the hands of salaried managers and contemporaneously the cattle business had suffered one of its periodic slumps.

It is not necessary to go into the harrowing details that are all too familiar to cattle men. Several years before, title had passed to a group of banks that held paper far in excess of the present value of the property, which, in order to maintain grazing rights on Government land, had been forced into the operation of the ranch while they sought frantically and futilely for a buyer all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

An experienced cattle man was operating the business for them in an endeavor to make expenses; and following his policy of taking advantage of every opportunity to augment the income, he had leased the home ranch together with the hunting and fishing privileges of the entire property to Cory Blaine, who had thus become a pioneer in the dude ranch business.

It takes time and capital to establish a going business, and Cory Blaine had discovered that a dude ranch was no exception to the rule.

For two years it had been rather hard sledding but

For two years it had been rather hard working, but at last he felt that the venture was on the high road to success. The number of his guests was satisfactory and so were their bank accounts, but even so Cory Blaine was not perfectly satisfied.

He wanted more than a living. He wanted big money; and the more he came in contact with people who had it, the more determined he had become to have it himself; for Cory Blaine's ambition was developed almost to the point of a disease.

He was sitting late one afternoon upon the front porch of the ranch house with some of his guests when a buckboard swung into sight on the dusty road that wound for miles through the property down to the railroad.

"Here comes the tenderfoot," said a man from Boston, who, three weeks previously, had never been west of Philadelphia.

"I hope he can play bridge," said a fat lady in khaki bloomers and high heeled shoes.

"I'm just hoping he can stay on a horse without help," said Blaine.

The buckboard that was approaching, drawn by a team of bronchos, was the result of Cory Blaine's instinct for showmanship. He used it exclusively to transport his guests between the railroad and the ranch house, feeling that it lent an atmosphere that

no automobile could induce.

The man who drove the buckboard was also a showman, as was evidenced by the magnificent style in which he drew up in front of the ranch house, covering the last two or three hundred yards at a gallop, setting the bronchos on their haunches in a cloud of dust at the finish.

A couple of cowhands had sauntered over from the bunk house when the buckboard had first appeared in the distance; and as Bruce Marvel alighted, they were unroping his trunk at the back of the vehicle while they sized him up with inward contempt. All other eyes were upon the new arrival as Cory Blaine descended from the porch and took him by the hand.

"You'd be Mr. Marvel, I reckon," said Blaine.

"Yes," replied the newcomer.

"My name's Blaine," said the host. "I'm glad to meet you."

"Thanks," said Marvel.

"Have a good trip?"

"Yes, but a dirty one. I'd like to go to my room and clean up."

"Sure," said Blaine. "Come ahead. The boys will be right up with your stuff," and he led the way into the house, followed by his new guest.

the house, followed by his new guest.

"Here ye are," said Blaine, opening the door of a small box-like room. "Guess you'll find everything here you need. When yer done come on out and meet the rest of the folks. We feed at six o'clock. It's pretty near that now."

"By the way," said Marvel as Blaine was leaving, "shall I dress for dinner?"

"Aint you dressed now?" asked the other.

"I mean do the men wear dinner clothes? tuxedos, you know."

Blaine tried to hide the pity in his heart as he explained that that was not at all necessary; but when he closed the door behind him he grinned; and upon the other side of the door his guest grinned, too.

"What do you suppose?" asked Blaine as he joined the others on the porch.

"What?" asked a girl in overalls.

"He wants to know if he should put on a spike tailed coat and a stove pipe hat for dinner."

"My God!" exclaimed a young woman, who was rigged up in an outfit that would have turned Tom Mix green with envy. "He's got a lot to learn."

"Perhaps," said the blond girl in overalls, "he is just

trying to be himself and act natural. You know there are a lot of people who dress for dinner every night."

"When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do," said the man from Boston.

"Give him a chance," said the blond girl, "and don't forget that on the first camping trip we took after you arrived you brought along green silk pajamas."

"Oh, come now, Kay," he expostulated. "That's different."

"Did you notice his luggage?" said the Tom Mix girl. "Brand new and his clothes, too. He must have bought a whole new outfit just to rough it in."

"I hope he can play bridge," said the fat lady.

"I'll bet he plays ping-pong," said Bert Adams, the man from Boston.

"I think he is real nice looking," interjected Miss Pruett, Kay White's spinster aunt.

Twenty minutes later silence fell upon the company as Marvel came out onto the porch -one of those uncomfortable silences that may last but a moment and still seem endless.

This one Cory Blaine relieved by introducing Marvel to his other guests, and a moment later the clatter of an iron pipe on a metal triangle announced

the evening meal.

At the long table Bruce Marvel found himself seated between Kay White, the blond in overalls, and Dora Crowell, the Tom Mix girl.

He had noticed the difference in the apparel of the two girls; and though he was duly impressed by the ornate trappings of Dora, he thought that the other girl somehow looked more genuine in her blue overalls pulled over high heeled boots, her denim workshirt, and a bandanna handkerchief knotted loosely about her throat. He surmised that she belonged here and this supposition prompted his first question.

"This is your home, Miss White?" he asked.

"It commences to look like it," she replied. "I have been here two months now, but my real home is in California."

"What time do we start tomorrow, Cory?" asked Adams.

"Almost any time you folks want to," replied Blaine. "The chuck wagon went on ahead today as far as Mill Creek. That's only about fifteen miles. I didn't want to make it too hard the first day."

"We're going on a lion hunt," Kay White explained to Marvel. "We had planned on leaving yesterday, but when Cory got your telegram he decided to wait so that you could go along with us."

"Can you ride?" demanded Dora Crowell.

"I guess I can manage," replied Marvel, "but I suppose these cow horses aren't much like polo ponies."

"Do you play bridge, Mr. Marvel?" demanded Mrs. Talbot.

"Do you play bridge here?" he asked.

"I can't get any one to play with me," complained the fat lady. "Those that play say they get enough of it at home."

"Well I suppose that's true," agreed Marvel. "What we want here is a change."

"Then I suppose you won't play with me either," whined Mrs. Talbot.

"We might get up a poker game," suggested Mr. Talbot.

"You would suggest that, Benson," snapped his wife. "You know I perfectly loathe poker."

"I wouldn't mind learning how to play poker," said Marvel.

"I reckon we'd be glad to teach you," said Cory Blaine with a wink at Talbot.

The husband that had brought Marvel had also

THE DUCKBOARD that had brought Marvel had also brought the mail, and after supper the news of the day was the principal topic of conversation.

"Is there anything about the Gunderstrom murder in your paper, Cory?" asked Dora Crowell, and then to Marvel, who was near her, "I went to school with Mr. Gunderstrom's daughter in Philadelphia."

"They haven't found that fellow Mason yet," said Blaine. "He's been missing for three weeks--disappeared the day after the murder."

"You see," explained Dora to Marvel, "this man Mason was a neighbor of Gunderstrom's, and they'd been fighting over a piece of land for nearly twenty years."

"And they think Mason killed him?" asked Marvel.

"They know it," replied Dora. "A man called up the sheriff's office on the telephone and told them so."

"Mason was a deputy sheriff," explained Kay White, "and he took advantage of his office to pretend that he was looking for the murderer so that he could get away himself."

"Clever at that," commented Adams.

"A man who was well enough known to be a deputy sheriff ought not to be hard to find," commented Marvel.

"It says here in the paper," said Blaine, "that his horse showed up on the range a day or two ago; so that looks like he probably caught a train and beat it out of the country."

"He must be a terrible man," said Dora Crowell. "He shot poor Mr. Gunderstrom right through the heart as he lay asleep on his bed."

"Between the eyes," corrected Cory Blaine.

"It didn't say that in the paper," said Dora.

"Oh," said Blaine, "well, maybe it was in the heart."

Bruce Marvel rose. "What time are you starting in the morning?" he asked. "I think I'll be going to bed now."

"Breakfast at seven," said Blaine.

"Seven sharp," said Mr. Talbot.

"And we'll be leaving right after breakfast," said Blaine.

The entire party was assembled at the breakfast table when Bruce Marvel entered the dining room the following morning. Dora Crowell voiced an audible "My God" while Mrs. Talbot choked in an effort to control herself. Cory Blaine dissembled whatever surprise he felt, for it was his business not to notice the various eccentricities of dress evidenced by his guests, so long as they paid their

bills.

"Good morning," said Marvel. "I'm sorry to be late, but I had trouble getting into my boots. My man usually helps me, you know."

No comment seemed to occur to anyone at the breakfast table; and so, amid silence, Marvel took his place between Kay White and Dora Crowell. He was arrayed in flagrantly new English riding boots, light tan English riding breeches, and a white polo shirt. But even more remarkable than his outfit was the fact that he did not seem to realize the incongruity of it. Apparently he was the only person at the breakfast table who was perfectly at ease.

If Cory Blaine realized the necessity of overlooking the foibles of his guests, his diplomacy was not always shared by the cowhands who herded the dudes on range; and when, shortly after breakfast, Bruce Marvel strode past the bunkhouse down toward the corrals he must need have been totally deaf to have missed all of the flippant remarks his sartorial effulgence precipitated.

The men were already leaving for the corrals to fetch up and saddle the horses, and Marvel soon had company.

"You aint aimin' to ride in them things, Mister, are you?" asked one of the men.

"That's what they were made for," replied Marvel.

"Them thar panties weren't never made to ride in. You can't tell me that," said a bow-legged puncher called Butts.

"You'll get 'em all dirty," opined another.

"And then what'll your mama say I" chimed in a third.

"They look funny to you, don't they?" asked Marvel good naturedly.

"They sure do, Mister," said Butts.

"That all depends upon who is doing the looking," said Marvel. "Did you ever look at yourself in a mirror?"

The other men laughed then at Butts' expense.

"What's wrong with me?" he demanded angrily.

"You're just funny looking," said Marvel with a laugh. "The only difference between us is that you don't know you're funny looking."

"It's a damn good thing for some of these dudes around here that they're guests," growled Butts.

"You needn't let that cramp your style any," said Marvel.

'Aw, cheese it," said one of the other men. "A guy's got a right to wear whatever he wants around

here. It aint none of nobody's business."

"But there ought to be a law against them funny panties," vouchsafed another.

"You fellows talk too damn much," said a voice behind them. It was Cory Blaine, and he was scowling angrily. "Shake a leg now and get them horses caught up and saddled. We can't hang around here all day making funny cracks."

"Will you see that they get me a nice, gentle horse?" said Marvel.

"Sure, I'll fetch him up a nice, gentle one," said Butts. "There's old Crowhop, for instance."

"You ride Crowhop yourself," said Blaine. "Fetch up Baldy for Mr. Marvel. Baldy is all right," he said turning to his guest, "except that he always wants to take a few jumps the first thing in the morning. I'll top him for you myself, and after that he'll be as gentle as a kitten."

"Thanks," said Marvel. "I certainly shouldn't care to ride a bad horse."

"No, polo ponies don't buck, I guess," said Blaine.

IV--KAY WHITE

THE OTHER guests arrived at the corral by the time the horses were saddled, those who were going on the hunt being dressed, each according to his own ideas of what was either comfortable or proper. Bert Adams from Boston and Dora Crowell from Philadelphia might have crept out of the latest Western movie thriller. Mrs. Talbot, who also acted as unofficial chaperon, was resplendent in khaki knickers, white stockings, and high heeled laced shoes, with a silk shirt-waist, and coat to match her breeches, her only acknowledgment to the wild, wild west being a colored bandana tied about her neck and a Stetson hat, that was a size too small for her, perched on top of her bobbed locks. Benson Talbot was dressed for golf, while Kay White still clung to her overalls and workshirt, to which she had added a broad brimmed Stetson and a leather coat, for the chill of the Arizona night was still in the air.

As the cowhands led their horses out, Cory Blaine took Baldy from the corral and mounted him. The horse made a couple of jumps and then ran for a few hundred yards, after which he trotted docile, back to the corral.

Of course, every one had watched the topping of Baldy. Kay White was standing beside Marvel. "Isn't he a marvelous horseman," she said.

The man glanced quickly down at her. "Wonderful!" he said.

"He's perfectly safe now," said Blaine, reining in beside Marvel and dismounting.

"Thanks awfully," said Marvel. "But say, haven't you got an English saddle?"

Blaine looked at him with a pitying expression that he tried to conceal. "No, Mister," he said.

"I thought I'd ask," said Marvel. "You see I might not be able to ride in one of these cowboy saddles."

"Oh, you'll get used to it," said Kay. "I ride a flat saddle at home most of the time, but I found that if you can ride a flat saddle you can ride anything."

"I wish I had brought my own saddle," said Marvel.

"I'm glad he didn't," said Butts in a low tone to Dora Crowell. "He is sure funny enough now, and if he'd brung that I'd like as not have laughed myself to death."

"Perhaps he will be all right," said Dora, "when he becomes accustomed to our ways. He doesn't seem to be a half bad sort of a fellow."

"He's too fresh," said Butts.

Naturally all eyes were upon Marvel as he mounted Baldy. With few exceptions they were hoping that the horse would pitch a little, but he did not. Marvel mounted a little awkwardly, caught his

knee on the cantle of the saddle and then sat on it, afterward slipping down into the seat. He also appeared to have trouble in finding his right hand stirrup.

"Good bye, Kay, and be careful of snakes," called Miss Pruell to her niece, as the party moved away, "and please be sure that she has enough covers at night, Mrs. Talbot."

"Good bye, Aunt Abbie," called the girl. "I wish you were coming with us."

"Heaven forbid I" exclaimed Miss Pruell. "It is quite bad enough here, without riding horseback all day in search of further discomfort."

"Your aunt has a lot of sense," said Marvel; "a lot more than we have."

"You don't expect to have a good time then?" she asked.

"I wouldn't say that exactly," he said, his eyes upon her fresh, young beauty, "but at that nobody with good sense would choose to sleep on the ground if he could sleep in a bed."

"Oh, you'll like it after you get used to it," she told him.

"Perhaps," was his only comment.

Presently Blaine broke into a trot; and as the others took up the gait, Marvel forced a little ahead

others took up the gait, Marvel forged a little ahead of Kay White and she noted, to her dismay, that he rode awkwardly; in fact, his form seemed almost an exact replica of that adopted by Birdie Talbot, who rode just ahead of him. It seemed a pity, she thought; he was so nice looking. His smooth, sunburned face and clear eyes suggested a life spent much out of doors; and when she had seen him in his riding clothes she had been quite certain that he would prove himself a good horseman, in spite of the incongruity of his apparel.

"How am I doing?" he asked, as she moved up to his side.

"Will you mind if I tell you?" she asked.

"Certainly not. I'd like to have you."

"Then, hold your reins in your left hand," she said, "and don't lean forward so much."

"That is the new army seat," he explained.

"I can't help what it is. I don't like it," she said. "Let your feet hang naturally. Don't carry them back, and whatever you do don't try to post in a stock saddle. Your stirrups are much too long for that, and besides they are not far enough forward."

"I'm riding just like Mrs. Talbot," he said.

"Well for heaven's sake, don't copy her. She was never on a horse before in her life until she came here two weeks ago."

here two weeks ago.

"Is this better?"

"Keep your seat. Don't bounce so."

"I'm trying not to," he said.

"Look at that damn dude," said Butts to one of the other cowhands, who was riding with him in rear of the party. "Polo, my foot! I don't believe that guy ever seen a horse before."

"Him and Birdie must have takin' riding lessons from the same correspondence school," said his companion.

"Well, Birdie is a woman; and you can't expect nuthin' from them," said Butts, "but it sure gives me a pain to see anything that calls itself a man ride like that."

"They is all a bunch of freaks," said the other. "I'd sure hate to have my poor old paw see me with this outfit."

"Look at Bert ride. I'll bet he's got corns now."

"When he gets back to Boston he'll have to eat off the mantelpiece."

"Well, I don't mind the others so much," said Butts. "I got kinda used to 'em; but that dude that blew in last night, him and me aint goin' to be no pals. Every time I look at his panties I want to hit him."

"Why don't you then? He invited you to."

"I can't on Cory's account. We got to treat a payin' customer decent whether we like him or not. But I'm goin' to get that guy just the same, only he won't know who done it."

"I never took no college degree," replied his companion, "but if I know anything, I know enough not to monkey with a guy with eyes like that dude."

"Looks don't mean nuthin' with them Eastern dudes," said Butts; "that's all they got."

For three days the party rode deeper into a wilderness of mountains and meadows until they reached their destination, a tiny shack beside a leaping trout stream in a valley hemmed by lofty mountains, where lived Hi Bryam, the owner of four good lion dogs that the party was to use in the forthcoming hunt. The chuck wagon had met them at Mill Creek and had been able to accompany them as far as Bryam's.

Beyond this point there was no wagon road; but lion were known to be plentiful in the mountains all about them, and Blaine had planned that they were to arrange their hunts from this camp so that they could return at night.

Before they had reached Bryam's, Bruce Marvel was well acquainted with his companions; and had found them a democratic and likeable lot who had

cast aside all formalities, including titles and surnames.

An instinctive diffidence had made it difficult for him to call the women by their first names; but he had finally been badgered into it, though it still required a distinct moral effort to call the fat Mrs. Talbot Birdie. Kay and Dora came much more easily to his lips-especially Kay. The girl from Philadelphia seemed rather mannish to him; but Kay White, in spite of her overalls and self reliance, was essentially feminine. During the long rides and the evenings in camp he had learned much concerning her and the other members of the party. He had learned, for instance, though not from Kay, that her father was a wealthy California banker; that her mother was dead and that shortly after the lion hunt, she expected her father to join her at the home ranch.

He had also surmised from what he had seen that Cory Blaine was much interested in Kay White; and that troubled him, for he did not like Blaine. There was something about the man that made Marvel think he was playing a part and that he was not at all at heart what he appeared to be. Butts, who seemed to be Blaine's right hand man, remained tacitly antagonistic to Marvel;--but Bud, the other cowhand who accompanied the party, was inclined to be friendly.

Toward Hi Bryam he conceived an immediate and instinctive dislike. The fellow was tall and lanky,

with a peculiarly repellent face and a surly manner that invited no familiarities.

Three days of hunting brought no success; and on the fourth day Marvel found himself paired off with Dora Crowell, while Blaine and Kay White followed him. Hi Bryam, with the other two dogs, led Dora and Bruce along the opposite ridge, the parties joining where the two ridges met some ten miles above camp. Bert Adams, sore and lame, remained in camp with the Talbots.

Cory Blaine was unusually silent as he led the way up the steep and rocky trail toward the summit of the ridge, and even when they stopped occasionally on some leveler and more favorable spot to blow their horses he seemed strangely preoccupied.

"You seem worried this morning, Cory," observed the girl, as they halted again, this time near the summit of the ridge.

"I reckon I am," said the man.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm worried because I'm such an ignorant cuss," said Blaine.

The girl laughed lightly. "What makes you think you're ignorant?" she demanded.

"You know I am," he said. "I aint got no book learning."

"You are far from ignorant," she told him. "There is a lot of knowledge in the world that is not in any book. Some of the most ignorant people in the world are scholars."

"That seems funny," he said. "But maybe ignorant aint the word I mean. What I mean is that I don't know how to do and say things the way, well, Bert Adams does, for instance. He's what they call a gentleman, and I'm not. I got sense enough to see that."

"It takes something more than a knowledge of English to constitute a gentleman, Cory," she told him.

"Yes, I suppose so," he agreed; "but there is a difference that I can't explain. I know it's there, and you know it's there. I'm not the same as you and Dora Crowell and Bert Adams. I'm not the kind that you people would associate with."

"Why how could you say that, Cory Blaine?" she exclaimed. "Has any one of us said or done anything to make you think that he thought he was better than you?"

"Of course not; but nevertheless you know it, and I know it."

"Nonsense."

"There aint no nonsense about it, Kay;" insisted the

man, "and I could prove it."

"How?"

"By asking you one question."

"What is it?" Instantly the words were spoken she regretted them, but it was too late.

"Would you marry a feller like me?"

"Don't be foolish," she said. "How in the world does a girl know whom she will marry?"

"But you wouldn't marry any ignorant cow puncher?" he insisted.

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose that I am no different from any other woman. If I loved a man, I would not care what he was--I mean that I would marry him no matter what he was."

"But you would rather that he wouldn't be an ignorant cow puncher?" he insisted.

"I don't see why you keep harping on that," she said. "It isn't fair, Cory."

"Well," he said, "I've got my answer."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you've told me that you'd never marry an ignorant cow puncher."

"I've told you nothing of the kind. I'd marry Hi Bryam if I loved him."

The man relapsed into silence as they started again along the trail. The girl was troubled. She was sorry that he had spoken, for she knew now what was in his heart; but she did not know her own.

Kay White was a normal young woman. She had been attracted by other men in the past, but her compulsion at such times had never been of such a nature as to convince her that she had been in love. She conceived of love as a devastating passion, compelling and unreasoning; and certainly no man had ever aroused such an emotion in her breast; but she realized that perhaps she might be mistaken, and she also realized that she had been undeniably attracted toward Cory Blaine. That love might start this way she had little doubt, but inwardly she shrank from the thought that she might love Blaine.

As she recalled their recent conversation she realized that she was now not at all sure that she had actually meant what she said. The statement that she would marry Hi Bryam if she loved him had been an emotional nonsensicality, and this admission raised the question as to whether she would marry Cory Blaine if she loved him.

She was not a snob, but she was endowed with more than an average amount of good sense. She had known some and heard of many girls who trod the same walk of life as she who had married stable

managers or chauffeurs; and very few of these matches had turned out happily, not because of the positions that the men held, but because everything in their training and environment and in the training and environment of their friends had been so different from that to which the girls had been accustomed that neither could find comfort nor happiness in the social sphere of the other.

The result of this thoughtful deliberation was to arouse regret for the statements that she had made; for she saw that they might, in a way, be construed as encouraging a hope within his breast; and that he might harbor such a hope seemed evident not only by his words but by the many attentions he had shown her since she had come to the TF Ranch.

But had he not also been attentive to Dora Crowell? Perhaps it was Dora he wanted, and perhaps he had only been sounding her to ascertain the attitude of a girl in a social sphere similar to that to which Dora belonged. Kay wondered, and as she considered the matter she also wondered if she would be pleased or disappointed should this prove to be a correct interpretation of his motives.

Where the trail widened again Blaine drew rein. "We'll rest here a minute," he said, and as she stopped her horse beside him he reached out and seized her hand. "I love you, Kay," he said. "Don't you think you could learn to love me?"

"I have been thinking about that for the last few

minutes, Cory," she replied, "and I shall be perfectly honest with you. I do not want to love you. Please do not say anything more about it."

"I am going to make you love me," he said.

V--THE LION HUNT

AS THEIR ponies climbed up the steep acclivity toward the summit of the hogback along which Bryam and his hounds had preceded them, Dora Crowell and Bruce Marvel paused occasionally to rest their mounts and to pursue one of those disjointed conversations that are peculiar to mountain trails.

"I think you're riding better every day, Bruce," said the girl. "If you stay here long enough you ought to make a horseman."

The man smiled. "Perhaps I'd do better if I had my own saddle," he said.

"Now don't be silly, Bruce. A flat saddle is all right in the park, but it would look perfectly ridiculous here."

"Can you rope?" he asked.

"Of course not. Why?" she demanded.

"Then what good is that heavy frame and the big horn on your saddle to you?" he asked.

"Don't be disagreeable," she said.

"I'm not trying to be disagreeable," he told her. "I'm just trying to find out."

"Find out what?"

"Why it would be silly to put a light saddle on your horse and not make him carry twenty-five or thirty pounds extra all day over rough, steep trails."

"What do they have these saddles for then?" she demanded.

"They have them for cowmen to use in their business. They have to be strong enough to hold a wild bull, and nobody needs one unless he can rope and hold a wild creature and expects to have to do it. I'll tell you, Dora, there are a lot of fellows wearing chaps and ten gallon hats who have no business weighting their horses down with a stock saddle and a rope that they wouldn't know how to use if they had to."

"There are a lot of false alarms in the world," she admitted. "I am one myself with all this cowboy scenery; but everyone knows it, including myself ; so I am not deceiving anyone, but if I am a false alarm I am not the only one."

"No?"

"No. There is at least one other. He may fool the rest of them, but he doesn't fool me."

"The world is full of false alarms," he said.

"But if people are going to try that they should know every little detail well enough to get away with it."

"Like you posing as a cowgirl," he grinned.

"Or you posing as an Eastern polo player," she retorted.

"Why?" he asked innocently. "What makes you think that of me?"

"There are several things, but one is enough. You have your boot garters on backward."

"I always was careless," he said.

"That's not carelessness, Bruce. That's ignorance, and you know it."

"You couldn't expect me to come out here on a cattle ranch and admit that I'd never seen a horse before, could you?" he demanded.

"You've seen plenty of horses before," she told him. "You may be a good actor, but you're not quite good enough for me. I might not have guessed it, except for the boot garters, before today; but after riding up this mountain behind you where I

after riding up this mountain behind you where I could watch every move you made, I know."

"What did you expect me to do, fall off?" he asked. .

"It's none of my business, Bruce; and I won't say anything more about it. I'm just one of those persons who hate to have anyone think that he is putting anything over on her."

"This isn't hunting mountain lion," he said, and they rode on.

When, at last, they reached the trail that ran along the summit of the hogback, he drew rein again; and as the girl rode up, he pointed across the canyon to the summit of the opposite ridge. "There's Kay and Blaine," he said. "Which one of them is a false alarm? It's not her, I'm sure of that."

"These Western clothes are nothing new to her," said Dora. "Her father owns ranches in California; and she has ridden all her life, Western and English both. It's funny," she added, "how so many of us want to be something else beside what we really are, and after all Kay is no better than the rest of us."

"How's that?" he asked.

"You don't think that she wears overalls and blue work shirts at home, do you?" she demanded.

"Well, now, really, I hadn't thought about it," he

well, now, really, I hadn't thought about it," he replied, "but she certainly looks mighty cute in them."

"If she had to wear overalls at home she'd be crazy to go somewhere where she could wear fine clothes. There's a little false alarm in all of us. I remember a girl at school like that. Do you recall the night you came to the ranch? We were talking about the murder of a man by the name of Gunderstrom in New Mexico?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, this girl I'm speaking of was Gunderstrom's daughter. She was about the sweetest and most natural girl I had ever met when she came to the school that I was attending just outside of Philadelphia. She was typically Western; but after awhile she seemed to get ashamed of that and became a regular false alarm, not only in her clothes, but in her manners and her speech. Then last year we roomed together; and I grew very fond of her, though I am afraid she is still a false alarm in some respects and always will be."

"Just what do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that she is trying to pretend to be something that she was not born to be."

"I see," he said.

"Perhaps it was her father's fault. She told me that

he would not let her come West after he sent her back East to school. He wanted her to be a fine lady and to forget everything connected with her childhood. I know, though, that at many times she was homesick for the West; and when I heard of her father's death and telegraphed my condolences, I suggested that she come out here to the TF Ranch and spend the rest of the summer with me."

"Is she coming?" asked Marvel, his casual tone masking his eagerness.

"She wired that she was going home first and that if she found that she could get away, she would come."

Their conversation was interrupted by the baying of the hounds far ahead. "They've raised a lion," he said. "We'd better be moving."

The girl, thrilled and excited by the prospect of being in at a kill, spurred her horse into a gallop and brushed past him on the trail. "Careful, Dora," he called after her. "This is no place to run a horse unless you have to."

"Come on," she called back, "I don't want to miss anything." But evidently he did not share her excitement for he moved on slowly at a walk.

His head was bowed in thought, which, however, had nothing to do with lions. Presently he glanced down at his legs, first at one, then at the other; and then presently he reached down and unbuckled one

of his boot garters, removed it, held it up and looked at it. After a moment of silent scrutiny, he held it down against his leg, turning it first one way and then another. Then he shook his head sadly and threw it off into the brush, after which he removed the other and threw that away also.

When he finally came up with the rest of the party they were all gathered around a tree in which a mountain lion had come to bay. Kay and Cory were there with Bryam and Butts and the four hounds. They were trying to decide who should have the honor of shooting the quarry.

"Let both girls shoot at him at the same time," said Blaine, "and Hi can be ready to plug him if they miss."

"I don't care anything about shooting him," said Kay White. "I'd much rather see him alive. Doesn't he look free and wild and splendid?"

"He just looks like a deer killer' to me," said Hi Bryam. "If it warn't for them sons-o'-guns, we'd have plenty of deer in these hills."

"Like they have in the Kaibab forest," said Kay, "since they killed off all the lions--so many deer that there isn't food enough for them and they're starving to death."

"Well if Kay doesn't want to shoot him, I do," said Dora.

She had already dismounted and stood ready with her rifle. Bryam was pointing out the best location for the shot and just where to stand to get the aim she wanted.

The others lolled in their saddles as Dora raised her rifle to her shoulder and took careful aim. At the sharp report of the weapon the horses all started nervously. Kay's mount wheeled and jumped away; and as she sought to control him, one of her reins parted; and the frightened animal broke into a run down the rough summit of the ridge.

The horror of the situation must have been instantly apparent to every member of the party; for the narrow trail, rocky in places, winding among the scant, low brush, offered precarious footing to a walking horse carefully picking his way along, while further down it dropped steeply and eventually pitched into the canyon at so steep an angle that even a walking horse, going most carefully, might be lost if he stumbled.

All of these thoughts flashed through the minds of the men and the girl, who, apparently, were utterly helpless to avert the inevitable disaster toward which Kay's horse was carrying her; yet almost at the instant that her horse bolted, Marvel put spurs to his own mount and, shaking the reins loose, gave him his head in pursuit.

"The damn fool!" exclaimed Cory Blaine.

"The damn fool!" exclaimed Cory Blaine.

He'll kill her and himself, too. Chasing him will only make that fool pony run faster. God, why did I bring that damn dude along?"

Whatever the outcome, nothing that they might do now could save them; so the entire party followed,, forgetful of the dead lion and the worrying hounds.

Baldy was swift, and for that Marvel offered up a silent prayer of thanks. The man paid no attention to the trail, holding his horse straight after the flying pony, Baldy taking the low bushes in his strides, his iron shoes striking fire from the dangerous rocks.

He was gaining; and then he stumbled and nearly fell, but recovered himself and was away again.

"Stay with him, Kay," shouted the man. "I'm coming."

She recognized his voice; and her heart sank, for she had no confidence in his horsemanship nor in his ability in a crisis such as this. She wondered where Cory was, for she knew that Cory could have saved her.

Baldy was closing the distance between them. Now his nose was at the rump of the runaway.

Marvel held him to a parallel course that he might come up on the near side of Kay's mount. A higher bush intervened, around which the trail swerved, but Marvel held his horse straight for the obstacle. A low word of encouragement, a light touch of the

spur and Baldy cleared the bush; nor did he lose his stride, and now his nose was at Kay's knees.

"Get ready!" said the man to the girl, and again his spurs touched Baldy's side and he spoke in his flattened ears.

Great with courage is the heart of a good horse, and few there are that will fail a man in a crisis; nor did Baldy fail, and his next jump took him abreast of the runaway.

Marvel encircled Kay's waist. "Put your arms around my neck," he said, "and kick your feet free of the stirrups." Then he straightened up and lifted her out of the saddle and spoke quietly to Baldy as he reined him in, while the runaway, in his next jump, stumbled and fell, rolling over and over before he came to rest, stunned and prostrate.

Baldy, thoroughly excited by the race, seemed little inclined to stop; and for a while it looked to those behind and to the girl clinging to the man's neck that, handicapped as he was, he would be unable to control him; but at last the great bit and the strength of the rider prevailed, and Baldy came to a stop, trembling and blowing.

Gently Marvel lowered the girl to the ground. Then he dismounted and walked around his horse to her side. She was trembling; and there were tears in her eyes; and he put his arm about her again to support her, for she seemed to be about to fall.

"All in?" he asked.

"Pretty much," she replied.

"I'll look after your horse myself after this," he said. "This would never have happened if any one had been watching him."

"I don't know what to say to you," she said. "It seems so silly to try to thank anyone for such a thing."

"If you want to thank anyone," he said, "thank Baldy. That is sure some pony. I knew he was fast. I could tell that after I saw him run every morning when they topped him for me; and I guessed that he had the heart, too. These horses that like to play usually have plenty of heart."

"I think you were the one that had the heart," she said; "for you knew that at any minute you might be killed, but Baldy didn't know that."

"Those things sure happen fast," he said. "A man doesn't have any time to think. Hold Baldy a second while I go over and have a look at that horse of yours."

She took the reins; and as he walked back toward the animal that was still lying where he had fallen she followed behind him.

The other members of the party were riding up, and they all met close to Kay's pony.

The animal lay on its side, breathing heavily, its legs outstretched. Marvel's first glance at it convinced him that none of its legs was broken. Blood was running from a small cut in the top of the animal's head; but he did not appear to be badly injured in any way, only too stunned, or perhaps too frightened to try to arise.

Marvel seized the broken bridle reins and urged the horse to get up; and as he scrambled to his feet, it was apparent that he was far from being crippled.

"Why he's not hurt much at all, is he?" exclaimed Kay.

"These cow ponies are pretty tough babies," said Marvel. "You'd have to hit this fellow with an axe to knock him out, and you'd be lucky if you didn't break the axe."

Dora and Cory had dismounted and walked over to Kay. Dora threw her arms about the girl and kissed her. "Lord! Kay," she exclaimed, "I guess I was worse scared than you;" then she sat down in the dirt and commenced to cry.

The men had gathered around Kay's pony, which seemed to offer some relief from their embarrassed silence. Blaine did not look at Marvel; for he was recalling his disparaging prophecy of a few moments before, while Butts was trying to convince himself that the dude's success had been only a matter of accident. Hi Bryam took a fresh chew and

number of accidents. Then Bryan took a fresh chew and remounted his horse.

"I reckon I'll ride back after the dogs," he said. "Butts can come along and give me a lift with the lion, if it's still there. I seen it fall all right, but by golly I don't know whether it was killed or not."

As Butts mounted and followed Bryan, Marvel led Kay's pony down the trail a few yards and then back again.

"He's all right," he said. Then he fastened the broken end of the bridle rein to the bit with a peculiar knot that went unnoticed by all but Cory Blaine. He looked to the stirrups and the cinches next, loosening the latter and settling the saddle into its proper place with a shake. "Good as new," he said, as he tightened the cinches again.

"You are not going to ride him again, Kay, are you?" asked Dora.

Marvel was untying the coiled neck rope from the pommel of Kay's saddle. "You can ride him," he said, "but I'm going to lead him."

"That's a rather humiliating way to ride into camp," said Kay.

"But safe," said Marvel. "He's still scared." And so they returned to camp with few breaks in the silence that the exigencies of the trail and their moods induced.

Cory Blaine had ridden in moody silence. He had scarcely spoken a word since the accident. He was helping Bud with the horses now; and as he swung the saddles across the pole of the chuck wagon and turned the horses loose to graze, he seemed buried in a brown study. When the last horse had trotted away, he took the broken bridle from the horn of Kay's saddle and examined it closely. "Look at this, Bud," he said presently. "Did you ever see a paper collared, cracker fed dude that could tie a knot like that?"

"No," said Bud, after examining Marvel's handiwork.

"Neither did I," said Blaine; "and you should see the son-of-a-gun ride," he spat with disgust; "and I've been topping his horse for him every morning."

"What's his game?"

"I wish I knew," said Cory Blaine.

VI--HI BRYAM

THE TWO girls had gone to their tent and thrown themselves upon their blankets to rest, exhausted as much perhaps by the excitement through which they had passed as by the fatigue of the long ride. For a long time they lay there in silence, thinking. Kay was

trying to piece together the jumbled impressions of those few harrowing minutes during which she had felt death spurring swiftly at her elbow. She recalled her disappointment when she had realized that it was Bruce Marvel and not Cory Blaine who was riding to her rescue, and she lived again the instant when a strong arm had gone about her body and quiet words of instruction had been spoken in her ear. In that instant she had known that she was safe; and as she had clung to him, her arms about his neck, she had sensed the strength of the man and his ability to protect her. What he had done he had done so quietly and coolly that it was difficult to believe that this was the same man who had been the object of the good-natured pity of them all.

"You've heard of people losing ten years growth in a second, haven't you?" said Dora out of the silence. "Well, I lost twenty when I saw your horse bolt and realized that he was uncontrollable. Were you terribly frightened?"

"Yes, I was," replied Kay frankly. "I didn't lose my head; and I recall now that I figured out in the first few seconds what my chances were, and they didn't seem very good. I know I made up my mind that before I'd let him carry me over the edge into the ravine, I would jump; but I hoped that he might stop, for I knew that I should be hurt terribly if I jumped. I was most afraid of his falling; that trail is terribly rough." "I don't see how Bruce's horse ever kept his feet," said Dora. "He wasn't following any trail. Bruce just rode straight, jumping everything."

"He is wonderful," said Kay simply, "and this morning we were kidding him because he let Cory top Baldy for him. I don't understand him."

"You'd understand him a whole lot less if you had been riding behind him instead of in front of him," said Dora.

"Why?" asked Kay.

"He rode as though he was a part of Baldy. I've been around horsemen all my life, and I guess you have, too, Kay; and we both know that there is something in the way a man sits his saddle that proclaims him either a horseman or a dub at first glance."

"But I have seen him ride for the last several days," said Kay, "and he certainly hasn't impressed me as being anything but an amateur. You know that some times, under the stress of an emergency, a person can do things that he could not do otherwise."

"Slush!" exclaimed Dora. "I watched him riding while we were alone this morning; and I guess he must have forgotten himself for the time being, and I saw then that he could ride. And when he rode after you, Kay--why, my dear, it was magnificent. And not only the way he sat his horse, but the way he controlled him."

"He is terribly strong, too," said Kay reminiscently. "He lifted me out of the saddle as though I didn't

weigh anything."

"Do you know," said Dora, "that there is something peculiar about him? I don't believe that he is what he claims to be at all."

"What does he claim to be?" asked Kay. "I've never heard him talk about himself."

"Well, that's right, too. He hasn't exactly claimed to be anything; but his clothes and his reference to polo and yachting and literature do, in a way, constitute a sort of indirect claim to a certain position in life; but every once in awhile he slips, usually in his English; or again by the use of a colloquialism that is not of the East, where he certainly has tried to give us the impression he is from."

"Well, what do you suppose his purpose is?"

"I think he is a joker," replied Dora. "He is having a fine time all by himself making monkeys of us."

"Oh, girls," interrupted Birdie Talbot, bursting into their tent. "Here comes Butts and Mr. Bryam with Dora's lion."

For the next few minutes the lion held the center of the stage. It was propped up and photographed with Dora standing beside it with her rifle. It was stretched out and measured, and then it was photographed again while Dora stood with one foot upon it

upon it.

"You made a bully shot," said Cory Blaine.

"Right through the heart," said Butts.

"Could you kill a lion with a revolver, Blaine?" asked Bruce Marvel.

"Sure, if you could hit him," replied Cory.

"I guess it would take a pretty good revolver shot to hit him in the heart," said Marvel, "but I suppose you're a pretty good shot."

"Nothing extra," said Blaine modestly.

"I'd like to try my hand with one of those some time," said Marvel. "Do you mind if I took a couple of shots with yours? I could put a tin can up over there against that tree."

"Hop to it if you want to," said Blaine. He took his gun from its holster and handed it to Marvel. "Be careful," he said, "that you don't shoot yourself."

Marvel took the weapon gingerly, walked over past the chuck wagon, where his bedroll lay and laid the weapon on top of the roll. Then he found an empty can which he placed at the foot of the tree, about twenty yards distant.

"Two bits says you can't hit it in five shots," said Butts.

"I'll take that," said Bruce. "I certainly ought to hit it once in five times."

As he picked the weapon up from his bedroll, it went off prematurely. "Gosh," he said, "I only touched the trigger."

"I told you to be careful," snapped Cory. "You're lucky you didn't shoot your foot off."

"I shot a hole in my bed," said Bruce. "I'll pay you for the damage to the blanket though, Blaine, when we get back to the ranch."

"Be careful how you handle it now and don't aim it this way," cautioned Cory.

"There's five shots left," said Butts. "See if you can hit the can once."

The rest of the party had moved forward now, and all were watching interestedly. Birdie Talbot offered to bet a dollar on Bruce's marksmanship.

"Want to bet, Cory?" she asked.

Blaine was watching Marvel through narrowed lids. "No," he said. Perhaps he was recalling the man's unexpectedly developed horsemanship.

"I'll take a dollar's worth," said her husband.

"That's right," said Dora. "Keep it in the family."

Marvel took careful aim and fired

Marvel took careful aim and fired.

"Miss number one," gloated Butts.

"He is not familiar with that gun," said Kay.

"Nor no other," said Butts.

Marvel shot again four times, scoring four clean misses.

"He didn't even hit the tree," chortled Butts, happily.

"I wasn't shooting at the tree," said Marvel. "I was shooting at the can. Here's your two bits, Butts." Then he handed the weapon back to Blaine. "I guess it must take a lot of practice," he said.

"Well," said Birdie Talbot, disgustedly, "I don't see how anybody could miss that can five times in succession."

"I didn't either," said Marvel.

"Come on, Birdie, pay up," said her husband, "and don't be a poor loser."

"Try and collect," said Mrs. Talbot.

"That's what you get for betting with your wife," laughed Dora Crowell.

Talbot laughed. "I win anyway," he said, "for if anyone else had taken her up, I would have had to

pay."

Marvel had unrolled his blankets and was looking at them ruefully. "Why here is the bullet," he exclaimed. "It didn't go all the way through. I'll have to keep it as a reminder of my marksmanship;" and he slipped it into his pocket.

After supper that night, Marvel strolled over to Bryam's camp, where the hunter was sitting upon his doorstep, puffing on his pipe. Bryam had shown no desire to associate with the members of the hunting party; nor was there anything about his manner to invite friendly advances, but Marvel seemed unabashed by the surly expression upon the man's face.

"Good evening," he said.

Bryam grunted.

"It must get lonesome up here alone," observed Marvel.

"Must it?"

"What do you do to pass away the time?" persisted the younger man.

"It takes about all of my time minding my own business," growled Bryam.

Apparently unaffected by these rebuffs, Marvel seated himself upon the doorstep at the hunter's

side. In the silence that followed Bryam putted intermittently at his pipe, while Marvel bent his eyes upon the ground in thought.

Hi Bryam, he concluded, was a peculiar man, certainly hard to get acquainted with; and he saw that he was peculiar physically, too, as he noted the size of the man's boots. Surreptitiously he placed his own beside one of them. There was fully an inch and a half difference between them in length.

"Many lion up here?" asked Marvel presently.

"Not as many as there was this morning," said Bryam.

There followed a considerable silence. "It must be quiet up here nights," suggested Marvel.

"It is when there aint some damn fool shooting off his face," replied the hunter.

Again there was a long silence. "You got a nice cabin," said Marvel.

"Have I?"

Marvel rose. "You mind if I look in it?" he said. "T'd like to see the inside of a hunter's cabin."

Bryam rose and stood in the doorway. "There aint nuthin' in here to interest you," he said. "You better run along to bed now."

"Well, may be you're right," said Marvel. "Good

men, may be your right, said Marvel. Good night, and thank you for the pleasant evening."

Bryam made no reply, and Marvel walked back to the campfire where the other members of the party were gathered. "We were just wondering where you were," said Birdie Talbot.

"Thought you'd wandered off and lost yourself," said Butts.

"No, I was just calling on Mr. Bryam," said Marvel.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit," said Blaine.

"Very much indeed," replied Marvel.

"Bryam must have changed then," said Butts. "He wouldn't aim to entertain no tenderfoot if he knew it. He aint got much use for 'em."

"He didn't know it," said Marvel. He moved off toward his blankets. "Good night, folks," he said. "I'm going to turn in."

"I just naturally don't like that fellow," said Butts, when Marvel was out of earshot.

"Then keep it to yourself," snapped Blaine, rising. "I think you'd all better turn in if we want to get an early start in the morning."

When the others had retired to their tents and blankets, Blaine and Butts made their way to

Bryam's cabin, the interior of which was faintly lighted by a single oil lamp standing upon a rough table where Bryam was playing solitaire with a deck of greasy cards.

As the two men entered the shack, a shadow seemed to move among the denser shadows of the pine trees, to come to rest opposite an open window.

"I won't get another chance to talk with you before we leave in the morning, Hi," said Blaine; "and I want to be sure there aint goin' to be no misunderstanding. Mart and Eddie know just what to do. When they get here, keep 'em one night; and let 'em rest. Get an early start the next morning. Take the south trail to the summit, and then follow the One Mile Creek trail around into Sonora. Eddie and Mart know the trail to Kelly's place from there on. They just been down there and got it fixed up with the old man; and remember this, Hi, no funny business and no rough stuff. If you pull anything raw, I'll croak you sure; and that goes for Mart and Eddie and Kelly; and they know it, too."

Bryam grunted. "I aint crazy yet," he said.

VII--THE BUR

IT WAS a cold morning that broke fair and

beautiful as the hunters struck their camp. The horses felt the cinches with humped backs. Baldy was even more convex than usual.

"Aren't you going to top him for me this morning, Blaine?" asked Marvel, as Cory started to mount his own horse.

"I guess you don't need nobody to top your horses for you," said Blaine shortly.

"He looks like he was going to buck for sure this morning," said Marvel.

"I'll top him for you, Mister," said Butts.

"Thanks," said Marvel. "I certainly don't want to get an arm or leg broken way up here in the mountains."

"Here, hold my horse," said Butts.

He swung gently into Marvel's saddle; and, true to form, Baldy took two or three jumps and bolted for a few hundred yards. Butts rode him on a little farther, and those at the camp saw him dismount and pick something up from the ground. Then he remounted and returned to camp at a lope.

"What did you find?" asked Marvel.

"Oh, I thought I seen something," said Butts, "but I didn't." He dismounted and looked to Baldy's cinches, readjusting the saddle and straightening out

the blanket back of the cantle, raising the skirt of the saddle to do so; then he turned the horse over to Marvel, but it was noticeable to all that Baldy had more of a hump now than before. In fact, he was moving about nervously, and seemed to be of a mind to start bucking before he was mounted.

As Butts threw his leg over his own horse, he winked at Bud. "It ought to be a large mornin'," he said.

Marvel raised the skirt of his saddle and reached under the blanket. When he withdrew his hand he held it out to Butts. "This yours?" he asked, and opening his hand he revealed a bur.

Butts tried to look innocent. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Marvel, dropping the bur to the ground and mounting Baldy, from whose back the hump had immediately disappeared with the removal of the bur.

The day's ride was to include an excursion to a point of scenic interest that would profitably occupy the time of the mounted members of the party while the chuck wagon was moving by a more direct route to the next camp.

As they started out, Cory Blaine succeeded in pairing himself off with Kay White. The Talbots rode together, as did Bud and Butts, leaving Dora and Bruce as companions of the trail. Bert Adams

rode ignominiously in the chuck wagon.

"Well, how is the mysterious Mr. Marvel this morning?" asked the girl.

"Just as mysterious as an old shoe," he replied. "Or a ladder," she suggested.

"I think you must be one of those writer folks," he said.

"What makes you think that?"

"You're just hell bent on making a story out of nothing."

"Now don't disappoint me," she said. "I am thrilled to death with mysteries in real life."

"Well, you just go on thrilling while you can, Dora," he said with a laugh; "for you're going to find that a tired business man, off on his vacation, aint much of a range to hunt thrills on."

"Meaning Benson Talbot?" she asked.

"There's not a thrill in him," said Dora; "but he's the only business man in the outfit."

"How do you reckon I live, then?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said, "but if you're a business man, I'm a cowgirl."

"I don't wonder you're suspicious," he said.

I don't wonder you're suspicious," he said.

"Why?" she demanded.

"I've been reading a lot about politics in Pennsylvania, and I shouldn't blame you if you didn't trust nobody."

"There you go again," she said.

"Go again? What do you mean?"

"When you are off your guard your English slips."

He flushed slightly. "Maybe that comes from associating with cowgirls and other illiterate people," he said.

"And maybe that also accounts for the fact that although you are supposed to be a tenderfoot, you knew immediately this morning that Butts had put a bur under Baldy's saddle."

"Oh, pshaw," he said, "anybody could see that."

"I didn't," she said, "and I was just as near to him as you."

"Maybe I am more observing," he suggested.

"Oh, not so very," she told him, "or you wouldn't have put your boot garters on backwards. By the way, where are they?"

"I reckon they fell off yesterday when I was

chasing Kay's pony."

"Why don't you tell the truth?" she demanded. "You couldn't figure them out, and so you threw them away."

"I always did think they were silly things," he said. "I never wear them at home."

"I'll bet you never did. Come on, Bruce, 'fess up. You're not what you pretend to be, are you?"

"I don't know what you think I am," he said; "but perhaps it's a good thing that I am not whatever it is, for I have heard tell that in this part of the country curiosity was sometimes a very fatal disease."

He smiled as he spoke, but the girl caught an undertone of seriousness that sobered her. "Forgive me," she said. "I have been impossible, but really I meant nothing by it. I didn't wish to pry into your private affairs."

"That's all right, Dora," he said with a laugh, "and you needn't be afraid. I'm not going to knife you in the back."

"No," she said, "I know you wouldn't; but I should hate to get too curious about Butts, or even Cory Blaine."

"Why?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "Perhaps it is just a woman's intuition."

"Well, you must have seen a lot of them," he said. "You've been here some time, haven't you?"

"Yes," she answered, "I have; but they have not always been here all the time. They go away occasionally, some times for a week or ten days, Cory's looking after cattle interests."

"He has cattle interests?" asked Marvel.

"And a mine, too, he says," replied Dora.

"Well, he hasn't been looking after them much lately," said Marvel.

"They got back from a trip about three weeks before you came to the ranch," she said; "and it must have been a hard one, too, for they were all in for a couple of days afterward. I guess Cory's a pretty hard rider, too. His horse dropped dead in the corral the morning they got in from that last trip. Bud told me about it."

"Wasn't Bud with them?" asked Marvel.

"No, he stays here and sort of looks after the dude ranch for Cory while he is away."

"Bud seems to be a pretty nice fellow."

"Yes, he is a nice boy," said the girl. "Everybody likes Bud."

They rode on for a while in silence that was finally broken by the girl. "I can't understand why it is," she said, "that I have that peculiar feeling about Cory Blaine. He has always been pleasant and accommodating, but away down inside somewhere I don't seem to be able to trust him. What do you think of him, Bruce?"

"Oh, I have no reason to have anything against him," replied the man. "He's always been decent enough to me, though it has probably been hard work for him to be decent to a tenderfoot."

"You can't have much use for Butts though; he has certainly been nasty enough to you."

"Butts is like having fleas," he replied. "They may annoy you, but you can't really hate them. A thing's got to have brains before a man could hate it. When the Lord was dishing out brains, He must have sort of overlooked Butts."

Dora laughed. "When you first came to the ranch I used to think that maybe He had overlooked you, too, Bruce," she said; "but I know now that He didn't."

"Thanks," said Marvel.

At the head of the little party, trailing at comfortable distances through the hills, rode Cory Blaine and Kay White. The man had been unusually quiet ever since the night that he had been first

quiet, even taciturn; but the girl, alert and eager for each new beauty of this unaccustomed trail, was glad for the long silences.

Sometimes her thoughts reverted to the harrowing incident of yesterday's lion hunt. Annoyingly persistent was the memory of a strong arm about her and of her own arms about a man's neck. The recollection induced no thrills, perhaps, but it had aroused a lively consciousness of the man that she had not felt before. It reminded her of the strength and courage and resourcefulness that his act had revealed, transforming him from a soon-to-be-forgotten incident in her life to a position of importance, where he would doubtless remain enshrined in her memory always. She had never given him much consideration. He had been agreeable in a self-effacing sort of way, and he was undeniably good-looking; but until yesterday he had never greatly aroused her interest.

We have all had similar experiences with chance acquaintances who were but additional names in the chaotic files of memory until some accident, perhaps trivial, precipitated them into the current of our lives, never to be entirely lost sight of or forgotten again, or perhaps to influence or direct our courses through rough or tranquil waters.

Her reveries were interrupted when Cory Blaine finally broke his long silence. "I can't help thinking," he said.

She waited for him to continue. but he did not.

"Thinking what?" she asked.

"Thinking that everything is wrong. A fellow starts wrong and then he never gets the right break."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"I never saw a girl like you before," he continued, "and now that I have found you, it is too late. I am what I am, and a fellow can't change in a minute. I might grow to be more like your kind, but that would take too long."

"You are all right as you are," she said.

"No, I'm not. If I was, you might love me as I love you."

"That has nothing to do with it," she said. "Love is unreasoning. It is purely instinctive. People are attracted to one another in that way or they are not. Haven't you often wondered lots of times what some married people saw in their mates that would have caused them to select the one they did above all others in the world?"

"I've wondered that about nearly all of them," admitted Blaine, "especially Benson Talbot; and that offers me some encouragement. One of them must have been attracted to the other first, like I am attracted to you; and then in some way the other one was won over. Don't you suppose, Kay, that I might win you?"

She shook her head. "No, Cory," she said. "I do not love you and that is all there is to it. Please don't talk about it anymore. It can only make us both unhappy."

"All right," he said, "I won't talk about it;" and then under his breath he muttered, "But by God, I'm going to have you."

They stopped presently in a grove of trees beside a mountain stream to rest and water their horses. Some of them had brought sandwiches; and when these were eaten, they mounted and rode on again; but this time Kay rode beside Bruce Marvel, and it was evident to Cory Blaine that the girl had arranged it so deliberately. He found himself paired off now with Birdie Talbot; and, being a good business man, he sought to be agreeable, though in his heart he had suddenly conceived an intense loathing for her, from her high heeled shoes to her ill-fitted sombrero.

VIII--FOURFLUSHERS, ALL

KAY WHITE, on the other hand, found relief in her escape from Blaine's society, which, with the avowal of his love, she had found depressing and embarrassing. Marvel was companionable in that he was silent when she did not wish to talk; or equally willing to unhold his end of the conversation when

she felt in the mood for it, though even then the brunt of it fell upon her, to which, being a woman, she was, naturally, not averse.

They had spoken casually of various things of interest along the trail and there had been long silences. It spoke well for the companionship of both of them that no matter how long these silences they never became strained ; and then their conversation wandered to their horses, as conversations between horse lovers always do.

"I can't understand why Lightfoot behaved as he did yesterday," she said, speaking of her own mount.

"Most any horse loses his head easy," he said. "They are not like mules or cows. A mule isn't so nervous. If they get tangled up in something they usually lie still and wait for somebody to untangle them; but a horse will either kick himself free or to death, and he doesn't seem to care much which it is. Of course, they are not all alike. I saw an old horse once that had stood all night with one foot caught in a wire fence, and he hadn't moved. He just stood there till I happened along the next morning with a pair of pliers and cut him loose. He was a right old horse, and he must have got wise with age."

"Maybe if Lightfoot lives long enough he will have as much sense as a mule," suggested Kay.

"Maybe," he replied, "and then again maybe he

won't. There are a lot of things, horses and men, too, who would never have any sense if they lived to be a thousand years old."

"He must have been terribly frightened yesterday," said the girl, "because he is always so sweet and gentle. Don't you suppose he would have stopped before the trail dropped off into the ravine?"

He shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "You can't always tell what a horse will do. Some folks say they're blind when they're frightened like that. I've seen them run right into a rail fence when they were real frightened, without even trying to jump it."

"It makes me shiver every time I think what might have happened if it hadn't been for you," she said.

He glanced up at her quickly. "It makes me feel mighty shaky, too," he said. "I am sure glad I was there."

"And you were the only one who thought to do it," she said.

"I reckon they knew their horses weren't fast enough," he said. "You know I knew Baldy could run. I've seen him run every morning; and he's built for speed, too. Anybody could see that. If I hadn't been sure he could beat Lightfoot, it would have been worse than useless to chase him, for then nothing on earth could have stopped him; and if you had jumped, the other horse might have hurt you."

"Every time I think of what you did I feel so ashamed of myself," said the girl.

"What have you got to be ashamed of?" he asked.

"I did you such an injustice," she said.

"You never did anything to me," he replied good naturedly.

"I mean in my thoughts," she explained. "I---it is rather hard to tell you, but I should feel like a hypocrite if I didn't."

"You don't have to," he said. "I think I know."

"I was deceived by outward appearances," she said.

"These clothes are sort of silly," he said; "I realize that now. Of course, though, when you are a stranger in a country it is hard to tell what to wear. You solved it though by adopting a sort of international garb. I guess overalls are worn everywhere."

"At least they are practical," she said, "and I am comfortable in them. It always seemed silly to me to dress up like an actor playing a part, especially when the part is one with which you are not familiar. Hikers who have never hiked, fliers who have never flown, golfers who have never golfed, and riders who have never ridden raid the sport tog shops seeking the last word in equipment and sartorial

elegance, no matter how uncomfortable or weird the result. I remember hearing my father telling how he and mother fixed up when they got their first automobile -linen dusters, gauntlets, and goggles; and mama wore a veil with streaming ends that floated out in the wind behind the car. Now they haven't a single thing specially for motoring."

"I remember reading a little while ago about some chap who was after some trans-continental non-stop record, who had a special sky-blue uniform made, while Lindbergh was apt to cop off a record any afternoon in a business suit. No, you can't tell much about people by their clothes."

"Sometimes people try to deceive through the clothes that they wear," she remarked.

"Do you think that is wrong?" he asked.

"It depends upon what their purpose is, I suppose."

"Now Mrs. Talbot has the right idea," he said with a trace of a smile. "She aint trying to deceive anyone. She's dressed for hiking, golfing, riding or bridge. You can just take your choice, and I reckon that underneath she's got on a bathing suit."

"That's mean," she said.

"Oh, no, it aint mean," he defended himself. "Everybody has been making fun of me as though I was the only funny looking thing around, but

perhaps I'm the only one that is dressed sensible and according to what he really is.

"Don't try to tell me that you are an Eastern polo player, Bruce," she said.

"I haven't," he said.

"But your clothes have tried to tell that," she insisted.

"But Dora's clothes just rear up on their hind legs and shout that she's a cowgirl, when she aint; and I'm sure I wouldn't be any funnier playing polo than you would be working in a section gang."

"I guess you're right," she said, laughing. "We are all of us fourflushers."

"Except Bud, perhaps," he suggested.

"How about Cory and Butts?" she asked. "How do you think they ought to be dressed?"

"If I told you you'd be surprised," he replied.

"`All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,'" she quoted.

"`And one man in his time plays many parts,'" he added; "but a lot of us are bum actors."

"You are an enigma," she said.

"xx/xx?" he asked

She shook her head and did not reply. His recognition of her quotation from Shakespeare baffled her, for she had noted the carelessness of his English and his many lapses into Western vernacular; and, like Dora Crowell, with whom she had discussed him, she had come to the conclusion that he was a Westerner playing a part. It was Dora's theory that he had suddenly made a lot of money in Texas or Oklahoma oil and that, prompted by silly vanity, he was trying to pretend to be something that he was not. The more she saw of him and the longer she talked with him, the more convinced she became, however, that he was genuine at heart; and before they rode into camp that night she would have had to have admitted, had she asked herself the question, that she had found Marvel tremendously congenial and that she was more than a little interested in him.

Nor was she alone the troubled victim of an awakened interest. Perhaps a consciousness of the girl's personality had been developing within Marvel during the several days that he had known her, but it had not been until this afternoon that it had made itself objectively felt by him. It came suddenly, like an awakening, and with it a realization that this girl, a type such as he had never before met, had achieved a place in his thoughts that he had believed reserved forever for another.

The man's loyalty was inherent and almost entirely apart from any objective mental processes. so that

the realization of his interest in Kay came at first in the nature of a distinct shock. He tried to put her out of his mind by conjuring the features of the girl to whom he believed he owed all the loyalty of his heart and mind; but if the features of the absent one faded easily to be replaced by those of a little blonde in blue overalls, it was not entirely surprising, for the one was close and very real, while the other he had not seen for years.

When she had gone away there had been no understanding, only in his own heart; but to that understanding he had always been loyal, and upon it had been built a secret dream castle of hope and longing.

Some day she would come back and he would claim her, or, if she did not, he would go after her wherever she might be; and so it was when he looked at Kay and thoughts that he could not govern came into his mind, he felt a distinct sense of disloyalty to the other; and then Fate stepped in and upset the applecart, for she caused him to recall the moment that the girl had clung to him with both arms about his neck. He felt again the soft, lithe body pressed against his own; and in that instant he was lost. But he tried not to admit it even to himself; and inwardly he swore that he would never speak of it to her, or, at least, until he had laid his heart at the feet of the other girl. If she would not have it; then he could take it to Kay White with a clear conscience. But these were only dreams. When he brought his reason to bear upon the subject. he

smiled cynically for he knew that there was little likelihood that Kay White would want his heart after he had brought it to her.

"A guy sure looks funny," he thought, "running around with his heart in his hand, offering it to different girls. That's what comes of reading poetry, I guess."

As the party sat around the fire that night after supper spinning yarns and discussing the events of the trip, it was noticeable that Cory Blaine had lost some of the suave and courteous manner of the host, and that he was especially short and almost disagreeable in the few remarks he was forced to address to Marvel.

The latter expressed his liking for Baldy. "Want to sell him, Blaine?" he asked.

"No," replied Cory shortly.

"I've taken a sort of fancy to him," said Bruce. "I'll give you more than he's worth."

"He wouldn't be much good to you," said Butts, "unless you hired me to go along and top him for you every morning."

"Maybe I could learn to ride him," said Bruce. "I've learned lots of things since I've been up here. I'll give you seventy-five dollars for him, Blaine; and he aint worth over fifty, with the way the cattle business is today."

business is today.

"What do you know about the cattle business?" demanded Blaine.

"Just what I hear," replied Marvel, "and since I've been out here I aint heard anything very good about it."

"That Baldy horse is worth a hundred dollars if he's worth a cent," said Cory, his avarice getting the better of his ill temper.

Marvel reached in his pocket and drew out a roll of bills. He handed Blaine five twenties. "Here you are," he said.

Blaine hesitated a moment and then reached out and took the money. "Baldy's yourn," he said.

As Bruce returned the roll of bills to his pocket, he commenced a hurried search of all the pockets in his clothes.

"Lost something?" asked Bud.

"Yes, I can't find my lucky tooth. I thought I had it this morning."

"Lucky tooth?" asked Dora.

"Sure," said Bruce. "Horse's tooth-better than a rabbit's foot."

"I never heard of such a thing," said Birdie Talbot.

"Live and learn," Marvel told her. "Now I'll have to find another one. Wouldn't do without a horse's tooth for anything."

One by one the members of the party rose and sought their blankets until only Kay White and Bruce Marvel were left sitting gazing into the glowing embers of the cook fire; but neither one felt the silence, and so they sat for some time until Kay finally roused herself and rose. "We both better go to bed," she said; "we have a long, hard ride tomorrow."

"Yes," he said, rising.

As she turned to go she paused. "Why did you buy Baldy?" she asked.

"He saved your life," he said simply.

She stood looking at him for a moment, the firelight playing on her golden hair and upon his bronzed face. Then she turned and walked away into the darkness, making no comment.

Marvel lit a cigarette, strolled over to the chuck wagon and picked up his bedroll; then he walked over and put it down close to where Cory Blaine lay.

After he had unrolled it, he went back to the fire and threw some more wood upon it before he removed his boots and crawled into his blankets.

Silence had fallen upon the camp, a silence broken only by the heavy breathing of some of the sleepers and the distant yapping of a coyote.

A half hour passed. The fire was still burning merrily. Bruce Marvel rose upon one elbow and listened attentively. Slowly he sat up and looked about the camp; then he reached over and picked up one of Cory Blaine's boots, where it lay under the edge of the sleeper's blankets. Taking careful and deliberate aim, he threw the boot into the fire; then he shouted loudly, "Get out of here, you!" whereupon Blaine and the other men awoke and sat up on their blankets.

"What's eatin' you?" demanded Blaine.

"There was a coyote sneaking around right in camp here," said Marvel, "and I threw my boot at him."

Blaine grunted and lay down again; and once more quiet reigned over the sleeping camp, and the smell of burning leather rose upward from the dying camp fire.

IX--THE SORREL COLT

BEFORE DAWN broke the cook was astir, moving and grubbing among his pots and kettles,

growing and grumbling among his pots and kettles, and then Cory Blaine awoke and reached for his boots, but he found only one. He looked about the camp in all directions and then he reached over and shook Marvel by the shoulder. "Say," he demanded, as the sleeper awoke, "who the hell's boot did you throw at that coyote?"

Marvel sat up and turned back the edge of his bed, revealing a pair of natty English riding boots. "By golly, Blaine," he exclaimed, "I'm awfully sorry. I must have thrown one of yours by mistake. I'll get into mine and go out and find it for you."

"It's funny how you could get hold of mine instead of your own," grumbled Cory.

"Isn't it?" agreed Marvel.

After Bruce had pulled on his boots he searched the camp, but no boot could he find. He questioned the cook and the cook helped him in the search, but all to no avail. Then Cory Blaine joined them with one foot bootless.

"The son-of-a-gun must have grabbed it and run off with it," suggested the cook.

"I sure am sorry," said Marvel.

Blaine mumbled something about damn fool tenderfeet and hobbled back to roll up his bed.

At breakfast Cory and Bruce were the objects of a great deal of good-natured gillywag, which the

a great deal of good-natured lamely, which the former seemed to have considerable difficulty in appreciating.

"I'd loan you one of my boots," said Bruce, "but I'm afraid it wouldn't fit you."

"I wouldn't be buried in one of them things," replied Blaine surlily.

Kay White did not enter into the joking. She was very quiet and often she watched Bruce Marvel, as though she were studying him.

When it came time to mount, Marvel stood holding Baldy by the neck rope.

"Are you going to top him for me, Butts?" he asked.

"No," growled Butts, "I aint got time."

Marvel turned to Bud. "How about you, Bud?" he asked.

Bud grinned. "Aw, you can ride him all right," he said. "Anyway, we aint had no fun for a long while."

"I don't like to ask Cory to top him," said Bruce, "because he's only got one boot."

"Why don't you ask some of the ladies," suggested Butts. "Like as not, they aint afraid."

"Well, I guess I'll have to try it myself then," said

Marvel.

"What sort of flowers do you want?" demanded Butts.

Bruce coiled the halter rope and gathered the reins in his left hand. He spoke in a low voice to Baldy and stroked his neck; then he swung easily into the saddle. Baldy did nothing. It was a great disappointment to everyone, except Marvel.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Benson Talbot in an aggrieved tone.

"I don't think you're a bit nice," said Dora Crowell to Marvel. "You might have got thrown once, at least."

"Sorry to disappoint you," said Bruce. "I'll fall off him, anyway, if you say so."

"I wish you would," muttered Blaine under his breath, "and break your fool neck."

As they started out Kay rode beside Bruce. He tried to engage the girl in conversation, but soon saw that she did not care to talk. and desisted; nor was it until the party had stretched out along the trail and the two were alone that she broke her silence.

"After I got to my tent last night, I did not feel like sleeping," she said; "and so I went out a little way from camp and sat on a rock that I had noticed there before dark. In front of me was the camp,

illuminated by the camp fire. Behind me lay the hills, mysterious under the starlight. I saw you pick something up and throw it into the fire. Until this morning I did not know what it was. I heard you yell at something, as though to chase it away; but there was nothing there. I was so surprised last night that I just sat there until the camp had quieted down again before I returned to my tent. I cannot imagine why you did it, but I want to tell you that I think it was a small and petty thing to do. I should think that you would be ashamed of yourself. Even if you were a little child, playing a joke, it would still be detestable." Her voice was low, but her tone touched like ice. He could see that she was thoroughly disgusted.

"I am sorry that you saw it." That was all he said.

The party had gotten an early start that morning with the intention of riding all the way through to the ranch, leaving the chuck wagon, which they no longer needed, to trail along in at its own gait; so that the same trip that had required three days going up into the mountains required only two coming out.

The hunters arrived at the home camp in the middle of the afternoon; and after greeting those who had been left behind, each repaired to his room to clean up and to read his mail.

Bruce Marvel had none; so he was soon out again, wandering about the ranch yard. Presently Blaine emerged from his quarters and walked down

toward the corral. He had donned a pair of old and well worn boots -boots that had once been resplendent with patent leather designs in two colors embellishing their tops and with little brass hearts set in the center of each heel.

As Bruce Marvel followed Cory Blaine into the dusty corral, his eyes were on the ground and he appeared to be absorbed in deep meditation; yet he was humming a gay little tune, an occupation which was so much at variance with his accustomed quiet that it elicited a comment from Blaine. "What's ticklin' you?" he demanded. "Get a letter from your gal?"

"No," said Marvel, "I haven't got any gal; but I just got some good news."

Blaine made no comment, but he had stopped as though he had something more to say to Marvel; however, it was the latter who spoke first. "Can you rent me a fresh horse, Blaine?" he asked.

"What do you want with a horse?" demanded the superintendent. "You've been ridin' all day."

"I just want to ride around a bit and see if I can find me another horse's tooth," explained Bruce. "There must be plenty of old skulls around here somewhere."

"Sure they is," said Blaine, "if you can find them."

"I can try," said Marvel. "I don't feel safe without a

horse's tooth - greatest luck charm in, the world."

"I aint got no very gentle horse up now," explained Blaine. "They are all out in pasture, and it might take a half an hour to get 'em up."

"What have you got?" asked Bruce.

"Nuthin' but an old crowbait that we use for wranglin' and a colt one of the boys is bustin'."

"That sorrel there?" asked Marvel, indicating a horse standing in a stall in the stable.

"Yes."

"I saw one of the boys riding him before we went on the lion hunt," said Marvel. "He didn't seem very wild."

"You can take him if you want, but if you have to walk home don't blame me none."

"I'm not going far anyway," said Marvel; "so it won't be a long walk."

"Just as you say," said Blaine. "I'll saddle him for you."

He led the animal out of the stable, and Marvel held him while the other man saddled and bridled him.

"I'll take him outside of the corral," said Blaine. "You'd better mount him out there where there's

lots of room. You may need it."

Marvel stroked the colt's neck and spoke to him as he had with Baldy; then he eased himself into the saddle, slowly and gently, and started off down the road at a walk.

Blaine stood watching him, his brows knitted as the horse and rider grew smaller and smaller in the distance. They were almost out of sight when Blaine straightened up expectantly -the colt had commenced to pitch.

Blaine grinned. "I guess that damn dude will walk home all right," he muttered.

The sorrel was pitching and he was pitching hard. Even from a distance, the watcher could see that; and he could see that he was bringing into play every broncho artifice for unseating his rider short of throwing himself to the ground.

Gradually the smile faded from Blaine's lips, and there crept into his eyes an expression of astonishment not unmixed with trouble. "The son-of-a-gun," he muttered, or something that sounded like that; but whether he referred to the horse or the rider, one may not definitely know.

Perhaps the sorrel pitched for four or five minutes--it seemed like fifteen to Cory Blaine--and then the rider evidently got the animal's head up and the two disappeared around the shoulder of a hill, the horse

moving at an easy lope.

"The son-of-a-gun!" -repeated Cory Blaine; and then, "I never did like that hombre anyway."

Bruce Marvel rode hard and fast, and he did not appear to be looking for horses' teeth along the way. The sun was setting when he rode into the railroad town at which, scarcely a week before, he had left the train and taken the buckboard for the ranch.

He tied his horse to the rail before the general store in which the postoffice was located; and after purchasing some stationery and a postage stamp, he wrote a brief letter, sealed and addressed the envelope, and dropped it into the slot for outgoing mail.

That he was the object of the amused interest of the few people whom he encountered in the store and on the street did not appear to concern him at all; and after watering the sorrel and readjusting the blanket and cinches, he mounted and started back through the growing dusk toward the ranch, where the guests were already sitting down to supper.

"Where is Bruce?" asked Dora Crowell, when, the meal half over, he had not appeared.

"He went out hunting horses' teeth," said Blaine. "I reckon he didn't have much luck."

"Who ever heard of a horse's tooth bringing good

luck?" demanded Birdie Talbot.

"No one," said her husband.

"I think he's crazy," said Birdie.

"Oh, he seemed a very nice young man," said Miss Pruell.

"Birdie thinks anyone's crazy who doesn't play bridge with her," said Benson.

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Birdie. "I just think they're a little peculiar."

"Do you remember the English lord, Birdie, who made such a wonderful bridge partner at Fishkill-on-the-Hudson that summer?"

"That might have happened to anyone," snapped Mrs. Talbot.

"Birdie was always quoting him as an authority on bridge and everything else until they came and took him away. He had escaped from Matteawan."

"And wasn't he an English lord at all?" asked Miss Pruell.

"No," said Talbot, "he had been a school teacher in Poughkeepsie until the night he killed his wife for trumping his ace."

Experience had taught Cory Blaine that his Eastern guests especially enjoyed the stories and the rough

guests especially enjoyed the stories and the rough humor of the cowhands, and so it was customary for some of the men to stroll up to the house during the evening and join the group upon the wide veranda.

X--BLAINE IS JEALOUS

TONIGHT THEY were later than usual in coming, and only Bud and Butts put in an appearance.

"Where's the dude with the panties?" inquired Bud, noting Marvel's absence.

"He is out looking for a horse's tooth," explained Dora.

"The poor nut," said Butts disgustedly, "hoofin' it around at night looking for a horse's tooth."

"He is not on foot and he started out in the daytime," said Kay White. "Don't you think someone ought to go out and look for him, Cory?"

"What's he ridin'?" asked Bud.

"The sorrel colt," said Blaine.

Butts whistled. "Sure we better go out and look for him," he said, "and we better take a basket or some blotting paper."

"Why?" asked Kay.

"That there sorrel's probably killed the dude by this time and spread him all over the landscape," explained Butts. "He sure is some ornery bronc."

"Oh, Cory, you shouldn't have let him take a bad horse like that," said Kay.

"I warned him," said Blaine, "but he wanted to take the horse anyway."

"You sure better send out a search party, Cory," said Butts. "That colt has the makin's of a good horse in him. It would be too bad to lose him."

"Here comes someone now," exclaimed Dora Crowell; and as all eyes turned in the direction of the road they saw a horseman approaching.

He rode up to the veranda. "Is Butts here?" he asked, and they recognized the voice as Marvel's.

"Yea," said Butts. "What do you want?"

Marvel dismounted. "Take my horse, my man," he said.

If there is anything that will wreck a cowman's equanimity it is to be treated like a menial; and no carefully studied insult would have been more effective than the use of "my man" in addressing the puncher; but Cory Blaine, who was sitting next to Butts, nudged him with his elbow before the man

Blaine, nudged him with his elbow. "Sure the man could make an angry reply; and Butts arose, boiling with rage, and taking the reins from Marvel led the colt away toward the stables.

"Where you been so long?" asked Blaine.

"I guess I must have got lost," exclaimed Marvel.

"Did you have any trouble with the colt?" asked Bud.

"Not a bit," said Marvel. "He was just like a kitten."

"Didn't he pitch at all?" asked Blaine.

"Not a pitch," replied Marvel.

"And you didn't find a horse's tooth?" asked Birdie.

"No," replied Marvel, "I didn't; but I'm going to get Bud to take me down tomorrow to where he knows there is a dead horse. Will you do that, Bud?"

"What dead horse?" demanded Blaine.

"I heard somebody say something about a horse dropping dead here a few weeks ago," explained Bruce.

"Sure I'll take you down tomorrow," said Bud.

"You must be hungry," said Kay. "You haven't had any supper; have you?"

"It won't hurt me any to miss a meal," said Bruce.

"Come on, I'll get you a sandwich," said Kay. "I guess the cook won't murder me." She arose and led the way into the kitchen.

"This is mighty good of you, Kay," said Marvel; "but I didn't want to put anyone to any trouble. I should not have been late."

The darkness hid the scowl upon Blaine's face. He muttered something under his breath.

"What was that, Cory?" asked Dora.

"There's something fishy about that bozo," said Blaine, recalling Marvel's statement that the colt had not pitched with him.

"Oh, any tenderfoot might get lost here after dark," contended the girl.

"Tenderfoot, my hat!" mumbled Blaine.

"The colt would have come back by himself, if he'd given him his head," said Bud. "He's raised right here on the ranch."

By the time Kay and Bruce had returned from the kitchen, Butts had come back from the stables. "You must have rid that horse pretty hard, Mister," he said to Marvel.

"Must I?" inquired Bruce.

"That's what I said, Mister," snapped Butts in an ugly tone.

"I heard you, my man," replied Marvel. "I aint deaf."

Butts started to rise. It was evident to him, as it was to some of the others, that Marvel was deliberately baiting him. His voice had been soft and low, but he had put just the right inflection on certain words to raise them to the dignity of insults.

Blaine laid a hand upon Butts' leg. "Sit down," he said in a low voice.

"I aint goin' to let no "

"Sit down," said Blaine sharply, "and shut up." And Butts did as he was bid.

"What's new?" asked Marvel. "It seems almost like I've been gone a week."

"I got a letter from my father," said Kay. "He may be along here any day."

"Is that so," said Bruce. "Well that surely is nice."

"When did he say he'd get here?" asked Cory.

"He didn't say exactly; in fact, he didn't know

when he could start; but from what he did write I imagine that he may be here any time now."

"Well, he'd wire you, wouldn't he?" asked Blaine; "so that we could meet the train."

"He is not coming by train," replied Kay. "He's driving on."

"Oh," said Blaine; and then, "When was the letter dated?"

"About four days ago. You see it came while we were on the lion hunt."

"How long would it take him to drive here?" persisted Cory.

"He likes to take it easy; so I imagine it would take him three or four days."

"Oh, by the way," exclaimed Dora Crowell, "there's a friend of mine coming up, Cory. I want you to save a room for her."

"When is she coming?" asked Blaine.

"Well, I don't know that, either. She said she would come just as soon as she could get away. It's Olga Gunderstrom, you know. You heard me speak of her before. She said she had a few more matters to settle up; and then she could get away for a week or ten days, and she wants to come up here with me and rest. I imagine it has been pretty

hard for her."

"The poor child," said Miss Pruell sympathetically.

"Did she say whether they found the murderer yet or not?" asked Cory.

"No, but they are pretty sure now that it was Buck Mason. They can't find trace of him anywhere."

"Is that the only reason they got for suspecting him?" asked Marvel.

"What more reason do you want?" asked Butts.
"Who else could it have been?"

"Well, maybe you're right," said Marvel; "but that's sort of slim evidence to hang a man on."

"They have more than that," said Dora.

"Oh, have they?" asked Marvel.

"An Indian turned up two or three weeks after the murder who said that he saw Buck Mason riding away from Mr. Gunderstrom's cabin late in the afternoon of the murder."

"I guess they got that guy hogtied all right," said Butts.

"It certainly looks like it," agreed Marvel.

"There aint no doubt but what he done it," said Butts.

"They are trying to find the man who telephoned the sheriff's office and gave the clew," said Dora. "They can't imagine who it could have been; but now they are commencing to think that Mason was one of the gang that has been robbing banks and paymasters all around there for the last year, and that one of his own men, who had it in for him, tipped off the sheriff."

"That certainly sounds like a good theory," said Marvel, "but how are they going to find the fellow that called up?"

"That's where the trouble comes in," said Dora. "Olga wrote me that the only clew that they have to him is that an old man by the name of Cage, who received the message, said that the man talked as though he had a harelip."

"That's not much of a clew," said Blaine. "There's a lot of men in the country with harelips."

"Well, if they're going to hang all the men with harelips and all the men that haven't been seen around Comanche County for the last three or four weeks, they've got some wholesale job cut out for themselves," said Bruce with a laugh. "When did you say Miss Gunderstrom was coming, Dora?"

"I may get a telegram most any time," replied Dora.

"I'll save a room for her," said Blaine. "I'm

expecting a party of four or five on from Detroit, but we'll make room some way for Kay's father and Miss Gunderstrom."

Birdie Talbot suppressed a yawn. "My gracious," she said, "I'm nearly dead. I think we should all go to bed."

"That's the first really bright remark anyone has made this evening," said Dora.

The suggestion seemed to meet with general approval; and as the guests rose to go to their rooms, Cory motioned to Marvel. "I want to see you a minute," he said. "See you fellows in the morning," he said to Butts and Bud; and then when the two were alone, he turned back to Marvel. "How much longer you figurin' on bein' here?" he asked.

"I like it first rate here," replied Marvel. "I was planning on staying awhile."

"Well, I got all these people comin' now," said Blaine, "and I'll be needin' your room pronto."

"When do you expect the people from Detroit?" asked Marvel.

"They may be along any day now," replied Blaine.

"Then I'll wait 'till they come," said Marvel; and turning, he entered the house.

"Wait," said Blaine, "there's one more thing."

Marvel turned in the doorway. "What is it?" he asked.

"I'm sort of responsible for these girls here," said Blaine. "I got to look after 'em. It's just hands off, do you understand?"

"I hear, but I don't understand," replied Marvel.

"If you know what's good for your health, you will understand," snapped Cory.

For a moment the two men stood looking at each other, and the air was charged with hostility. Then Blaine walked down the porch to the entrance to his own room, and Bruce Marvel disappeared within the interior of the ranch house.

"So," thought Marvel, as he entered his room and lighted his oil lamp, "Mr. Blaine is jealous. I'm glad that it isn't anything else. He sure had me guessing though at first."

After he had taken off his outer clothing, Marvel opened his trunk and extracted a suit of silk pajamas. They were brand new and had never been worn. He examined them critically as he had upon several other similar occasions and then he replaced them carefully in the trunk and slipped into bed in his underclothing. "I suppose I'll have to learn to wear 'em some day," he murmured; "but, Lord, what if the house would get on fire when a fellow

was wearing things like that?" And he was still shuddering at the thought as he fell asleep, to dream of a blonde head and blue denim overalls.

Late that night a fire burned upon the summit of a rocky hill below the ranch house, but none of the sleeping inmates saw it, and by morning it was only cold ashes.

XI--"THAT WOULD BE EDDIE"

BRUCE MARVEL was a few minutes late for breakfast the following morning, and all of the guests were seated when he entered the dining room. He greeted them with the quiet smile with which they had become so familiar, and a casual word here and there in reply to the banal remarks to the accompaniment of which a group of human beings usually starts the day. Cory Blaine alone did not look up as he entered, a fact which did not seem to abash Marvel in the least.

"Good morning, Cory," he said cheerily.

"Mornin'," grumbled Blaine.

"Ready for the paper chase, Bruce?" asked Kay White.

"What paper chase?" he asked.

"Oh, that's so, you weren't at supper last night, were you?" continued the girl. "We arranged it all then. We are going to have a paper chase today."

"I'm sorry," spoke up Cory, "but I can't go today. I've got to attend to a little business, and I figured on letting Bud take you all over to Crater Mountain. There aint any of you seen that, and it's worth seein'. Tomorrow we'll have the paper chase."

"One day is as good as another," said the girl, "and I've always wanted to see the crater of the old volcano."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Marvel. "I was figurin' that Bud could help me find a horse's tooth this morning."

Blaine looked up at him in disgust and then suddenly the light of inspiration shone in his eyes. "Why that can be fixed up all right," he said good-naturedly. "Butts can just as well take the folks over to Crater Mountain, and you and Bud can go tooth huntin'."

"Oh, that's mean," said Dora; "why don't you come along with us?"

"Maybe I'll find the tooth and catch up with you," he said; but his thoughts were not upon his words; instead they were occupied with the wish that Kay White had said that instead of Dora Crowell.

After breakfast they all went to the corral while the men caught up the horses for the day. There was the usual rush and movement and excitement that seems never to pall even upon those most accustomed to seeing it. The cleverness of the horses and the cleverness of the men, the kaleidoscopic changes of form and color, the smell of horses, the clashing hoofs, the dust of the corral all combine to produce a spell that lingers forever in the memory.

Blaine was issuing instructions to his men, selecting for the riders horses that had been left at home during the lion hunt.

"I think I'll ride Baldy," said Marvel. "I won't be doing much today."

"Suit yourself," said Blaine. "Bud, you're going with Mr. Marvel hunting teeth. Butts will take the folks over to Crater Mountain."

"You better pack along a thirty-thirty," said Butts to Bud. "Some of them teeth is pretty wild. I knew a tenderfoot once who come out from the East huntin' teeth. He went out alone without a gun and he got bit all up."

It being customary to laugh at such witticisms, everyone now laughed, including Marvel, who stood speculatively scrutinizing Butts' bowed legs. "I wish Butts was going with me instead of Bud," he

said.

"Why?" demanded Butts. "I aint no wet nurse."

"But you're just what a fellow needs when he's hunting teeth," insisted Marvel.

"How do you make that out?" asked Butts.

"Well, you see, I'd take along a gunny sack and stretch it between your legs and chase the teeth in."

"Well I won't be along," said Butts; "so you better shoot 'em; but be sure to aim at somethin' else or you won't never hit 'em."

"I guess that'll hold you, Bruce," said Dora.

"I guess it ought to," he said grinning.

A moment later, as Kay White's horse was led out of the corral, Marvel stepped over as she was about to mount and examined the bridle, the bit, and the cinches.

"I'm sorry you are not going today," she said in a low voice.

"Are you really?" he asked.

She nodded. "But I suppose there is nothing so important as a horse's tooth."

He looked at her and smiled. "It means a lot to me, Kay," he said. "Anything would have to mean a lot

to keep me from riding to Crater Mountain today."

There was something in his tone that checked whatever reply she might have made, and in silence she mounted as he held her horse; and then the others rode up around them and carried her along, but he watched her for a long time as she rode away toward the hills to the East.

"Here's your horse, Mister," called Blaine from the corral, interrupting Marvel's reverie. "Want me to top him for you?"

"Oh, I don't think he'll do anything."

"He certainly won't do anything more than the sorrel colt," said Blaine.

"Well he didn't do nothing; so I guess I'm safe," said Bruce.

As Marvel and Bud rode away down the valley, Blaine stood looking after them. "I sure don't like that bozo," he said aloud. "I just aint got no time for him; but," after a pause, "I'll be damned if I know why."

Marvel and Bud rode side by side at a slow walk. "We might have a look at that horse of Blaine's that fell dead a few weeks ago," suggested the former.

"I'm afraid it's pretty fresh," said Bud.

"We can have a look at it anyway," said Marvel.
"Where is it?"

They rode down the valley for about a mile and well off the road when, suddenly, several vultures rose just ahead of them.

"There it be," said Bud.

They rode closer. "It is a bit fresh, isn't it?" asked Marvel. Between coyotes, vultures and rodents the horse had pretty well disappeared; but the stench was still overpowering, yet Marvel rode close up to the putrid remains.

He sat looking down at the grizzly thing for half a minute; then he turned and rode away.

"I guess it's a little bit too high even for me," he said.

"Well," said Bud, "there ought to be others. It seems to me I seen a horse's skull down the wash about a half a mile farther," but Marvel seemed suddenly to have lost interest in horse teeth.

"Oh, never mind, Bud," he said. "I guess I'll let it go till another day."

"That's funny," said Bud. "You sure was keen for it a little while ago."

He did not see the figure of a horseman winding into the hills in the West, and had he, he might not

have connected it with the tenderfoot's sudden loss of interest in horse teeth; but Marvel had seen and he had recognized both horse and rider, even though they were little more than a speck against the hillside.

Marvel and Bud rode slowly toward the ranch. The former, riding slightly in the rear, was scrutinizing his companion meditatively.

"How long you been with this outfit, Bud?" asked Marvel presently.

"I've always been on the ranch. I was born there. My uncle used to own it. When Cory turned it into a boarding house I went to work for him."

"Known him long?"

"Couple of years."

"I don't see how he makes a living out of his boarders," said Bruce.

"It's been tough goin' until lately," replied Bud. "It's pickin' up now; but he always seems to have plenty of dough. He has a mine somewhere, he says, and a ranch, too."

"I guess he'd be needing them," said Bruce, "to keep up this outfit; but I don't see how he runs two or three businesses."

"Oh, he and Butts go away every once in a while to look after his other interests."

to look after his other interests.

"You never went with him?" asked Marvel.

"No, he never took me along. He leaves me here to look after things while he's away."

As they talked, Marvel had dropped back until Baldy's head was about opposite Bud's knee. Riding in this position, Bud did not see his companion raise one of his feet and remove a spur, which he quietly slipped inside his shirt.

"I should think all these boarders would get on his nerves," said Bruce.

"Some of them do," replied Bud.

"Me, for instance," suggested Bruce. Bud grinned.

"Hell I!" exclaimed Marvel, "I've lost a spur." He reined in and so did Bud.

"Let's go back and look for it," said Bud.

"No," replied Marvel, "you go on back to the ranch. I'll look for it myself."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Bud. "I'd just as soon help you find it."

"No, you go on back to the ranch. I've learned what a nuisance a dude is, and I'll feel better if you just go on and let me find it for myself."

"Whatever you say," said Bud. "We aim to please, as the feller said."

"See you later," said Marvel; and reining Baldy about he started back down the valley.

At a point where a dry wash came out of the hills from the West he stopped and turned in his saddle. Bud was jogging quietly toward home, his back turned. For a few seconds Marvel watched him; then he headed into the dry wash, the high banks of which would hide him from Bud's view should the latter happen to turn his eyes backward.

Now he rode more swiftly, spurring Baldy into a lope, until the ascent toward the hills became too steep.

The arroyo he was following led to the summit of low hills near the point where he had seen the rider disappear shortly before; and as he neared the top he went more slowly, finally stopping just before he reached the ridge. Dismounting he dropped Baldy's reins to the ground and covered the remaining distance on foot.

It was a barren ridge, supporting but a scant growth of straggling brush. As he neared the top he dropped to his hands and knees and crawled the remaining distance to a point just behind a small bush that grew upon the crest of the ridge. Here he lay on his belly and wormed himself a few inches farther upward until his eyes topped the summit.

Beyond the ridge and below him lay a barren gully, in the bottom of which, a hundred yards up from the point at which he was spying on them, three men sat in their saddles; and one of them was addressing the other two rapidly and earnestly. This one was Cory Blaine.

An expression of satisfaction crossed Marvel's face. "That," he said enigmatically, "will be the other two."

For ten minutes Marvel lay there watching the three men in the gully below. Then he saw them gather their reins. Blaine spurred his horse up the side of the gully, while the other two turned down toward the valley.

Half way up the hillside Blaine reined in his mount and turned in the saddle. "Don't you fellers do no drinking tonight," he shouted back at the two below him, "and see that you are there on time tomorrow."

"Sure, boss," shouted back one of them in a thick, almost inarticulate voice.

"And that what I said about drinking goes double for you, Eddie," called Blaine, as he turned his horse's head upward again toward the summit of the ridge.

Marvel returned to Baldy and mounted him. Then he urged the horse at a reckless pace down the rough wash. Near the mouth of the arroyo he reined to the left, urging Baldy up the steep bank and

to the left, urging Baldy up the steep bank and across a low ridge; then he put the spurs to him, and ignoring the rocky terrain and the menace of innumerable badgers' holes he cut downward across the rolling hills parallel with the valley at a run.

Where the ridge finally melted into the floor of the valley, he reined Baldy to the left and so came at last into the mouth of the barren gully in which he had seen the three men talking.

Riding toward him now were two of the men, and as he came into view they eyed him intently. With what appeared to be considerable effort, he stopped Baldy in front of them, while they reined in their own ponies and viewed him with ill-concealed contempt.

"Who let you out, sister?" demanded one of them.

Marvel looked embarrassed. "My horse ran away with me," he explained, "and I guess I'm lost."

"Where you lost from, sis?" demanded one of the riders with exaggerated solicitude, and in the scarcely articulate tone that Marvel had previously heard when the speaker had addressed Blaine.

"That," soliloquized he, "would be Eddie;" and then aloud, "I'm stopping at the TF Ranch. Could you direct me how to get there?"

"Certainly," said Eddie. "Go straight up this here

gulch. Then the men moved on.

"Them directions," said the second man, "will land the son-of-a-gun in Mexico, if he follows them."

"Well, they aint got no business roamin' around Arizona without their nurses," replied Eddie.

Marvel watched the two for a moment, his keen eyes taking in every detail of both men and horses. Then he rode slowly up the gulch, following the trail that the two had made going up and coming down, his eyes often bent upon the ground. When he reached the point where Blaine had spurred up over the ridge, he did likewise and presently dropped down into the valley on the other side where the ranch lay; and as he rode into the ranch yard, Eddie, far away, was still chuckling over the joke he had played upon the tenderfoot.

Today, seeing no one about the corral, he removed the bridle and saddle himself and turned Baldy into the pasture.

As he approached the ranch house, Blaine and Bud emerged from the former's room, which was also his office. "Find your spur?" asked Bud.

"Yes," replied Bruce.

"You must have had to chase it all over the county," said Blaine. "Bud says he left you three hours ago."

"I found it," said Bruce.

"I guess I got lost again," explained Bruce.

"You dudes are a damn nuisance," snapped Cory, all his usual suavity gone.

Marvel raised his eyebrows. "Our money aint such a nuisance, is it?" he asked.

"I got all your money I'm going to," said Blaine. "You'll be leavin' now. Them folks are comin' from Detroit right away."

"I'm about ready to leave anyway," replied Marvel, "but I think I'll stay until after the paper chase. I certainly would like to be in on that."

"The paper chase needn't detain you none," snapped Blaine, "and I'll be wantin' your room tomorrow morning."

"What's the rush?" demanded Marvel. "Whenever those folks come they can have my room."

Whatever reply Blaine may have contemplated was interrupted by Bud. "Here comes the bunch back from Crater Mountain," he announced; and he and Cory hurried down to the corral to meet them, followed more slowly by Marvel.

Conversation during dinner was occupied largely with the events of the day and plans for the paper chase on the morrow. Cory explained that he and Bud would be the hares, taking one other member of the party with him, whom he would select in the

XII--"GOODBYE, KAY"

THE GUESTS retired early that evening, with the exception of Marvel, who sat alone on the veranda smoking. Blaine and Butts were sitting on the top rail of the corral talking. "I'm gettin' rid of Marvel tomorrow," said Cory.

"What you so asceared of him for?" demanded Butts. "He's harmless."

"He's sweet on Kay White," replied Blaine. "I want her for myself."

"Well, aint you goin' to get her?"

"Yes, but I think she sort of likes the dude; and if he's around he may bust it up after I get it fixed."

"Now that he's goin'," said Butts, "I sure would like to make him dance."

"Nuthin' doin'," said Blaine. "Anything like that would give us a bad reputation."

"I sure would like to take a shot at that dude just the same," said Butts.

"Well, you aint goin' to," said Blaine. "He don't

mean nuthin' to me except to get him out of the way of Kay White as easy as I can. See that you don't go mussin' things up."

"Just as you say, boss," replied Butts, "but my trigger finger sure itches every time I look at that son-of-a-gun."

On the ranch house veranda Marvel had stamped out the fire of his last cigarette and was sitting with his feet on the rail thinking.

"I guess," he meditated, "that it's just about as well that I get out of here anyway, for if I don't I'm going to fall in love with Kay White--if I haven't already fallen. Of course, I aint give no one else a promise except in my own heart, and I think she knew before she went away that I'd be waiting for her when she came back. It's a funny world. I wonder what she'll be like."

He was sitting in the shadows at the end of the porch when a light step attracted his attention; and looking down the long veranda he saw a slender figure emerge from the house, and as he saw it a little thrill ran through his frame.

He did not speak nor move, fearing perhaps that he might frighten her away. She came slowly along the veranda toward him, reveling in the cool night air and the star-shot heaven against which the black hills stood out in sharply defined silhouette. She was quite close before she discovered him, and when she did she voiced a little exclamation of surprise.

"I didn't know that there was anyone out here," she said; and, coming closer, "Oh, it's you."

"It's so much nicer out here," he said, "that I hated to go into that stuffy little box."

"That's the 'way I felt. I could not sleep."

"I am glad that you couldn't."

"That is not very nice," she said, smiling.

"You know what I mean," he said. "Won't you sit down?" Rising, he drew another chair closer to his own.

"I might for a minute," she said, "but "

"But you would rather be alone. I know how that is. Lots of times I feel that way myself, most of the time in fact; but I'll promise not to talk."

"I don't mind if you talk," she told him, "if you don't make me talk."

"Then I reckon it won't be very noisy out here."

She settled herself comfortably in her chair. "That will be nice. There are so few people who know when to keep still."

He smiled contentedly, but made no reply; and, having purposely arranged the chairs to this end, he

sat admiring her profile and lazily permitted himself to indulge in thoughts that were not entirely loyal to another girl. It was a long silence that followed--a silence which the girl was first to break.

"Do you think the paper chase will be good sport?" she asked.

"I hope so," he said.

"Cory has promised that I can be one of the hares," she continued.

"Oh."

"Do you think you can catch us?"

"I am not going along," he said.

"Why?" she asked in surprise.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," he told her.

"Leaving!" she exclaimed, sitting erect and turning toward him. "Not leaving for good?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I am sorry. I thought perhaps that you would be here longer."

"Cory wants my room. He has other guests coming."

"Did he ask you to leave?"

"Yes, but I was about ready to go anyway."

"I don't see why he couldn't make room for you," she said. "Dora and I could double up, or you could go in with Bert Adams."

"I sort of guess Cory wouldn't thank anyone for the suggestion."

"You mean that he doesn't want you to stay? Why in the world shouldn't he?"

"Maybe I haven't paid my bill."

"I know better than that," she said. "You paid a week in advance when you came. I heard you and Cory talking about it, and I saw you pay him for Baldy; so I know that you can't owe him anything."

"I suppose he's got his own reasons," said Bruce.

"I don't see what they could be."

"Don't you?" he asked.

There was a curious inflection to the question that perhaps he did not intend, but she sensed a hidden meaning which piqued her curiosity. "Why should I?" she demanded.

"Oh, nothing," he said, moving uneasily in his chair.

"It is something," she insisted. "It sounds as though in some way I were responsible."

"Oh, you aint to blame. It's just that Cory has foolish ideas in his head, though perhaps they aint so foolish after all," he added.

"You have got to tell me," she said. "I certainly have a right to know if I have done anything."

"I told you you haven't done anything."

"Well, then, I want to know anyway," she said with finality.

"It's just that Cory thinks," he started, and then he gave a nervous cough and started over again. "It's just that Cory thinks--by golly, Kay, I can't say it."

She looked at him, her eyes wide; for he had told her everything in his halting speech and embarrassed manner, though doubtless he would have sworn that he had told her nothing.

She rose slowly from her chair and stood looking out into the night for a moment. Now she was moving away, along the veranda toward the doorway. "Good night," she said.

"Good-bye, Kay."

She did not reply as she moved rapidly toward her room.

He sat there alone and in silence until midnight, while Kay White tossed sleeplessly upon her bed.

Here was another problem, and that it had suddenly become a serious one she recognized now that the man's unconscious avowal had brought a realization of the depth of her interest in him--an interest that had been constantly mounting since the day of the lion hunt.

She was glad that he was going away on the morrow and that she would never see him again, for something seemed to tell her that he might be a very difficult person to resist; and perhaps, too, she realized he might be almost as equally difficult to forget.

She kept congratulating herself over and over again that she had not fallen in love with him, and thus she fell asleep.

At breakfast the next morning, Bruce Marvel appeared in his street clothes, much to the surprise of every one, except Cory Blaine and Kay White.

"Why the smart togs?" demanded Dora Crowell. "Are they the last word in paper chase raiment?"

"I'm leaving today," he explained.

"Oh, I think that is real mean," said Birdie Talbot. "We haven't had a single game of bridge."

"We shall certainly be sorry to see you go, Mr. Marvel," said Miss Pruell.

"Well, we made a horseman of him, anyway,

before he left," chimed in Bert Adams.

"I envy you, Bruce," said Benson Talbot; "I'd like to get back to God's country, where there's a golf course, myself."

"Butts is goin' down to the train to meet a party," announced Blaine. "He'll take you and your stuff along with him."

"What are you going to do with Baldy?" asked Dora.

"I'm going to take him along with me," replied Marvel.

"Want to sell him?" asked Adams. "I'll give you what you paid Cory for him."

"I'm not aimin' ever to sell Baldy," replied Marvel; and Kay White knew that the words were meant for her.

XIII--MARVEL BUYS AN OUTFIT

AFTER BREAKFAST Bruce watched the party get away on the paper chase. He saw Cory and Kay and Bud start up the valley fifteen minutes ahead of the others. At the last minute the girl had come and

given him her hand in parting. "Good bye, Bruce," she said. "I'm sorry that you are not going to be here when my father comes. He will be sorry not to have been able to thank you for what you did that day."

"I didn't do it for thanks, Kay," he said.

"They are taken for granted anyway. Anyhow, Kay, he couldn't be any more thankful than I"

"Hurry up!" growled Blaine. "If we want to get back tonight, we better get started."

Marvel pressed the girl's hand. "Good bye, Kay," he said, and a moment later she was gone.

When the rest of the party had ridden away, Marvel and Butts found themselves alone at the corral.

The cowboy turned toward the city man. "We'll be leavin' right after dinner, Mister," he said. "The train's due about three."

"I'll be ready," said Marvel, and turned back toward the house, where Miss Pruell was sitting on the veranda, her embroidery lying in her lap, her eyes strained up the valley following the dust of the riders.

Marvel joined her. "Rather lonesome for you, Miss Pruell," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind it a bit," she replied. "Only that I

Oh, I don't mind it a bit," she replied, "only that I worry so much about Kay. I shall be glad when her father gets here, because I don't like the idea of her riding off alone with strange men."

"Mrs. Talbot and Dora are along."

"But Kay and Cory and Bud started fifteen minutes ahead of the others, and I don't think it's proper at all. I just can't get used to the ways of modern young people, Mr. Marvel. I'm too old-fashioned, and I always shall be."

"I guess I'm a little bit old-fashioned myself, Miss Pruell. I would rather have seen one of the other ladies go along with Kay."

"Do you think there is any danger?" she asked, perturbed.

"Oh, my no," he assured her. "It is you and I probably who are wrong."

"Well, I suppose so," she admitted. "That is what Kay is always telling me. It would just about kill her father and me if anything happened to Kay. She is all we have left. My sister, who was Kay's mother, died when Kay was a little girl; and I have always had the care of her; so that she is just as dear to me as though she were my own."

"I can see how that is," said Marvel. "You sure ought to be mighty proud of yourself, Miss Pruell," he added.

"Why?" she asked. "What do you mean?"

"Kay is such a fine girl," he explained.

"She is a fine girl," said Miss Pruell, "whether I had anything to do with making her one or not; but the trouble with Kay is she is too trusting. She thinks everybody is just as fine as she is. She is self reliant enough; but somehow she doesn't seem to be as sophisticated as some of the other girls, and I am always afraid that she is going to be imposed upon."

"Now no one would have to worry if Dora Crowell was riding without a chaperon," suggested Marvel, "and she's a mighty nice girl, too."

"Dora impresses one as being able to take care of herself," said Miss Pruell.

"Well, Kay can take care of herself, too," said Marvel. "Oh shucks, Miss Pruell, she'll be all right."

"Oh, I know it," admitted the woman, "but just the same I'd feel safer if you'd been along, Mr. Marvel."

He looked at her in surprise. "But I'm more of a stranger than Cory," he reminded her.

"I know what Kay thinks of you," she said. "We have both felt that she was so much safer when you were along-since what you did that day."

"I'm very glad to know that you have confidence in

"I'm very glad to know that you have confidence in me," said the man.

"Yes, we both have a lot of confidence in you, Mr. Marvel, especially Kay. She was all broken up this morning when she told me you were going away."

He made no reply; but he was thinking that the girl had very successfully hidden her regret from him; but then girls were funny. He had read enough about them in books to know that. Everyone said they were funny.

"I guess I won't ever understand them," he said.

"Who?" she asked.

"Did I say anything? I must have been thinking out loud." He was looking out across the ranch yard down the valley; but his thoughts were in the other direction, where a golden haired girl in overalls rode with a man he did not trust. "Here comes a car," he said. "You don't see many cars up here."

Miss Pruell looked up. "Why bless my heart," she exclaimed, "I believe that's Mr. White. Yes, that's Kay's father. I recognize his roadster."

The two sat watching the approaching car as it came swiftly up the rough road and, slowing down, turned into the ranch yard. Then Miss Pruell stood up and waved her hand, and as the car stopped before the house she went down the steps to greet a well built man of fifty with graying hair that accentuated the brown of his tanned face.

accentuated the bronze of his tanned face.

"Hello Abbie," he said.

"I am so glad you've come, John."

"Where is Kay?" he demanded.

"She's out for the day - gone on a paper chase." He had opened up the rumble seat and was getting out his bags.

"Can't I help you, sir?" asked Marvel, coming down the steps.

"John, this is Mr. Marvel," said Miss Pruell. "This is Kay's father, Mr. Marvel."

The two men shook hands; and in the brief keen scrutiny of the instant, each saw something in the other that he liked.

"Mr. Marvel saved Kay's life the other day, John."

"They are going to make a good story of that before they get through with it," said Marvel laughing; but he had to listen again to a detailed narration of the whole affair.

"I'm sorry that I can't tell you how I feel about this," said John White; "but until you are a father yourself you can't understand what I owe you."

After helping White in with his bags, Marvel left the two and strolled down to the stable, guessing

that they might probably have much of a personal nature to discuss; so that he did not see them again until dinner was served at noon.

During the conversation at the table, Marvel learned that John White had started in life as a cowpuncher, that he had become foreman of a big ranch in California and then a partner; and that with the accumulation of wealth and the growth of the community in which he lived, he had drifted into banking. It seemed almost like a fairy story to Marvel, and he wanted to ask a great many questions; but his natural reticence prevented, and presently the conversation drifted to other topics; and soon the meal was over and Butts was calling him from the veranda.

"You better shake a leg, Mister, if you're goin' along with me," he said.

"Just a moment, my man," replied Marvel; but he rose from the table. "I'll say goodbye before I leave," he said to Miss Pruell and White. "It will take a few minutes to get my baggage roped on to the buckboard."

When he reached the veranda, Butts met him with a surly scowl. "Give me a hand with my stuff, Butts," he said.

"Hustle it yourself," growled the cowpuncher. "I aint flunkyin' for no tenderfoot."

"Have it your own way" said Marvel. "I aint in any

Take it your own way," said Marvel. "I ain't in any hurry to leave; but I don't leave without my trunk, and I aint goin' to carry it alone. If Blaine finds me here when he gets back he's goin' to be peeved at you."

Butts hesitated for a moment, and then he growled something under his breath.

"Come on then," he said. "Where is it? I don't want to see you around here no longer than I have to."

Together they went to Bruce's room and carried his trunk and bag out to the buckboard; and while Butts was roping the baggage on to the vehicle, Marvel returned to the house and bid Miss Pruell and Mr. White goodbye.

"I hope I see you again some time, young man," said White, as they parted.

"You don't hope it half as much as I do," thought Marvel as he turned and left them.

"Well, are you about ready?" demanded Butts.

"Just as soon as I get Baldy," said Marvel.

"What you goin' to do with Baldy?" demanded the cowpuncher.

"I'm goin' to lead him down to the railroad."

"Who said so?"

"I do."

"You aint goin' to lead him behind this buckboard," said Butts.

"Then I stay right here. Take my trunk off."

"Well you got me again," said Butts, "but you're sure goin' to be sorry for it."

"Not if I know it," replied Marvel.

"Goodbye, Mr. Marvel," called Miss Pruell, who had come out onto the veranda. "I hope you have a pleasant trip."

"I'm expecting to," replied Bruce.

Butts drove down to the stable; and Marvel went in and led Baldy out, taking him up close to the side of the off horse.

"What you doin' there?" demanded Butts.

"I'm goin' to tie him up here where you can't get funny and lose him," replied Marvel.

"You know too damned much for a tenderfoot," said Butts.

"He'll travel better up here anyway," said Marvel, "besides removin' all temptation from your soul."

After he had tied Baldy's halter rope to the ring in the snaffle bit of the off horse. he came back and

the stable or of the old horse, he came back and climbed into the buckboard and Butts started the team toward town.

At first Baldy was inclined to make things awkward; and Butts indulged in much grumbling and profanity, but after awhile the horse settled down to the gait of his fellows and thereafter travelled easily.

From the ranch stable to the little town sprawling along the railroad, two and a half hours away, neither man spoke, except that at the end of the journey Marvel told Butts to leave him and his stuff off at the hotel; for the next eastbound train did not leave until early in the morning.

The westbound train on which Butts expected his passengers was late--how late the station agent could not tell. All he knew was that it was held up by a wrecked freight train, and that it might be several hours before the track was cleared.

Marvel got a room in the hotel and took Baldy to the livery stable.

The proprietor of the livery was a bleary eyed, red nosed individual, who appeared much interested in Marvel's clothes.

"I reckon you be one of Cory Blaine's dudes," he said.

"Do you?" inquired Marvel politely.

"Your horse?" asked the proprietor.

"Yes. You haven't got a saddle and bridle you want to sell, have you?"

"I've got an outfit I've been holdin' for a board bill for more'n a year now," replied the proprietor. He took the halter rope from Marvel and led Baldy into a stall.

"What you feedin'?" asked Marvel.

"I got some good alfalfa hay."

"Nothing else?" asked Bruce.

"What you want for this cayuse? T-bone steaks?"

"I seen some oat hay stacked in the shed when I come in," said Marvel. "Give him that."

"You're sure particular."

"Just like you would be with one of your horses," said Bruce. "I know a horseman when I see him, and I'll bet yours get nothing but the best."

The bleary eyed one swelled perceptibly. "You're dead right, young feller," he said.

"And where's your grain?" demanded Marvel.

"Grain?"

"Sure. You can't never make me think a man like

Sure. You can't never make me think a man like you don't grain his horses. Oh, I see. It's in that bin back there. You fork him in some of that oat hay, and I'll get the grain;" and he started toward the end of the barn where the grain bin stood.

The proprietor hesitated; then he shook his head and went outside to fork the hay into Baldy's manger. When he returned Bruce had already measured out a generous ration of oats for his horse.

"Now let me see that outfit," he said.

Ten minutes later he had purchased an old but serviceable saddle, to the pommel of which was tied a forty foot hemp rope, had also acquired a bridle of sorts, and was on his way back to his hotel room.

XIV--KIDNAPED

As CORY BLAINE, with Kay and Bud, rode away from the ranch house ahead of the others, they bore to the southwest through a low pass that took them out of the main valley in which the ranch lay.

At the horn of his saddle, Bud carried, a sack filled with paper cut into small pieces; and some of this he dropped occasionally as Blaine instructed him to do so.

"You might as well ride on ahead, Bud," said

Cory. "Follow that old, dry spring trail for about five miles and then cut across to the left, back into the valley. Drop a little paper when you enter a main trail; and then you don't have to drop no more, as long as the trail is plain, until you leave it. After you leave a trail, ride about fifty yards before you drop any more paper. That'll make 'em hunt around a bit to pick up your trail again. After you get into the valley, keep out of sight as much as possible. Use washes and high brush to hide yourself, and keep on up the valley quite a bit before you cross. I don't care if you go as far as Mill Creek. We're goin' to give 'em a ride today that they'll remember."

"If I go that roundabout way to Mill Creek," said

Bud, 'it'll be nigh on to forty miles before we get back to the ranch."

"I don't believe some of us can stand it," said Kay.

"They'll have somethin' to talk about for the rest of their lives," said Cory, "and that's what most of 'em are out here for. It won't kill 'em."

"Bert Adams won't never sit down again," said Bud.

"That's his funeral," said Blaine. "You mosey along now, Bud; and we'll follow. You got the best horse in the outfit, and there aint no use of our tryin' to keep up with you."

"All right," said Bud. "So long," and he rode away.

Blaine held his horse to a walk until Bud was out of sight. He did not talk to the girl, who followed behind him along the narrow trail, but presently she spoke to him.

"You're off the trail, Cory," she said. "This isn't the main trail, and Bud hasn't dropped any paper."

"Oh, that's all right," said Cory. "I know where Bud's ridin' and this is an easier way. It's a short cut."

"I don't see how it can be a short cut," said the girl, "when it's bearing off to the west, while Mill Creek is southeast of us."

"Well, it aint shorter in distance, Kay," he said; "but it's a whole lot easier, and we'll make better time. The trail Bud's on gets mighty rough a bit farther up, and we'll dodge all that and may even beat him into the valley."

They dropped down into a gully and crossed a low ridge, beyond which lay a barren and forbidding gulch, carved k from the red soil by the rains of ages.

It did not look like an easier way to Kay; but she had confidence in Blaine's knowledge of the country and was content to follow where he led.

A steep and precarious cattle trail led down into the bottom of the gulch, where they were entirely hidden from view in the winding bed of a dry wash.

"What a lonely place," said Kay.

Blaine made no reply. He was unusually quiet and preoccupied.

Despite herself, the girl felt nervous. She wished now that she had insisted upon continuing on with Bud; and then she noticed for the first time that Cory carried no gun, as was habitually his custom.

"You forgot your gun," she said.

"That's right," he replied, "I did. I was so busy this morning I must o' plumb forgot it."

"I don't like this place, Cory," she said after another silence. "I wish you'd take me out of it."

They were crossing the mouth of another deep wash that entered that in which they were riding. The sides of these washes were unusually perpendicular and sometimes ten or fifteen feet in height, forming narrow, tortuous corridors, their walls broken occasionally by well worn cattle trails that led down one bank and up the other.

Something attracted Kay's attention up the wash they were passing. "Cory!" she exclaimed in a startled whisper. "I saw a man up there. He had a handkerchief tied across his face."

Just ahead of them the wash turned abruptly to the left, and the girl had scarcely ceased speaking when a rider blocked their further progress. He, too, wore a bandana about the lower part of his face, hiding all but his eyes.

"Stick 'em up," he said.

Cory's hands went up; and at the same instant Kay wheeled Lightfoot in an effort to escape; for in that instant she sensed that she had been led into a trap.

Quick though her action was, it was too late, for as Lightfoot wheeled, the other rider spurred into the wash, blocking her escape.

"Set tight, Miss," he said, covering her with his
forty-five

"Climb down!" ordered the man confronting Blaine.

"What do you want?" asked Cory. "If it's money, take what you want. I aint armed."

"Shut up and climb down," growled the bandit.

Cory did as he was bid, and the man also dismounted and came toward him. "Turn around," he said, "and don't make no funny moves if you don't want to get kilt."

He took the riata from Blaine's saddle, had the man lower his arms behind his back and then secured his wrists there with one end of the rope. Looping the reins of Blaine's horse over the horn of his own saddle, he turned back up the wash leading his horse, while Blaine followed at the end of the rope, with Kay and her captor trailing in the rear.

Around the bend a cattle trail led up onto the bank, and here the party climbed out of the wash and halted beside a clump of high bushes. Here the man who had Cory in charge made the latter lie down and quickly bound his ankles, after which he removed Blaine's bandana from about his throat, twirled it into a cylinder, the center of which he made Blaine take in his mouth, after which he tied the ends tightly at the back of his neck, effectually gagging him. Then he tied the prostrate man's horse to the other side of the bush.

"I reckon they'll find you in a couple of days," he said.

In the meantime the other man had taken down Kay's halter rope and was holding it to prevent another attempt at escape.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"You're goin' along with us, Miss," said the man who had been tying up Cory. "As long as you don't get to actin' up, you won't get hurt." Then he mounted, and the three rode up the gulch toward the south.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when Bud rode into the ranch yard, unsaddled his pony, and turned it out to pasture. As he walked toward the bunk house, Miss Pruell called to him from the veranda, where she was sitting with John White.

"Where are the rest of them?" she asked, when he had come over.

"I guess they aint far behind," he said. "I seen 'em a couple of times."

"I thought Kay and Cory were with you," said Miss Pruell.

"They dropped behind the first thing this morning," said Bud, "and I haven't seen 'em since. I reckon they'll be in directly though."

A half hour later the other riders commenced to straggle in. Dora Crowell was first; and fifteen minutes later the Talbots appeared and joined them on the veranda.

Miss Pruell had introduced John White first to Dora and then to the Talbots; and of each he had inquired about Kay, but none of them had seen either her or Cory.

"Look there," exclaimed White, pointing up the valley. "Here comes a riderless horse."

"That is probably Adams'," said Benson Talbot. "The last time I saw him he looked like he'd a whole lot rather walk than ride."

Bud was standing at the foot of the steps and now he strained his eyes through the growing dusk. "That aint Adams' horse," he said. "That's Cory's. Somethin' must have happened."

With the exception of Miss Pruell and Birdie Talbot, they all went down to the corral to meet the horse as he came trotting in. The animal was dragging his halter rope, the loose end of which was knotted about a bit of broken brush wood.

"Cory had him tied and he busted loose," said Bud. "I reckon he's walkin' in and that Miss White is stayin' with him."

"Why didn't they continue on with you?"

demanding white.

"That's just what I'd like to know," said Bud. "I can't figure it out."

"Did the rest of you follow this man's trail all the way?" asked White, turning to Talbot.

"Yes," replied Talbot, "it was plainly marked; and I think we never got off of it once."

"Then if they weren't considerably off the trail you should have seen something of them," continued White. "There is something wrong here. It doesn't look good to me at all."

"It doesn't look good to me either, Mr. White," said Dora Crowell, "and there is something wrong."

"We should send out after them at once," continued White. "How many men have you here?" he turned to Bud.

"There's me and two other fellers," said Bud. "We'll start right out if you say so."

"I wish you would," replied White; "and you will be well rewarded if you find them."

"We'll have to catch up some fresh horses," said Bud. "We'll find them all right, Mr. White. Don't worry." He turned to the two men in the corral. "Get up the horses," he said, "and get saddled up. I want to get a snack of grub before I start. I aint had nothin' to eat all day."

couldn't eat all day.

When he had departed in the direction of the kitchen, Dora Crowell drew John White to one side. "I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily, Mr. White," she said; "but if I were you I wouldn't trust entirely to these men. There's a deputy sheriff down in town. I think you should telephone him to start a posse out after them."

"Do you think that it is as serious as that?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said; "but if you were not here, I should have done it myself."

"You must have some grounds for your suspicions," he said. "I wish that you would be frank with me."

"Blaine is in love with your daughter," said Dora; "and," she added, "I don't think that he is any too trustworthy."

"Does she care for him?" he asked.

"No, and that is where the danger lies."

"Where is the telephone?" asked White.

"In the office," replied Dora. "Come with me, and I'll show you where it is."

As the two returned to the ranch house, Bert Adams rode into the yard and up to the corral. He

was swaying in the saddle when his horse came to a stop. Painfully and laboriously, he dismounted; then he lay down in the dirt, while his horse walked on into the stable.

Bruce Marvel was sitting in the office of the hotel in the little cow town when the telephone bell rang. The proprietor was washing his face in a tin basin just outside the door. His hands and his hair and his eyes and his nose and his mouth were covered with lather. "Will you answer the danged thing for me, young feller?" he asked; and in compliance with the request Bruce crossed to the instrument.

"Hello!" he said, as he took down the receiver.

"Hello!" said a voice at the other end. "This is John White at the TF Ranch. I want to speak to the deputy sheriff."

"Wait a minute," said Bruce, and then turning to the proprietor "Here's a fellow wants to talk with the deputy sheriff," he said.

"He's out to his ranch, and he aint got no telephone. Take the message."

"I can't get hold of him now," said Marvel into the transmitter, "but if you'll give me your message I'll get it to him."

"My daughter and Cory Blaine are lost somewhere in the hills," said White. "They went out on a paper chase early this morning. Every one else is in but

them. Blaine's horse came in alone five minutes ago. I want the sheriff to form a posse and make a thorough search for them. I'll stand all the expenses and pay a reward in addition."

Marvel was almost stunned by the information, but his voice showed no indication of excitement as he answered. "One man will start right now, Mr. White," he said, "and the sheriff will be notified to follow with a posse. Good bye," and he hung up without waiting to hear more.

In a few brief words he explained the situation to the hotel proprietor. "Can you get word to the sheriff at once?" he asked.

"I'll have a man on the road in five minutes."

"Good. And now listen to me. Tell 'em never to mind huntin' the hills. Ride straight to Hi Bryam's shack at the head of Mill Creek canyon. If they don't find nuthin' there, tell 'em to keep on along the One Mile Creek trail to Kelly's place in Sonora."

"You seem to know a lot about this here country for a tenderfoot," commented the proprietor.

"Never mind what I know. Get busy," and, turning, he took the steps two at a time to his room on the second floor.

Quickly he stripped off his clothes, and opening his trunk dragged out well worn boots and spurs, overalls, flannel shirt, Stetson, chaps and bandana.

overalls, hammer shirt, Stetson, chaps and bandana. Quickly he donned them, and then strapped about his hips a cartridge belt that supported two old forty-fours in holsters as darkened and mellowed by age as were his chaps and his cartridge belt.

As he ran down the stairs, crossed the office and stepped out into the night, no one saw him, for the proprietor had gone to find a man to send after the sheriff. The train from the east was pulling into the station; and Butts was waiting for his passengers; so that he did not see Marvel as the latter hurried to the stable as Olga Gunderstrom alighted from the train.

No one was at the livery stable as Marvel entered and saddled and bridled Baldy, for the proprietor was eating his supper in his home across the street.

Earlier in the afternoon, while it was still light, Marvel had noticed a pile of empty gunny sacks on the floor beside the grain bin. Into one of these he dumped several measures of oats, tied the sack securely back of his saddle and a moment later rode out into the night toward the south.

XV--ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS

BUTTS' NONE too lovely disposition had been

badly strained by his enforced wait for the delayed train. There were urgent reasons why he should have been back at the ranch early; and now as he wrestled with two trunks and three suit cases in an endeavor to strap them all securely to the back of the buckboard, he inwardly cursed everything and everybody that came out of the East, and especially the supercilious young woman who spoke to him in the same tone of voice as she had addressed the colored porter as she tipped him at the Pullman steps. But at last he had everything tied on securely; and then he turned to the girl, "Get in, Miss," he said brusquely; and when she had seated herself beside him "You better hang on tight. We're goin' to travel."

Once across the railroad tracks he gave the bronchos a cut with the whip; and as they bounded forward, Olga Gunderstrom's head snapped back.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed. "Please be more careful, my man."

Butts gritted his teeth and struck the horses again.

"I shall report you for this," snapped the young lady.

"Report and be blowed," snapped Butts. "I'm sick of this job anyway. I'm fed upon dudes and dudesses."

A short distance out of town they passed a lone horseman who spurred his horse to one side of the

road as they dashed past. Out of the corner of his eye Butts saw the rider; but so quickly did he pass that he recognized nothing familiar in the figure, which is not surprising, though had he been able to note the horse more closely he would doubtless have found much that was familiar about him.

It was a dusty and angry young woman who alighted from the buckboard at the foot of the TF Ranch house steps. Dora Crowell recognized her immediately and ran down to greet her.

"Why, Olga Gunderstrom!" she cried. "Cory Blaine never told me you were coming today."

"Well, here I am," snapped Olga; "and it's no fault of this man here that I am here alive. I never saw such a surly, impudent person in my life. Where is Mr. Blaine? He ought to discharge him at once."

"Mr. Blaine is missing," said Dora. "We are afraid that something has happened to him and Miss White in the hills. Did you hear what I said, Butts?"

"Yes, I heard you, Miss," replied the man, who received the news without any show of excitement.

"Bud and the other two boys have gone out to search for them," continued Dora. "Don't you think you better go too, Butts?"

"That's what I'm aimin' on doin'," replied the man. "If there was anything here but dudes I could get started right away, but I've got to unload all this

junk and then put the team away."

"We'll attend to that," said John White. "I'll certainly be glad to have another man who knows the hills out looking for them."

As he came down the steps toward the buckboard, Benson Talbot arose. "I'll help you, Mr. White," he said.

"I'd like to," murmured Bert Adams weakly, "but I don't think I can get up."

"We can manage it all right, I guess," said White.

"Thanks!" mumbled Butts ungraciously, as he started for the corral.

The only horses up were the sorrel colt and the old horse that was used to drive in the saddle horses; and Butts, being for some reason, in a great hurry, saddled the former. He rode straight toward the west, crossed two ridges and dropped down into a dry wash.

After he reached the bottom of the wash, he commenced to whistle occasionally, a few bars from an old time air that had once been popular.

Presently, from the distance, it came down to him again like an echo. He urged the sorrel into a faster walk, and a few minutes later a voice hailed him.

"Hey, you!" it called. "I'm up here on the bank."

Butts found the trail that led up from the bottom of the wash, and a moment later he dismounted beside Cory Blaine.

"You long eared idiot!" exclaimed Blaine. "Did you figure I expected to be left here all the rest of my life? The next time I pick a man for a job like this, it won't be you."

"I couldn't help it," said Butts. "The train was late, held up by a wreck. I run the broncs all the way from the railroad and then started right out after you. I aint had nuthin' to eat, either."

"That's too bad about you," grumbled Blaine, as Butts fumbled with the knot of the rope that secured his ankles and wrists. "I've been lying here all day with nothing to eat and nothing to drink."

"What happened to your horse? They say he came in just before dark?"

"The damn fool got frightened at somethin' and pulled back 'till he busted the brush he was tied to; then he beat it."

"Everything work all right?" asked Butts.

"Sure, all except this. I sure didn't aim on lyin' here all day and half the night."

"You should have brung a bed," said Butts.

"Do you think that sorrel will carry double?" asked Blaine.

"I reckon he's gonna have to," said Butts, "for I sure aint goin' to walk."

"Maybe we'll both have to walk," said Blaine.

"We'll try it down in the bottom of the wash," said Butts. "If he started pitchin' up on the bank here he'd be sure to fallin'."

"Let me have him," said Blaine. "You can ride behind."

"I always get the worst of it," said the other.

Cory mounted and rode down into the wash, reining the sorrel close to a low spot along the bank, from which Butts lowered himself gingerly onto the animal's rump.

"I guess he aint goin' to do nuthin'," said Blaine.

"I hope not," said Butts.

"I suppose there is a lot of excitement at the ranch," said Blaine, as the sorrel walked off like an old family horse.

"I guess they is," said Butts. "I wasn't there long. Her father came today."

Blaine whistled. "Has he offered a reward?" he asked.

"He'll give a reward all right, but he didn't say how much."

"Well, it's goin' to be plenty," said Blaine,

"unless "

"Unless what?" asked Butts.

"When I pull this rescue stunt from Kelly's ranch, I won't want no reward or ransom money nor nuthin', if she'll marry me; for if I'm ever John White's son-in-law, I'll be sittin' pretty for the rest of my life."

"But how about the rest of us?" asked Butts. "Where do we come in? We aint goin' to be no son-in-laws, and we want our cut of the ransom."

"That's so," said Blaine, scratching his head. "Well, I reckon he'll have to pay the ransom; but he won't have to pay no reward."

"You be a regular hero and refuse to take it," said Butts. "That'll make a hit with him."

"But I still get my cut of the ransom," Blaine reminded him.

"I don't care what you get as long as I get mine," and then they rode on in silence for some time.

"I'd hate to trust my girl to that bunch," said Butts, "especially Hi Bryam."

"They know I'd kill 'em," said Blaine.

"Well, she's your girl," said Butts; "but I wouldn't trust Bryam, at least not way down in Mexico where he could make his getaway."

"I aint worryin' none," said Blaine, and then as though the subject bored him, "Did that Marvel fellow get away today?" he asked.

"Say, don't mention that son-of-a-gun's name to me. Every time I think of him I could chaw the head off a rattlesnake."

"There was somethin' fishy about him," said Blaine. "He sure had me worried. Did I ever tell you how he rid this colt?"

"I knew he took him when he went to look for them fool horse's teeth," said Butts.

"I was watchin' him when he rid away, and I seen this little son-of-a-gun start to pitch down there just before the road makes the big bend around the hill. He sure gave that dude the works, but it never seemed to faze him; and when he come in that night, sayin' he's been lost, he swore the colt never did a thing and was gentle as a kitten."

"I can't figure it out," said Butts. "Maybe it was just an accident, and then again maybe he kin ride, but he sure can't shoot; and he aint got real good sense, either--huntin' for horse's teeth."

"Did he ever find a tooth?" asked Blaine.

"He found a whole mouth full of 'em in that pinto o' yourn; but it stunk so that Bud said he lost interest, real sudden like, and wouldn't even look for no more."

"He sure was a damn fool," said Blaine, "throwin' my boot away. I think he done it apurpose."

"And shootin' a hole in his bedroll," scoffed Butts. "That dude sure was loco."

"I wish I was sure he was a dude," said Blaine.

"What do you think he was?" demanded Butts.

"I dunno," said Blaine; "but he sure was the funniest dude I ever seen, if he was a dude."

"Well, he's gone now. You won't never see him again."

"I hope not."

When Blaine and Butts rode into the yard at the home ranch they found a depressed and worried company gathered on the veranda of the big house.

Dora Crowell was the first to recognize him as the two rode up. "There's Cory now!" she exclaimed, and immediately the entire party came down the steps and surrounded him as he and Butts dismounted from the sorrel colt.

"What happened?" demanded John White. "Where is my daughter?"

"You are Mr. White?" asked Blaine; and without waiting for a reply, "Something terrible has happened, Mr. White," he said. "Two fellows stuck us up this morning. I was unarmed, and we didn't have a chance. I thought they just wanted money; so I didn't even try to make a fight, though it wouldn't have done no good if I had and maybe your daughter would have been shot during the rumpus. They bound and gagged me and then rode off with her. During the day I managed to work the gag out of my mouth, but I couldn't get my hands and feet loose."

"I found him tied up like a sack of barley over in Dry Spring Gulch," said Butts. "If he hadn't of got that gag out, I'd of rid right by him in the dark."

"Which way did they take her?" asked White.

"They went west over the ridge," said Blaine.

"I wish we had known that sooner," said White, "the sheriff was just here with a posse; and it might have helped him to know which way they went."

"Which way was he aimin' to look?" asked Blaine.

"He wouldn't tell me," said White. "He just said that he had a tip. They only stopped here long enough to see if we'd heard anything, and then they

enough to see if he could find anything and then they rode on."

"How did the sheriff hear of it?" asked Blaine.

"I telephoned to town just as soon as it was obvious that something must have happened to you and Kay," explained White.

Cory seemed thoughtful. "I wonder where he got his tip and what it is?"

Butts had departed, taking the sorrel colt to the stable. "Ask one of the boys to get Blue up for me, Butts," Blaine called after him.

"None of the boys are here," said Dora.

"They are all out looking for you and Kay."

"I'll get him up," said Butts.

"What are you going to do?" asked White.

"I'm goin' out to look for your daughter, Mr. White," replied Cory, "and I'll never come back until I find her."

"It will mean ten thousand dollars, Mr. Blaine, to you or any other man that brings her back alive," said White.

"I don't want no money, sir," Blaine assured him. "It means more to me than all the money in the world to get her back to you safe and sound. I feel

like it was all my fault that this happened."

"Don't take it too hard, Blaine," said White generously. "I don't see what you could have done to prevent it."

"I'm all broke up over it," said Blaine, "but by God, sir, I'll get her back; and if anything's happened to her, somebody's goin' to get kilt."

"Whoever they are," said White, "you may rest assured that they shall be brought to justice. I have already telegraphed to business associates in Mexico and to the sheriffs of adjoining counties to be on the lookout. If they get away, it will be a miracle."

For a moment Cory Blaine stood in thoughtful meditation.

"Perhaps that wasn't the right thing to do, Mr. White," he suggested. "Them sort of fellers is desperate. If they're surrounded they might make away with her in some lonely spot and bury her where she wouldn't never be found in a hundred years; then they could scatter, and even if some of 'em was caught, it would be hard to prove anything on 'em; for they was masked and I couldn't never identify 'em. If I was you I would telegraph all them people to lay off for awhile 'till I see what I can do. I know this country better than anyone, and if I can't find her nobody can."

"I'll think over what you have said," replied White

noncommittally.

"I reckon I'll go and get me something to eat," said Cory. "I aint eat since breakfast, and I may not get a chance to eat again for some time."

As he ran up the steps and entered the house, some of the party returned to the veranda; but John White detained Dora Crowell. "Don't you think now that you were mistaken about Blaine?" he asked. "He certainly had no part in the abduction, and it is evident that he is terribly cut up about it."

"Nevertheless, Mr. White, if I were you, I wouldn't call off those telegrams," said Dora. "If those men are so desperate, they are not going to let Cory Blaine take Kay away from them single-handed."

"I guess you are right at that," said White, "and it won't hurt to give him all the help that we can get for him, but still I can't help having confidence in him."

"I wish I could," said Dora.

Butts had gotten the horses up, and after considerable difficulty he managed to get ropes on two of them. These he had saddled and tied to the corral posts, and then he had gone to the bunk house.

Rummaging in the duffle bag that was tucked beneath his cot, he finally extracted a piece of note naner. The bunkhouse was dark. and no one had

paper. The characters were plain, and no one had seen him enter it from the veranda of the ranch house; nor did they see him emerge, but presently they saw him hurrying excitedly toward them.

"Look here," he cried as he reached the foot of the steps. "Here's a note from the kidnapers. It was stuck to the side of the bunkhouse door."

White took the slip of paper from him eagerly and, followed by the others, went into the ranch house where, by the light of the kerosene lamp, he deciphered the crude scrawl.

"Tell Mr. White," it read, "that if he wants to see his daughter alive again to have one hundred thousand dollars in twenty dollar bills ready one week from today at TF Ranch. He will get further instructions then how to deliver the money and get his girl. No funny business or we'll slit her throat."

There was no signature, and the characters were printed in an obvious effort to disguise the hand.

Cory Blaine had eaten, and as he joined them White handed him the note. "What do you think of it?" asked White, after Blaine had read it.

"Where did it come from?" demanded Blaine.

"I found it stickin' on the side of the bunk house beside the door," said Butts. "It sure gave me a shock when I read it."

"How could you read it?" asked Dora Crowell.

"There is no light at the bunkhouse."

Just for an instant Butts' jaw dropped. Perhaps no one noticed it, for he caught himself so quickly. "I seen the paper and I struck a match," he said.

"Oh!" was Dora's only comment.

"What would you advise, Blaine?" asked White.

"I might fail, Mr. White," replied Cory; "and after all the first thing we care about is getting Kay back, so maybe you better get the money in case I do fail."

"If you get in touch with them, Blaine, you may offer them the reward in my name," said White. "It is a great deal of money; but I think that I can raise it; and, of course, it is needless to say that I would make any sacrifice to get Kay back alive and well."

"I'll sure do all I can, Mr. White," said Cory.. "You may absolutely depend on me."

"I got two horses up, Cory," said Butts. "I'm goin' with you."

"You stay here," said Blaine. "I don't need no help, and if any other clew should turn up while I'm gone there ought to be someone here who knows the country and who can ride hard."

Butts said nothing, but he accompanied Blaine as he walked down to the stable for his horse. "One of

us has got to be here," said Cory. "If anything goes wrong and it aint safe for me to return, light a fire on the hill. I'll make a signal on Horsecamp Butte on my way back. You keep your eye peeled for it, and if I don't get no signal from you that night I'll know that everything is jake and I'll come on in."

"All right," said Butts, "but I hate to have to hang around here. I feel sort of nervous."

"Why?"

"That Crowell girl. She came near getting me. I sure do hate all them damn dudes."

"Keep your mouth shut, and you won't get in trouble," advised Blaine.

A minute later he had mounted and ridden off into the night.

XVI--AT BRYAM'S CABIN

BRUCE MARVEL conserved the energies of his horse, for he knew that he might have a gruelling grind ahead of him. His, he realized, was an endurance race in which speed might readily prove a liability rather than an asset; for were he to reach his goal with an exhausted mount, failure must be his only reward.

He believed that he was pitted against a hard and desperate gang and that even should he be so successful as to wrest Kay White from them, his ability to return her in safety to the TF Ranch might still depend solely upon what of stamina' and speed were left in Baldy.

He rode steadily until shortly after midnight when he dismounted and removing the horse's saddle and bridle permitted him to roll.

A short time previously he had watered him in Mill Creek; and now when he had stretched his muscles in a good roll and both of them had rested for five or ten minutes, Bruce gave the animal a small feed of oats; and after he had cleaned them up they were soon on the trail again.

All night he rode; and just before dawn he halted again for a brief rest, during which he removed the saddle and bridle from Baldy, rubbed down his back, turned the blanket and re-saddled immediately.

As he mounted he glanced back down the valley, his eyes immediately attracted by a twinkling light ten or a dozen miles away.

"That must be the sheriff and his posse," he thought, "for there wasn't nobody there when I came past."

And far up, toward the head of Mill Creek

Canyon, other eyes saw the light-the eyes of a watcher posted on the hillside above Hi Bryam's cabin. "Not so good," muttered the watcher, and, descending, he awakened two men who were sleeping outside the shack.

"What's wrong, Mart?" demanded one of them.

"They's a campfire this side of Mill Creek camp," replied the man. "I think we better be movin'. There shouldn't be nobody comin' this way that would build a campfire."

"Cory told us to rest here for one day."

"I don't care what he told us. I'm lookin' after my own neck, and I aint goin' to wait around here for no man."

"Me neither," said Bryam. "He sure give us credit for sense enough to get out of here if you fellows were followed, and it looks like you was, all right."

"It's all the same to me," said the third. "I aint hankerin' to have no one see me with this girl here, whether they're followin' us or not."

"He was just figurin' on givin' the girl a rest, thinkin' she couldn't stand so much ridin'," said the first speaker.

"She's had five hours rest now," said Bryam, "and that's all she's goin' to get for awhile. You and Mart

get saddled up, while I rustle some grub. We got plenty time to eat and get a good start, even if they start now, which like as not they won't."

"Probably they'll be waitin' till mornin'," said Eddie, "thinkin' they could pick up our trail better then."

"That's sure a long way off," said Mart. "I don't see how you seen it in the first place, Eddie;" and, in truth, the distant campfire was little more than a glowing speck in the far distance. Only the keenest eyes could have detected it at all and even to such it did not burn steadily, but twinkled like a distant star of lesser magnitude.

"Well, you fellers get busy," said Bryam. "I'll wake the girl and get the grub."

"Better let her sleep as long as we can," said Eddie..

"The hell with her," said Bryam. "She aint no better than we are."

"She's a girl," said Eddie, "and we ought to treat her as decent as we can."

"Don't be so soft," snapped Bryam.

"I aint soft," said Eddie, "but I aint stuck on this business. Kidnapin' women aint never been my particular line of business."

"Quit beefin'," said Mart, "and come on;" and

Eddie followed on into the darkness in search of the hobbled horses.

Bryam went to the cabin door and opened it. "Say, you!" he called. "Wake up. We're leavin'."

Wake up! Kay White had been sitting wide eyed through the long hours since they had brought her to Bryam's shack. She could scarcely have forced herself to lie down upon the filthy thing that Bryam called a bed, but she knew that even had she done so, she could not have slept. She felt physical fatigue; but her mind was too awake, too active to entertain any thoughts of sleep.

"Dya hear me?" demanded Bryam.

"I heard you," replied the girl. "I am ready."

"I'm fixin' some grub," said Bryam. "When it's ready, I'll call you."

The girl, sitting in the rickety chair before the rough table, made no reply, as her thoughts, bridging the interruption, attacked once more the tangled skein they sought to unravel. She had been able only to guess at the motive for her abduction, since her captors would tell her nothing; but the logical surmise was that she would be held for ransom.

In the first instant of her capture she had sensed intuitively that Cory Blaine had deliberately led her into the trap; but when she had seen how roughly they had treated him and how heartlessly they had

left him bound and gagged in the desolate gulch, that theory had been somewhat shaken. Then, again and again, the idea had forced itself upon her that perhaps in some way Bruce Marvel was responsible. There had been something mysterious about him. Both she and Dora Crowell had sensed that. He certainly was not what he had tried to lead them to believe he was, and this fact furnished a substantial groundwork for her suspicion.

Yet always she put the thought aside, refusing to accept it; and when the two men had brought her to Hi Bryam's cabin, her suspicion settled once more upon Cory Blaine; yet why had Marvel chosen to leave the ranch at this particular time? That question troubled her, for she knew that he had been planning to remain longer. Could it be that the paper chase had given him the opportunity for which he had been waiting. She remembered his refusal to accompany the party to Crater Mountain and that this refusal had followed the announcement that the paper chase would take place the following day and what a silly excuse he had given for remaining at the ranch—hunting horse's teeth indeed! Added to all this was the fact that he had quickly given up his search for teeth and had absented himself alone from the ranch for hours; but further than that she could never pursue this line of thought, since it invariably stopped before the blank wall of unreasoning belief in the integrity of the man.

"He could not have done it," she murmured. She sprang to her feet almost defiantly and raised her

eyes to the black shadows among the rafters. "He did not do it," she said aloud.

"What's that?" asked Bryam from beyond the doorway.

She walked out to where the man stood beside the fire. "Cory Blaine did this," she said, "and you may tell him for me that there are two men in the world, one of whom will kill him for it the one who catches him first."

"Blaine had nothing to do with it," snapped Bryam. "Here's the grub and you better eat. You got a long ride ahead of you."

In silence she ate the rough fare, for she knew that she must maintain her strength; and the three men with her ate, too, in silence, while the hounds nosed among them, whining for scraps.

"What you goin' to do with the pooches, Hi?" asked Mart, after he had finished eating.

"Leave 'em here," replied Bryam. "They can rustle plenty grub in the hills."

"Won't they follow us?" asked Eddie.

"Not if I tell 'em to stay here," replied Bryam.

"I've been thinkin'," said Mart suddenly.

"That aint one of the things that nobody aint expectin' of you," said Bryam.

"You listen," said the other.

"I'm listenin'."

"That campfire down there has upset all our plans. Everybody knows you're batchin' up here, huntin' lion. If they find you gone and your dogs here, that'll look funny to 'em."

"Well, what's to be done about it?"

"You ought to stay here," continued Mart. "It will be a whole lot safer for you and for us, too."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Bryam.

"If they find you here they aint goin' to suspicion you, are they?"

"No. That's right, too."

"And if you're here when they come, you can send them off on a wrong trail after us."

"That's where your head aint no good," said Bryam. "If you come here with the girl, then I must have known somethin' about it; and if you didn't come here, how could I tell 'em what trail you went on?"

"You don't have to tell 'em the girl was here. Tell 'em two fellers you never seen before rid in over the ridge from the east, bummed some grub and asked

the trail to Deming; then say that they rid back up over the ridge to the east."

"That would be a hell of a trail to Deming," said Bryam.

"Sure it would," agreed Mart; "but don't you see that fellers stealin' the girl would just naturally beat it for the roughest country they could find?"

"That aint such a bad scheme," said Eddie.

"It's a durn good one," admitted Bryam.

"We'll ride up the canyon a bit, then cut across to the west ridge and follow that to the One Mile Creek Trail. You can easy brush out our trail above camp for a ways, then ride your horse up the east trail to the summit, come down somewhere else and ride him up again, pickin' another new place to come down into camp. That'll give a fresh horse trail to the east summit, and they aint goin' to stop to try and figure out whether there were two horses or three went up, even if they could tell, which probably they couldn't."

"You aint such a fool as you look," admitted Bryam grudgingly.

"Well, let's get started," said Eddie. "Come on, Miss, here's your horse."

"May I go back into the cabin a moment?" asked Kay. "I left my handkerchief there I think."

"Well hurry up," said Bryam.

She ran quickly into the cabin, but she did not search for any handkerchief. Instead she gathered up a deck of greasy playing cards that had been lying on the table and slipped them into the pocket of her leather coat. A moment later she was outside again and had mounted.

Mart led the way up the canyon, his horse following the trail in the darkness. Directly behind him rode Kay, and following her was Eddie. They had temporarily, at least, discarded their original plan of leading Kay's horse, for it was obvious that this would have been most difficult upon the steep, rough trail, zig-zagging up the canyonside to the summit of the western ridge. They had warned her against the danger of attempting to escape, since a single misstep from the trail might result in injury or death to her; and she knew that they were right.

In the darkness Kay took one of the playing cards from her pocket and tied her handkerchief tightly about it. When she saw Mart turn abruptly from the trail toward the ridge at their right, she dropped the handkerchief and the card to the ground, knowing there was no likelihood that he would perceive what she had done. Then she took another card from her pocket and tore it in two, dropping the halves at intervals; and so she marked their way until they entered the main trail leading up the hillside.

Perhaps no one would come that way to see

Perhaps he or she would come that way to see. Perhaps, if they did, they might not interpret the significance of the signs that she had left; but if someone did chance to see and guess the truth, she knew that she had plainly blazed for such the trail of her abductors onward from Bryan's shack.

The trail, bad enough in the daytime, seemed infinitely worse at night, yet they reached the summit of the ridge in safety and were moving southward on more level ground.

With dogged determination, Bruce Marvel followed the trail upward into Mill Creek Canyon. Bald v had responded nobly to the call upon him; but as the man had done all that he could to conserve his horse's strength, the animal had not, as yet, shown indications of fatigue.

"Baldy, I'm banking on you," said the man in low tones. "You saved her once and you're going to again. If we find her at Bryan's, it won't be long now; but if they've left and hit the trail for Kelly's in Sonora, you and I got some ride cut out for us; but I reckon we can catch 'em, Baldy.

I seen their horses yesterday, and they aint one-two with you. No, sir, old man, beside you they is just plain scrubs."

Once again he lapsed into his usual state of silence, but his mind was active with plans and memories.

He recalled, as he often did, Kay's tone of disgust

when she had reproached him for having thrown Blaine's boot into the fire. She had never spoken of it again, but he knew that she had not forgotten it and that by that much he had lowered himself in her estimation. He admired her for not reverting to it again -another might have reminded him of it. Yes, she was a brick all right.

XVII--TORN PLAYING CARDS

BEHIND HIM, several hours now, rode the posse, headed by the deputy sheriff of Porico County; and behind the posse came Cory Blaine. He would have been glad to have passed them so that he might reach Bryan's shack first; but there seemed little likelihood that he would be able to do so; for they were maintaining a good gait and riding steadily, while a detour from the trail that would permit him to pass them unseen would necessitate negotiating rough terrain which could not but retard his own speed.

He cursed the luck that had brought John White to the ranch one day too soon and thus upset all his well laid plans, for he believed that if White had not been there Butts would have been able to have delayed the formation of a searching party until the following day at least.

And then, at last, in his darkest hour, fortune

smiled upon him, for the posse halted to rest the horses.

Blaine did not know this until, unexpectedly, he saw a tiny fire glowing ahead of him, perhaps a half mile away. He watched it grow as he drew nearer until at last its leaping flame revealed the figures of men gathered about it.

"That," he said, "is what I call luck."

He reined his horse to the left, out of the trail, with the intention of passing around the posse, coming into the main trail again ahead of them.

Low hills, cut with washes, came close to Mill Creek at this point; and it was necessary for Blaine's horse to pick his way carefully through the darkness. Perhaps a better horseman, or a more considerate man, would have dismounted and led the animal; but Blaine, like many of his kind, was only a rider and no horseman; nor was he instinctively considerate of anything other than his own interests. He was tired, and so it pleased him to ride; and his horse, willing and obedient, did its best, though twice it nearly fell.

The two had covered half the distance of the detour and were opposite the camp of the posse when suddenly the bank of a dry wash gave way, precipitating horse and rider to the bottom. Fortunately for Blaine, he fell clear of the animal.

Scrambling to his feet, Cory approached his

mount. Seizing the reins, he urged it up and it tried to respond to his command, but only fell back upon its side with a groan; then he cursed it beneath his breath and kicked it, and once again the creature struggled to arise. It almost succeeded this time and before it sank to earth again, the pale starlight had revealed to the man the hopelessness of its condition--a leg was broken.

For a moment Blaine stood in dumb, futile rage beside the beast; then, to his credit, he did the one merciful thing that he could do. Drawing his revolver, he shot the animal through the brain--a shot that brought every member of the posse to alert attention.

Far away, along the trail, the shot sounded faintly in the ears of a solitary horseman. He reined in and sat motionless for a full minute, listening; then he rode on, puzzled but not diverted from his course.

"Now what the hell was that?" exclaimed the deputy sheriff, who, with the other members of his posse, stepped quickly away from the fire at the sound of the shot.

"Hey, some of you fellers!" came a voice out of the darkness. "Come up here and give me a lift."

"Who are you?" demanded the deputy.

"Cory Blaine," came the reply.

The entire posse moved in the direction of Blaine.

"What's the matter?" demanded one of them, after they had located the man in the bottom of the dry wash.

"I had to shoot my horse," replied Blaine. "He busted a leg. I tried to get my saddle off him, but the cinch ring caught somewhere underneath him. I need someone to give me a hand."

"What you doin' up here anyway?" demanded the deputy sheriff.

"I was followin' you fellers, and I guess I got off the trail," replied Blaine. "It was sure dumb." They helped him with his saddle, and he walked back to camp with it and his bridle.

"Will one of you fellers let me have a horse?" asked Blaine. The question apparently aroused no enthusiasm. "I got to get on," he said. "You see I feel more or less responsible for that girl."

"I don't reckon none of the boys want to hoof it back to town," said the deputy sheriff.

"I'll pay him a good price for his horse, if he will," insisted Blaine, "and he can pick up a fresh one at the ranch."

"I reckon," said the deputy sheriff, after another long silence, "that you better ride along double with one of us. Come mornin' we'll like as not run on to some range horses."

"I'll allow that's about the best we can do," said another; and so it was that when the posse took up the march again, following a considerable rest, Cory Blaine rode behind one of the men, while another packed his saddle, and a third carried his bridle.

Shortly after dawn, true to the deputy's prophecy, they sighted a bunch of range horses. Three of the men rode out from the posse and drove them in and shortly thereafter one of them had been roped and saddled; and once again, to his relief, Blaine had a mount.

To leave them and ride ahead now was impossible, for they were pushing their horses to the utmost; and though the animal he rode was fresh and could have outdistanced the others, perhaps, the deputy sheriff would not permit him to ride ahead of the posse, though his reasons therefore, prompted perhaps more by egotism than necessity, were vague.

Though he chafed beneath the authority of the officer, Blaine might still console himself with the knowledge that the trail up Mill Creek Canyon was often in plain sight from Bryam's shack, thus giving him the hope, that amounted almost to assurance, that the party there would see the posse in ample time to permit them to make good their escape.

Far up toward the head of Mill Creek Canyon, Hi Bryam sat in the doorway of his shack smoking his pipe. Far below him he saw the canyon spread out

into a valley, through which Mill Creek wound, its tortuous course marked by the green of the verdure along its banks, standing out in bold relief against the purple and brown of the surrounding landscape. Little specks moved here and there upon the face of the valley. Grazing cattle and horses they were, and to the man they were just a part of the landscape, attracting no particular attention. But presently another speck appeared; and though to an unpracticed eye it might have appeared no different from the others, it brought Bryam to immediate and alert attention.

"That would be Blaine," he soliloquized. "I sorta got an idear he bit off more'n he can chew this time. Somehow I wish I hadn't had nuthin' to do with it. Folks is funny that way. You can steal somebody's money and nobody seems to get terribly excited about it, except the feller whose money it was. But steal a woman or a kid and by God it's everybody's business, and they all want to kill you."

He sat for a long time watching the approaching horseman; and then he arose and went inside the cabin and returned with his rifle, an old Springfield thirty-thirty.

He sat down again with the weapon lying loosely across his knees, his eyes steadily upon the man and the horse drawing constantly nearer.

After awhile he arose again. "That don't look like Cory," he muttered. "I reckon I'd better hide out 'till I see who it is." He walked slowly toward a clump

I see who it is. He walked slowly toward a clump of trees, growing part way up on the side of the canyon, perhaps two hundred feet from the shack. His four hounds, lazing about near him, rose to follow. "Go on back, you," he said, and, obediently, they did as they were bid.

Bruce Marvel rode openly up to Bryan's shack, for he knew that it was useless to attempt to approach unseen. If anyone were there, eyes, he knew, had been watching him for many minutes; and he knew, too, that the best way to disarm suspicion was to avoid suspicious action. To ride up boldly would disarm them. He thought that Kay White was there; but he did not expect to see her, nor did he expect to take her away single-handed from three men. He did not believe that she was in any immediate danger, even though he still thought that Cory Blaine was with her; for he believed that Blaine's prime object was to collect a ransom and that he would not harm her as long as there was any hope of that.

On the way up he had made his plans very carefully. He had decided that he would tell whoever was there that Kay was lost and that he was looking for her. Bryan, or whoever else was there, would tell him, of course, that they knew nothing about it, that they had not seen her. Then he would ride on; but instead of following directly on the trail to Sonora, he would ride up to the ridge on the east, leading them to believe that he was hopelessly off the trail.

This ridge, he knew, joined the other at the point where Dora Crowell had shot the lion and from that point he foresaw little difficulty in finding the One Mile Creek Trail, where he purposed lying in wait for Kay and her abductors, for, long before, he had connected up the conversation that he had overheard in Bryam's shack the last night of the lion hunt, which fitted in so perfectly with all that had since transpired that he was now confident that it had related to the plan for Kay's abduction.

As Marvel drew up before the shack he called aloud to attract attention. The dogs had already come to meet him, but outside of this there were no signs of life about the place.

"I reckon they seen me and they all lit out," thought Marvel.

He dismounted; and as the dogs came to nose him, he petted the nearer of them, but all the while his eyes were on the ground; and from the trees on the hillside Bryam watched him, his vision interfered with by the foliage through which he looked.

"There's somethin' familiar about that son-of-a-gun," mused the watcher, "but I'll be danged if I can place him." Yet he hesitated to come out of hiding, and stood in silence while Bruce remounted and rode on up the canyon.

In the trampled earth in front of the cabin he had read a story that told him much. He had seen the

fresh prints of horses hoofs and of the boots of men and among them the imprint of a small, high-heeled boot; and he knew that he was upon the right trail.

Just above the cabin, along the fresh trail of three horses, he came to a point where the spoor suddenly vanished. To one side lay a leafy branch freshly torn from a tree. The leaves at its lower end were frayed and dust covered; a shadow of a smile touched Marvel's lips.

"Punk work," he thought, as he rode on up the trail from which Bryam had brushed the signs of the passing of the three horsemen.

For a hundred feet the trail had been brushed clean of hoof prints and then they commenced again, as Marvel had known that they would. He rode on for another hundred yards until his eyes were attracted by something lying in the trail. Reining Baldy in, he leaned from his saddle and picked the thing up--a dainty handkerchief tied about a greasy playing card. For an instant he gazed at the tiny bit of linen; then, almost reverently, he tucked it inside his shirt. "Poor little kid," he murmured. "I wonder if you thought of me when you dropped this," and then he shook his head; "but, of course, you didn't for you don't know how much I love you."

At the point where the handkerchief and the card had been dropped, Marvel saw that the horsemen had turned abruptly to the right; and following their trail he came presently upon half of a torn playing card. "Paper chasin' has its advantages," he

card. Paper crasin has its advantages, he soliloquized. "It learns people tricks they might not have thought of." But here he did not need the evidence of the card.

The spoor lay plain before him, leading diagonally up the side of the ridge, back in the direction of the cabin.

With knitted brows, Bryam watched the rider, and now for the first time he took particular note of the horse. "Hell!" he muttered under his breath. "That's that Baldy horse that the dude rode."

The horse and rider were now in plain sight upon the flank of the ridge; and something in the way the man sat his horse, in the way he carried his shoulders seemed familiar to Bryan; and then, at last, he recognized him. "I'm a son-of-a-gun," he ejaculated, "if it aint that nosey dude."

Bryam was worried. He was no intellectual giant, but he had brains enough to see that Marvel was upon the trail of the girl and her abductors and to realize that the man knew that he was on the right trail. Here was disaster. Here was the end of his dream of affluence, to his share of the ransom money; and here, too, was a man who might definitely link him to the crime.

Bryam stepped from behind the trees that had concealed him, and as he did so he cocked his rifle. Throwing it to his shoulder, he took deliberate aim, while Marvel, guiding Baldy along the steep hillside,

was concentrating his attention upon the spoor that he was following.

Bryam squeezed the trigger. A spurt of dust rose on the hillside on a level with Marvel's head; and with the simultaneous crack of the rifle, the man was electrified into instant action.

Almost as though he had been actuated by the same mechanism that released the hammer on Bryan's rifle, Marvel wheeled in his saddle, a forty-four ready in his hand.

Bryam was an excellent shot and so sure of himself that he could not have conceived that he might miss such an easy target; and so he had lowered his rifle after the first shot, certain of the result. Perhaps the clean miss disconcerted him, for he hesitated just an instant before he threw his rifle to his shoulder again for a second shot--a second shot that was never fired; for before he could align his sights, Marvel's old forty-four had spoken and Bryam, clutching at his breast, pitched forward upon his face.

For a moment Marvel sat watching his man to make sure that he was harmless; and then he reined on up the side of the ridge, turning constantly in the saddle to watch Bryam.

"He aint dead," he muttered, "but he sure is too sick to do any shootin'."

It was a hard pull to the summit, and he rested Baldv twice: but at last he rode into the more level

trail along the top of the ridge and here another fragment of a playing card marked the way. At intervals he continued to find them; and always they brought a strange lump into his throat--these inarticulate appeals for help that the girl had left behind her.

"She's game," he murmured. "She sure is game, and she aint lost her head either."

He tried to figure how far ahead of him his quarry was, and from the signs along the trail he judged that it could not be more than five hours. His greatest fear and his greatest hope lay in Baldy. Their horses must have rested at Bryam's for several hours, but Baldy had had but two or three brief rests since the previous evening; yet he showed only the slightest indications of fatigue.

"I thought Bull's Eye was some horse, old boy," murmured Marvel, "but I guess you've got him faded, though," he added meditatively, "of course Bull's Eye never had nuthin' so important as this to travel for."

XVIII--ON THE TRAIL

MARVEL WAS far on the trail toward the south when the deputy sheriff and his posse rode up to Bryam's shack. The deputy was in the lead and the

first thing that attracted his attention was four hounds that rose bristling and growling from about the body of a man a short distance up the side of the canyon to the left of the shack.

Riding quickly over to the prostrate man the deputy dismounted, while the hounds withdrew a short distance watching him suspiciously. He turned Bryam over on his back and saw that he still lived, though his shirt and the ground beneath him were soaked with blood.

The wounded man opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the deputy. Feebly he raised his hand and tried to point toward the east. "They," he gasped--"they headed for Deming over the east ridge."

Cory Blaine, who had been riding at the rear of the posse, rode up now and dismounted.

"Who shot you?" demanded the deputy.

With an effort that seemed to require all his remaining strength, Bryam answered, "That damned dude, Marvel." Then he saw Cory and beckoned to him to lean closer. "Send 'em away," he said. "I want to speak to you alone."

The deputy sheriff heard, but he hesitated.

"Let him speak to me alone," said Blaine. "I don't know what he wants, but I reckon it's about his family."

Withdrawing, the deputy motioned the other men away; and Cory knelt close and bent his ear close to Bryam's lips. "What is it, Hi?" he asked.

Bryam struggled and gasped. "He-," blood rushed from between his lips. He coughed and there was a rattling in his throat as he tried to speak again; then he sagged limply to the ground.

For a moment, squatting on his heels, Blaine looked at him; then he rose and turned toward the deputy. "He's done," he said.

"What did he tell you?" asked the officer, coming forward.

"He never got a chance to tell me nuthin'," said Cory. "He just died."

"'Who's this guy Marvel he was tellin' about?" asked the deputy.

"He's the feller who rustled the girl," said Blaine.

"What makes you think that?" asked the officer.

"He was a guest up at my place and he got stuck on her. It got so bad that I kicked him out yesterday; but he must have had everything arranged, for he held me and the girl up and took her away from me. He knows her old man is rich and he's lookin' for the ransom. He can't be very far ahead of us because Brvam aint been shot long.

The trail's hot now and you ought to pick him up before dark."

"Hell!" ejaculated the deputy. "There aint no trail over this here east ridge to Deming. That's the worst damn country anywhere about."

"So much the easier to get 'em," replied Blaine. "There's three of 'em; and they aint goin' to travel very fast--the girl can't stand it. If you start right now you ought to overhaul 'em before dark."

"There aint much use," said the deputy, "but we'll try it."

"I'll stay here and bury Hi," said Blaine, "and then I'll follow along and catch up with you."

"Come on, boys," called the deputy. "Water your horses and we'll get goin'."

As Cory Blaine watched the posse zig-zagging up the steep trail toward the summit of the east ridge, he was unquestionably worried. Uppermost in his mind was the question as to what Bruce Marvel had been doing here at Bryam's camp on the trail of Eddie and Mart. Who was the man? How had he got a start on all of them and what had led up to the gunfight between him and Bryam? As he tried to visualize all that had happened and the tragedy that had been enacted here at the head of Mill Creek Canyon, he reached the conclusion, from what Bryam had told the deputy sheriff, that his confederate had been successful in misdirecting

concederate had been successful in misdirecting Marvel onto the east trail; and by sending the sheriff and the posse after him, Bryam had given Eddie and Mart ample time in which to make good their escape into Sonora.

"Things aint turnin' out so bad after all," soliloquized Blaine. "This is just the break that I've been lookin' for."

He watched the riders picking their way up toward the summit of the ridge, but he did not move until the last of them had disappeared beyond the crest; then he swung quickly into his saddle and spurred up the trail toward the summit of the west ridge, leaving Hi Bryam lying where he died.

The sun was sinking in the west as Bruce Marvel started the descent upon the south side of the range. Below him lay a broad, desolate valley, and in the distance another range of mountains beyond which lay Mexico.

Level as a billiard table appeared the wide expanse of sage-dotted plain below him, but he well knew that it was a rough and rugged terrain cut by many washes. The trail that he was following descended along the summit of a hogback toward the distant valley. He paused for an instant upon this lofty shoulder of the range, his eyes searching far ahead in the hope that they might find a trace of the three riders who had preceded him. In the distance the outlines of another range of mountains lay purple against the sky, a low saddle marking the pass

through which he knew the trail led onward into Sonora.

Far away he thought he discerned an indication of dust along the trail that the quarry would be following, and as he moved forward again his eyes dropped to a scrap of pasteboard lying on the ground ahead of him. It was half of a queen of hearts. Leaning from the saddle, he picked it up and tucked it in a pocket of his shirt. "Almost like gettin' a message from her," he soliloquized. "The queen of hearts--that would be a love letter. Shucks I I'm gettin' foolish in the head."

He rode on down an easy declivity, and twice again he thought he saw dust across the valley. Occasionally a fragment of a playing card appeared in the trail and it seemed to the lonely rider almost like talking to the girl who had dropped them.

Night was falling as he wound down the trail along the lower slopes of the mountains. His greatest immediate concern now was for Baldy. He had watered the horse in Mill Creek just above Bryam's cabin, but he had seen no signs of water out across the desolate, barren valley that he was entering; and Baldy had been traveling now for almost twenty hours with only a few brief rests. There was still a little grain left in the gunny sack at the cantle of his saddle, and once again he halted to rest and feed his mount and turn his blanket.

As yet the man himself felt neither hunger nor

fatigue, and he knew that were it not for the shortage of water, both he and the horse could go on for many hours longer.

In the mountains across the valley there was water; and he determined to push on all night, if necessary, to reach it before the heat of a new day beat down upon them, taking its toll of moisture from their bodies.

While Baldy ate, Marvel examined the animal's feet and rubbed his legs; then he lay down upon his back for a few minutes, seeking the refreshing rest of absolute relaxation.

"Everything was working out so pretty, Baldy. It's too bad this had to happen," he said. "Another day or two at the most and it never could have happened; but me and you will straighten it out yet, old man." Baldy looked up from his oats and gazed reflectively at the man. "I used to think Bull's Eye was the best horse in the world," said Marvel, "but I reckon he'll have to take his hat off to you after this trip. Of course, he never had no such chance as you. You got the break, Baldy. I guess no other horse in the world ever had such a break. You're goin' to be a regular hero, Baldy -packin' me all them miles to save the sweetest thing the sun ever shone on."

It never occurred to Marvel that he might fail, so sure was he of his horse and himself. It was not egotism, but absolute self-confidence, coupled with the knowledge that he must not fail which gave him

the knowledge that he must not fail, which gave him this assurance.

"Well," he said presently, rising to his feet, "I reckon we'd better be hittin' the trail. We've loafed long enough."

He laid the blanket upon the horse's back, carefully smoothing out the wrinkles in the cloth; and then he lifted the heavy saddle from the ground. "Here's where one o' them postage stamps would come in handy," he remarked. "There really aint no sense in a horse packin' all this weight, which aint no use in a case like this."

Baldy appeared not even mildly interested in the relative merits of stock and English saddles. He grunted to the tightening of the forward cinch, and when he felt the rear cinch touch his belly he flattened his ears and reached back in that peculiar gesture of viciousness with which most horses indicate their disapproval of cinches in general and rear cinches in particular.

The trail lay dimly visible before him as Marvel turned Baldy's nose again toward the south; and presently it dropped into the mouth of a wide canyon, which it followed downward for a couple of miles. Crossing the canyon, which here turned toward the right, it rose abruptly again to higher ground.

Before the rider there lay once more the wide expanse of valley that now was but a black void,

rimmed upon the south by the black outlines of the mountains, with the low saddle in the distance the only landmark to point the way.

"It's just like a great big black curtain turned upside down," mused Marvel. "It hides everything and makes a fellow wonder what's behind it. She's out there in it somewhere--I wish I knew just where. She don't guess that I'm here; and I reckon it wouldn't make any more difference to her if she did than as if it was Bud or some other fellow; but it means a lot to me--it means everything. I "

His soliloquy came to an abrupt stop, as far away in the distance a point of light shone unexpectedly and mysteriously against the black pall.

"That sure was an answer all right," he said, "jumpin' up like that right when I was wishin' I knew where she was. They sure must be crazy to light a fire now, unless they think they got such a start that no one can catch up to 'em anyway."

He was moving on again now and at the same time endeavoring to restrain himself from urging Baldy to a faster gait; but his better judgment prevailed, and he saved his horse at the expense of his own nerves, which chafed at the slow progress toward the goal which seemed now in sight.

For a great deal of the time the light was hidden when the trail dropped down onto lower ground and always then he feared that he might not see it again; but at intervals his view of it recurred and

always it grew larger as he approached it until at last, just before the first streak of dawn had lighted the eastern sky, he topped a little rise of ground to see the fire in plain sight a few hundred yards away. It was burning low now - mostly a mass of glowing embers--and he could distinguish nothing in its vicinity.

He reined in his horse and dismounted quietly, praying that if this were indeed the camp he sought, the horses that he knew must be staked or hobbled nearby would not discover Baldy's presence and nicker a revealing welcome.

He led Baldy back along the trail to lower ground where the horse would be out of sight of the occupants of the camp, and tying him to a low bush, Marvel returned in the direction of the campfire. As he approached the higher ground from which it was visible, he dropped to his hands and knees and taking advantage of the bushes which dotted the ground, he crawled slowly forward. The stars had faded from the eastern sky, and the growing light of a new dawn was showing above the horizon.

Carefully the man crept forward. He could not afford to take the chance of premature discovery, for he was not sure just how many men he would have to face. He did not believe that Cory Blaine had been with the party at Bryan's shack, for he had seen the man ride out of camp that morning on a horse called Pudding Foot, which was remarkable for the roundness and size of his hoofs. The prints

of Pudding Foot's feet he would have recognized, and he had seen no sign of them anywhere along the trail, but he did believe it possible that Blaine might have joined them later by another trail. So it was possible that he might have three desperate men to contend with instead of two; and then again there was the possibility that he would find no one about the campfire, at which they may have cooked some food and ridden on. With that thought came the first intimation of the nervous tension under which he had been laboring, for he broke into a cold sweat as he contemplated the possibility that, after all, he might not find Kay White here.

XIX--"STICK 'EM UPI"

NOW, AT last, he was within a few yards of the glowing embers, which were temporarily hidden from him by a low bush that had offered him concealment as he crawled forward. Removing his hat, he raised his head slowly until he could look over the top of the bush. In front of him, and now visible in the growing light of the new day, he saw a man sitting by the fire half reclining against a pile of saddles; and on the ground, beyond the fire, two forms were stretched.

Marvel replaced his hat upon his head and rose slowly, a forty-four in each hand. He advanced softly toward the man sleeping against the saddles.

body toward the man sleeping against the saddles, and now he was close enough to recognize that one of the other figures was that of a woman, and he breathed an almost audible sigh of relief. Beyond the camp he saw three horses standing patiently.

All this he took in in a single, brief glance; then he spoke.

"Stick 'em up!" he snapped sharply. "It's all over. I've got you covered."

Instantly the three awoke. "Stick 'em up!" snapped Marvel again, and the hands of the man by the saddle went quickly above his head; but the other man leaped to his feet and reached for his gun.

It all happened very quickly, so quickly that Kay White, awakened from a sleep of utter physical and nervous exhaustion, scarcely realized that she had seen a man killed. Sharp words had awakened her, and as she opened her eyes she had seen a sudden streak of fire accompanied by the bellow of a forty-four; and then the man that she had heard called Mart had pitched forward upon his face and lain very still, his body almost touching her feet.

"Get up," said the killer to the man against the saddles, "and keep 'em up. Face the other way."

There was a note in the man's voice that was familiar to the girl, but she knew at once that it was not Cory Blaine. Only once before had she heard Marvel speak with a tone of authority; and then his

voice had not been hardened by long suppressed hate and anger; so she recognized only a strange familiarity, while his clothes meant nothing to her since she had never seen him dressed thus before, and it was not yet light enough to distinguish his features. She saw him slip one of his own guns into its holster and remove the weapon from Eddie's holster. Then he turned to her.

"You all right, Kay?" he asked. "They aint hurt you none, have they?" And with the sudden change in his tone, she recognized him.

"Bruce!" she exclaimed. "I -" A sob choked other words in her throat.

"You're all right now, Kay," he said. "There can't nuthin' happen to you now. Your papa is at the ranch, and we'll have you back there in no time. But tell me first, did either of these men harm you? If they did, I'm goin' to kill this one now. I aint goin' to take no chances with the law. It lets too many of them escape."

"I never done nuthin' to her," said the man in a voice that was barely articulate, so muffled was it by some impediment of speech.

"No," said Kay. "They treated me all right, especially Eddie. That is Eddie there," she explained, indicating the man standing before Marvel.

"Yes," said Marvel. "I know Eddie. I've been

lookin' for him for a long time."

"Who the hell are you?" demanded Eddie. "I never seen you before."

"And that wise guy, who thought he could beat me to the draw after I drew, would be Mart, wouldn't he?" demanded Marvel.

"Who are you anyway?" demanded Eddie.

"It wouldn't do you no good to know now, son," replied Marvel. "When you should have known who I was was a couple of days ago." He stepped quickly over to Mart and, stooping, recovered the gun that had dropped from the man's hand when he fell and also extricated the other from its holster. Then he laid all four weapons beside Kay. "Watch 'em," he said. "That feller may not be dead. I aint got time to examine him now." He turned to Eddie. "Take a tie rope off o' one of them saddles," he said, and when the man had done as he was bid, Marvel secured his wrists behind him.

Kay White sat in bewildered silence, partially overcome by the sudden turn in her fortune and partially by her surprise at seeing Marvel in this new role. Here was no man playing a part, and she realized that for the first time she was looking upon the real Bruce Marvel. She noted his clothes as the light increased and how much a part of him they seemed. She recalled the doubt that she had felt concerning him, and she wanted to say something to him. She wanted to explain and to ask his

him. She wanted to explain and to ask his forgiveness, but she did not know how to say it; so she remained silent.

"Got any grub in camp, Eddie?" asked Marvel. "I aint eat for so long I've forgotten what it's like."

"There's food in a couple of them bags," said Eddie sullenly, pointing to the pile of saddles.

Marvel searched among the bags. In one he found a frying pan, a coffee pot and some tin cups, and in another bacon, potatoes and a can of coffee, in addition to which there were three canteens, one of which was full and another that had some water in it.

"I reckon this'll do," he said. "Hungry, Kay?"

"Not very," she replied.

"Well, you better eat," he said. "We got a long pull ahead of us yet and you've got to keep your strength."

He busied himself preparing their frugal meal and when it was ready, he served Kay, after which he freed Eddie's hands that he, too, might eat.

While he ate Marvel squatted on his heels directly in front of Eddie. "Where's Blaine?" he demanded suddenly.

"He" Eddie hesitated. "How the hell do I know where he is?"

"Listen, Eddie, I know all about you," said Marvel. "Come clean and it may go easier with you. I think you're expectin' Blaine. I want to know when you expect him and what trail he's comin' on. If you don't answer me, or if you lie to me, and Blaine comes on us unexpected, I'm goin' to shoot you first."

"He's comin' the same trail we come on," replied Eddie after considerable hesitation. "He didn't aim on catchin' up to us until after we reached " He stopped.

"Until after you reached Kelly's place in Sonora," suggested Marvel.

"If you know so much what's the use of askin' me?" demanded Eddie.

"There aint none," replied Marvel; "but we're goin' back to the TF by a different trail, and if we meet Blaine on that trail you can kiss yourself good-bye. I don't want no unexpected or promiscuous shootin' while I got Miss White with me."

"There aint no other trail to the TF, least ways no shorter one."

"Oh, yes, they is," said Marvel. "When I was a kid I helped my old man trail some cattle up from the border this away; so I know there's another trail and besides that, there's water on it."

Eddie contemplated Marvel for a moment. "You must be the guy that planted all the willows on the cricks in this part of the country," he said; "but it's funny I never seen you before."

"I told you once that you have seen me before. You saw me day before yesterday."

A sudden light of recognition dawned in Eddie's eyes. "Why you're that damn dude," he said.

The shadow of a smile moved Marvel's lips. "We'll be movin' now," he said, and then he turned toward the girl. "It's mighty hard on you, Kay, but I don't see no way out of it. We couldn't stay here in a dry camp nohow, and then particularly I don't want no rumpus with Blaine while you are with us."

"Don't think of me," she said. "Do whatever you believe the right thing to do. I'm tired, of course, but I'm very far-from being exhausted."

"You're sure a wonder, Kay," he said admiringly, as he busied himself with the rope with which he was again securing Eddie's wrists. Then he removed Eddie's cartridge belt from about the man's hips and handed it to Kay. "Strap this on," he said, "and take one of those forty-fives. I hope you won't need it, but I'll feel safer if you have it."

As she followed his instructions, he walked out and brought in the three horses, which she held while he saddled and bridled them.

"Where is your horse?" she asked.

"I hid him over yonder," he replied. "We'll pick him up on our way out."

"What are you going to do with him?" She nodded her head toward Mart's body.

"I can't do nuthin' with him," replied Marvel. "We aint got nuthin' to dig a hole with and we aint got time if we had. I might pack him in on his horse, but we may need the horse. One of our's might give out."

"You are just going to leave him lying there?" she asked incredulously.

"There aint no other way, Kay," he replied; "and even that is too good for him." His tone was as hard as his words, for they reflected the contempt that he held for the dead man.

She said no more, but mounted Lightfoot and turned her back upon the body of the dead Mart. Marvel assisted Eddie into the saddle; and then he mounted Mart's horse, and the three rode to where Baldy was tied.

"I reckon I'll give you a rest, old man," he said, and handing the lead rope to Kay, he remounted. "I'll lead Eddie's horse," he said, "and you follow with Baldy. It's been a long time since I've been over this trail, but if I remember right there's water in the next

ten or fifteen miles."

Since the unexpected arrival of Marvel and the rapid and grim sequence of events that had followed, Kay White had scarcely spoken. Perhaps the shock to her nervous system, already weakened by fatigue, had left her dazed; but now as she rode along the trail in the rear of Marvel and Eddie she had time to review the happenings of the past hour. Uppermost in her mind, naturally, was the killing of Mart. Never before had she witnessed tragedy at such close range; and she was impressed more by the horror of the casualness of it, perhaps, than she was by the death itself. It seemed to her that a man who might have been forced to shoot a dog would have evidenced more feeling in the matter than Marvel had.

She almost shrank from the thought of being near him; and then she realized that this was but a natural reaction, resulting from emotional complexes rather than from studied and rational consideration of the events leading up to the deed. Then came the realization that what he had done had been for her and she was filled with remorse for the unjust thoughts she had harbored.

Eddie rode in sullen silence, his weak and stupid face a study of hopeless dejection. He knew nothing of the legal penalty for kidnaping; but he was conversant with the rough and ready justice of his fellow men, which raised within his mind the vision of a lonely figure suspended from a tree. He did not like the picture. It gave him a most

did not like the picture. It gave him a most uncomfortable sensation about the neck, and so his mind groped muddily for a plan to escape.

Marvel, constantly alert, rode in the lead. Occasionally he turned in his saddle and scanned the country for signs of pursuit. He was very happy; and by way of expression he hummed snatches of a little song that was more notable for its doleful lugubriousness than for any intrinsic value it possessed as a work of art; and thus, each occupied with his own thoughts, the three followed the dim trail toward the north.

XX--WATER!

BLAINE, MOUNTED upon a comparatively fresh horse, made good time along the trail from Bryan's shack toward the south. Before darkness had fallen the preceding day to obliterate all signs along the way, two features of the spoor had puzzled him. Fragments of torn playing cards appeared so often in the trail as to convince him that someone had been blazing it for a purpose and he could only assume, as had Marvel, that it was the girl. The other was not quite so plain, but he thought that it indicated that four horsemen instead of three had preceded him. His trailing ability, however, was not so great that he could be positive of this, nor did the signs tell him that three of the horsemen had

preceded the fourth by several hours.

So sure was he, however, that Bryam had misdirected Marvel toward the east that he succeeded in almost convincing himself that he was in error in believing that four horses recently had passed along the trail.

With the coming of the new day he saw that the spoor had been dimmed and in some places obliterated by the footprints of nocturnal animals which, by night, follow man-made paths, the open, dusty parts of which are the plazas of the little folk where they come to stroll and to play.

But for such things Blaine had neither eyes nor thoughts as he strained the former far into the distance ahead in search of some tell-tale moving thing that might indicate the whereabouts of those whom he sought.

"If Marvel did follow 'em and caught up with 'em," he soliloquized, "the boys sure must have bumped him off; but if he got the drop on 'em he would be coming back this way, and I ought to be meeting him pretty soon." He loosened the gun in its holster and redoubled his alertness. "It aint that I'm afraid of the damn dude," he apologized to himself, "but he might be lyin' in wait for me behind some bush-him and his funny panties. If I ever get the chance I'm goin' to shoot them panties full of holes, more especially if he's in 'em."

The trail dropped into a hollow and then rose again

to higher ground, and as he topped this rise he saw something just ahead that brought him to a sudden stop and his gun from its holster--it was the figure of a man lying beside the ashes of a fire.

The instant that he saw it he knew that the man was dead. At first he thought it was Marvel because he hoped that it was; but as he rode closer, after convincing himself that there was no one around, he saw that it was Mart; and he cursed beneath his breath.

Dismounting beside the dead man he turned him over on his back. For a moment he stood looking at him. "Dead as a doornail," he muttered. Then he stooped and ran his hand inside the dead man's shirt. "He aint plumb cold yet," he soliloquized. "That means whoever done this aint far off."

Searching the ground he found the spoor of three horses leading away from the camp. At a short distance farther on, where Marvel had left his horse, he counted the tracks of four horses leading to the north. Nowhere ahead could he see any sign of horsemen.

"If it's that damn dude," he said, "he's lost himself, which will give me a chance to get back to the TF ahead of him. Then it'll be his word against mine." For a few minutes he sat there puzzling out his problem, and then the light of a sudden inspiration was reflected in his eyes. "No," he said, half aloud, "it will be better than my word against his. It'll be

mine and Bryan's and Mart's. The three of us together ought to be able to put a rope around that bozo's neck."

Blaine was a hard rider. He never gave any thought to his horse, nor to the future, but only to the present necessity for speed; and now he wheeled his mount and spurred back along the trail he had come, bent only on reaching the TF Ranch ahead of Marvel and praying as he rode that it was indeed Marvel who had overtaken his two confederates and presumably rescued Kay White. He knew that his horse would hold out at least as far as Bryan's; and there he could change to Bryan's horse, which he had seen hobbled and grazing in the vicinity of the cabin; so he had no doubts but that he could reach the ranch long in advance of Marvel, even though the other was not lost as he believed and was able to find his way back to the TF without delay.

Marvel, pushing along the dim trail, was acutely aware that their horses were commencing to weaken from fatigue and thirst under the heat of the burning sun. He no longer hummed his sad little tune, for he was genuinely worried, harassed as he was by the haunting fear that the spring where his father had camped years before might since have gone dry, or that he might miss it entirely.

Perhaps he had staked too much upon his ability to find that waterhole. If their horses gave out and they were left afoot in that arid waste, their situation might indeed be hopeless. He was not thinking of

might indeed be hopeless. He was not thinking of himself or of the other man, but only of the girl. He reproached himself for having taken this long chance, yet when he considered the fact that the girl must inevitably have had to face the dangers of a gun battle with Blaine had they returned by the other trail, he still thought that his decision had been a wise one, and once again his self confidence asserted itself and he became strong again in the conviction that they would find water soon.

His train of thought and the long silence were broken by Eddie. "This horse of mine aint goin' much further," he said. "He is about through."

Marvel turned in his saddle. For some time he had had to drag the other horse along with a couple of turns of his rope about the horn of his saddle and now he saw that the beast was staggering and weak.

He reined in. "We'll switch you over to this horse," he said, "and I'll ride Baldy. How's your horse comin', Kay?"

"He seems to be holding up pretty well," she replied. "He hasn't the weight to carry that the others have."

"You better get back on the other trail to Bryan's where we can get water," growled Eddie. "There aint no water here."

"Shut up," admonished Marvel, "and speak when

you're spoken to."

Dismounting, they rested their horses for several minutes. Marvel considered the advisability of abandoning Eddie's horse, but finally decided to take him on as far as he could go, for he knew that if he could get him to water and rest there for a couple of hours the animal might recuperate sufficiently to prove useful to them before their long ride was over.

Shortly after they took up the march again, Baldy lifted his nose in the air and pricked up his ears and almost immediately the other horses did the same, the four of them pushing suddenly forward with accelerated speed. Marvel breathed a sigh of relief.

"What's the matter with the horses?" called Kay from her position in the rear. "They act as though they saw something."

"They smell water," replied Marvel, "and it makes them feel good; but take it from me it don't make them feel half as good as it does me."

The horses moved forward eagerly now and with vitality renewed by anticipation of the opportunity of quenching their thirst in the near future. The change in the spirits of their mounts seemed also to revivify the riders; so that it was with much lighter hearts that the three rode on beneath the pitiless rays of an Arizona sun, Marvel giving Baldy his head in the knowledge that the animal's instinct would lead it unerringly to the nearest water.

leading to the nearest water.

Ahead of them stretched what appeared to be an unbroken expanse of rolling brush land, lying arid and uninviting in the shimmering heat of the morning.

Presently there broke upon Marvel's vision the scene for which he had been waiting, the picture of which he had been carrying in his memory since boyhood--a large, bowl-like depression, in the bottom of which green verdure proclaimed the presence of the element that might mean the difference between life and death to them.

As they dropped over the edge and rode down a steep trail leading toward the water, Eddie contemplated the back of the man riding just ahead of him. "Dude!" he murmured. "I wonder what long-eared, locoed son-of-a-gun hitched that monicker onto this bozo?"

"You speakin' to me, young feller?" asked Marvel, for the mutterings of the man had come to his ears, although he had not been able to interpret the meaning.

"You and your old man trailed cattle this a-way when you were a kid?" asked Eddie.

"Yes."

"What made 'em think you were a dude?" demanded the man.

"Who said I was a dude?" asked Marvel

"Butts-" Eddie stopped in confusion.

"So you know Butts, too, eh?" asked Marvel, casually.

Eddie hesitated. "I seen him once," he said at last.

"Don't worry, Eddie," said Marvel. "You aint give nuthin' away. As I told you once before I know all about you--all five of you."

"You think you're a smart guy," said Eddie, "but you aint got nuthin' on me. They aint no law against my knowin' people."

"It aint so good for your health to know some folks too well, though, Eddie," replied Bruce. "I can think of three of 'em offhand right now - there used to be five, but two of 'em's dead."

Eddie looked up quickly from contemplation of his saddle horn. He thought a moment. "Who's the other?" he asked.

"Bryam," replied Marvel.

"Did you kill him?"

"I had to, Eddie. He was shootin' at me with a thirty-thirty, and for a lion hunter I will say that he was a damn poor shot." It went against Marvel's grain to speak of this killing, much less to boast of it; but for reasons of his own he wished to break

down the man's morale--in the vernacular, to put the fear of God into him and he knew that if Eddie had Bryam to think of now as well as Mart, he would worry that much more over his own possible fate and break the easier under the strain when the time came.

The balance of the trail into the bottom of the depression they negotiated in silence. Marvel noted with relief that green grass grew over a considerable area around the spring. He had not even dared hope for such good fortune as this.

"They can't be runnin' many cattle in here this year," he said to Eddie.

"They aint never run nuthin' in here since I've been in this neck of the woods," replied Eddie, "and I aint never even been in this valley before. They aint near as many cattle on the range as they used to be since the cattle business got bumped a few years ago, and there still bein' some rustlin' over the border, no one ranges in here no more."

"The feed never was no good in this valley anyhow, I guess," said Marvel. "They used to feed in the hills on both sides and water in this hole on the way across."

They halted beside a spring of clear, cold water that ran a little stream for a hundred yards or so before it sank into the earth again. Below the main spring they watered their horses, permitting them only a little at a time. Marvel took a half hour to

only a minute at a time. Marvel took a half hour to this, releasing Eddie's hands that he might assist him, while Kay filled their canteens and each of them quenched his thirst. After the two men had hobbled their horses and turned them loose, Marvel secured Eddie's wrists again; then the three threw themselves upon the ground to rest.

Bruce made Kay lie at full length and relax, and he wet his bandana and brought it and laid it across her forehead. Eddie needed no invitation to lie down, though he grumbled at the uncomfortable position his bound wrists necessitated. Marvel lay where he could watch the trail down which they had come into the depression and where, at the same time, he could watch the horses, for he knew that they might be the first to give warning of the approach of a pursuer. Occasionally the man turned his head and looked at the girl lying quietly a few yards away. How soft and small she looked; and always the sight induced a strange sensation in his breast--a sudden fullness. "By golly," he soliloquized, "it's just like I wanted to cry; but I don't want to cry, I want to sing. There's something about her that makes a fellow want to sing when he's close to her."

Presently he saw by the steady rising and falling of her breasts that she had fallen asleep. He half rose then and hitched himself over close to where Eddie lay. The man looked up at him. "I want to talk to you, young fellow," he said; and then, in a low tone that might not awaken the girl, he talked steadily for several minutes, while the changing expressions upon the face of his listener denoted various

upon the face of his listener denoted various reactions, the most marked of which were surprise, consternation, and fear.

"I aint askin' you nuthin'," he said in conclusion. "There aint nuthin' to ask you, I just been tellin' you. Now if you know what's good for you, you'll know how to act." As he ceased speaking he drew a large pocket knife from his overalls and opened one of the blades. Then he drew one of his forty-fours, the wooden grip of which bore many notches, the edges of which were rounded and smooth and polished by the use of many years. As Eddie watched him, fascinated, Marvel cut two new notches below the older ones.

"Them's Bryam and Mart?" asked the prisoner.

Marvel nodded. "And there's room for some more yet, Eddie," he said.

"You make all them?" asked Eddie.

"No," replied Marvel. "These guns were my father's."

"He must have been a bad man from way back," commented Eddie in frank admiration.

"He weren't nuthin' of the kind," replied Bruce. "He was a sheriff."

"Oh!" said Eddie.

For two hours they rested there; and while they

For two hours they rested here, and then they rested, Cory Blaine drove his faltering mount ruthlessly along the back trail toward Bryan's.

They had had several hours start of him, but their rest and the killing pace that he was travelling might easily permit him to overcome the handicap; so that now it was a race with, perhaps, much depending upon who reached the TF Ranch first, though only Cory Blaine realized that it was a race.

For two hours Marvel permitted the girl and the horses to rest and recuperate. Then he aroused Eddie, removed his bonds and the two men went out and fetched the horses back to the spring. Not until they were saddled and ready to ride did he arouse Kay.

"I hate to do it," he said, as she opened her eyes to the pressure of his hand upon her shoulder, "but we got to get goin'. We can't make the ranch tonight, but if the horses hold out we ought to pull in some time after breakfast in the mornin'."

XXI--"HE IS BUCK MASON"

AS THEY mounted and rode away, Cory Blaine was looking down upon Bryan's shack from the summit of the ridge near the head of Mill Creek Canyon. His horse, blowing and trembling, faltered at the edge of the steen trail nitching down into the

at the edge of the steep wall placing its front into the canyon. As Blaine urged him forward, the animal took a few faltering steps, then he swayed and dropped in his tracks.

"Hell !" muttered Blaine. "Now I got to hoof it to the bottom and pack my saddle to boot."

Trudging down the steep trail beneath the weight of his heavy saddle, he caught occasional glimpses of Bryan's body lying where he had left it. Above, on ragged wings, great black birds swung in easy, majestic circles. Occasionally one of them would swoop lower; but four bristling, growling hounds kept them at bay.

In the shade of a tree near the shack, Bryan's hobbled horse stood patiently, switching his tail in perpetual battle with the flies, while he rested in the shade during the heat of the day before going out to graze again on the meadowland below the shack.

Two of the hounds came menacingly toward Blaine as he approached; but he circled them, and when they saw that he was not coming nearer to their dead master, they stopped and stood watching him as he saddled and bridled the horse, removed its hobbles and rode away down the valley.

The guests of the TF Ranch were at breakfast when Cory Blaine rode into the corral and unsaddled. No one had seen him arrive, and he went directly to the bunkhouse. When he entered he saw Butts just pulling on his boots, the other men

having already gone to their breakfast.

The two men eyed one another. "Did you get the girl?" demanded Butts.

"-Hell, no," replied Blaine.

"Where is she?"

"That damn dude beat me to it," replied Blaine. "He got her."

"You don't mean that Marvel feller?" demanded Butts.

"Yes."

"You seen him and didn't plug him?"

"I didn't see him."

"Then how do you know he got the girl?" asked Butts.

"He killed Bryam."

"The hell you say."

"Yes. And Hi lived long enough just to tell who killed him. Then I followed the dude's trail to where he come up with Eddie and Mart and the girl."

"He took her away from them?" asked Butts.

"He plugged Mart; and I reckon he got the drop

on Eddie, for I seen where the three of 'em rode off; but they took the wrong trail, and I reckon they're lost somewhere in the hills."

Butts looked worried. "They may be lost," he said, "and they may not; but they'll get here sometime, and when they do here's one bozo's goin' to be missin', and you better come with me."

"Don't be a fool, Butts," replied Blaine. "When they hear my story they won't never hang it on us. I got it all figured out; and, believe me, that fellow Marvel is goin' to swing for the murder of Bryam and Mart, to say nuthin' of what he'll get for abductin' the girl."

"You sure you can do it, Cory?" asked Butts.

"I know I can. You come along with me now. I'm goin' up to the house and give 'em some facts that'll make their eyes pop out. I aint killed one horse and damn near killed another to get here ahead of Marvel for nuthin'."

"All right," said Butts, "but I'd feel a whole lot safer if I was headin' for somewhere's else."

"That'll be just like tellin' 'em you was guilty," said Blaine.

The two men approached the veranda of the big house just as the guests were coming out from breakfast.

"There's Cory!" exclaimed Dora Crowell.

John White stepped forward as the two men came up the steps. "Have you any news, Blaine?" he asked.

"A lot of it, sir," replied Cory. The other guests clustered about, eager and attentive.

"Tell me what you know," said White.

"I trailed the abductors as far as Bryam's cabin. They was three of 'em. I guess Hi must have tried to interfere with 'em, because Marvel shot him."

"Marvel!" exclaimed two or three of them simultaneously.

"Yes, Marvel," replied Blaine. "I was always afraid of that fellow. That's why I kicked him out. I knew right along that he was after Kay."

"How do you know it was Marvel?" demanded Dora Crowell.

"Hi told me just before he died. The deputy sheriff and the posse were there at the same time. They heard him. Then the posse rode one way and I rode the other, lookin' for trails; and I found their trail leadin' down toward Sonora. I rode all night, and in the mornin' I came on their camp. They weren't no one there except one feller who was shot through the chest. He was still livin', and he told me how it happened.

"He said his name was Mart and that he and another guy had been hired by Marvel to work for him, but he hadn't let 'em in on what he was goin' to do till the last minute. When they got to this camp this feller Mart said he wouldn't have nuthin' more to do with it. He told Marvel he was goin' to quit and go back, and the other feller wanted to quit, too; and then Marvel shot this feller Mart.

"He said he was unconscious for a long time and didn't know what happened after he was shot. He didn't know whether Marvel killed the other feller, too, or made a prisoner of him, or finally persuaded him to come along with him; but before the shootin' Marvel said he was goin' right back and claim the reward. He even got Kay to promise not to accuse him by threatening to kill her and her father if she did. I tell you he's a bad one, and he's comin' in here with a story of how he rescued Kay. I tell you it was a lucky thing I come on that Mart when I did."

"What happened to him?" asked Dora. "Where is he?"

"He died right after he told his story to me," replied Cory.

"One would have thought that such a desperado would have made sure that both his victims were dead before he left them," said Dora.

"I reckon he thought they was dead," said Blaine.

"What do you suppose has become of the posse?" asked White. "Could it be possible that they may have overhauled Marvel?"

"No," replied Blaine. "They went in a different direction. Aint they back yet?"

"No. I wish that some of them might be here when Marvel came in, so that they could make the arrest, but the sheriff is back from his trip and I'll telephone him at once."

"I reckon you better-do that," said Blaine.

"I just can't believe it," said Birdie Talbot as White stepped into the house to telephone. "Bruce was such a nice young man."

"It just doesn't seem possible," said Miss Pruell. "It doesn't seem possible at all."

"I aint surprised," said Butts. "I always said there was somethin' phoney about that bozo, but I don't see how he ever killed anyone with a gun.

He must have snuck up on 'em while they was asleep, or maybe when they seen his panties they committed suicide."

"I don't know nuthin' about that," said Blaine, "but he sure is one bad hombre."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Dora Crowell,

looking Blaine steadily in the eye.

The man flushed. "It's a good thing for you you're not a man," said Blaine.

"Perhaps it's a better thing for you that I am not, Cory," she replied.

Blaine turned away. "I aint goin' to stay here jawin' with no fool woman," he said. "I aint had no sleep for two nights; and I'm goin' to turn in," and with Butts at his side he walked back toward the bunkhouse.

After the two men had left them, the guests fell into a discussion of Blaine's charges against Marvel. Some agreed with Dora, while others took sides with Blaine. Miss Pruell reiterated that she just couldn't believe such a thing about Mr. Marvel.

"I guess he must be guilty," said Birdie Talbot, "after all that Cory has told us. We have known Cory much longer than we have Marvel, and there is no reason why we should not believe him. You know I always did suspect something funny about Marvel. I suspicioned him right away when he kept refusing to play bridge."

Benson Talbot, running true to form, took sides against his wife.

"It looks pretty bad for Marvel," said Bert Adams, "and perhaps it seems worse to some of us because we know that he was not what he pretended to be.

But there was something else about him that the rest of you don't seem to recall that comes pretty nearly convincing me that he is guilty of all that Blaine accuses him of."

"What's that?" demanded Benson Talbot.

"His eyes," replied Adams.

"Why I think he has nice eyes," said Miss Pruell.

"He has the eyes of a killer," stated Adams confidently.

"Slush!" exclaimed Dora Crowell.

Olga Gunderstrom had not entered into the discussion because she knew nothing of either Marvel or Blaine. In fact, the whole matter seemed to bore her and now she turned away. "I am going to my room, Dora," she said. "I think I shall lie down for a few moments." And then, one by one, the guests drifted into the house to read or write letters or to rest, so that the veranda was deserted when Bruce and Kay and Eddie rode into the ranch yard.

Marvel led them to the foot of the veranda steps, and when they had dismounted he told Kay that she had better go to her room immediately and get some rest. "I reckon the reason there's nobody about is that they are all out lookin' for you," he said, but even as he spoke John White stepped out onto the veranda. As father and daughter saw one

another they rushed into each other's arms. There were tears in the man's eyes, while Kay sobbed openly.

"You are all right, darling?" he asked.

"All right, dad," she replied through her sobs, "and we have no one to thank for that but Bruce--Mr. Marvel."

The older man's face hardened, but the girl did not see it for hers was buried upon his shoulder. "I know all about that, dear," he said. "Now you go to your room and get some rest and I will talk with Mr. Marvel."

She turned and smiled through her tears at Bruce. "I haven't thanked you yet," she said, "but sometime I am going to try."

"Never you mind the thanks," he said; "you get to bed."

When she had gone, White descended the veranda steps and faced Marvel. "Blaine is back," he said.

"I reckoned as much," said Marvel. "Where is he?"

"He told the whole story," said White. "I ought to kill you, Marvel; but you brought her back unharmed, and I owe you something for that. I am going to give you a chance to get away. The sheriff is on his way here now. You get on yours and I'll tell him that I do not intend to prosecute."

Marvel looked at the older man for a moment. "I sure would have known that Blaine was back," he said, "even if you hadn't told me. I aint goin' to try to tell you nuthin', Mr. White, except that you are all wrong. I thank you for what you think you're tryin' to do for me, but I'm not goin' away. Kay knows the truth, and you will know it after you have listened to her. I had nuthin' to do with her abduction."

"It's no use, Marvel," replied White. "Blaine's story was too circumstantial."

Olga Gunderstrom came onto the veranda as Marvel shook his head and was about to turn away. As their eyes met the girl stopped and hers went wide. "Buck Mason!" she exclaimed.

"Olga!" cried the man, and started up the steps toward her.

"Don't come near me, you murderer," she cried.

"I had to shoot 'em both in self defense, Olga," he said. "Bryam was shootin' at me with a thirty-thirty and the other feller tried to draw after I had him covered."

"I don't mean those two," she said. "You know who I mean."

"Olga!" he cried. "I couldn't guess that you'd believe that about me. I heard that story, too; but I

knew that you would know that I never done it."

She shuddered. "I know your kind," she said icily; "no refinement, no instincts of decency, just a common brute, who can think of nothing else but to kill."

He looked at her in bitter silence for a long moment. Pain, disillusionment, sorrow made a raging chaos of his brain; but at last the only outward expression of what was passing within was the reflection of the sorrow that lay deep in his eyes. Then he turned away, hesitated and turned back toward John White.

"I'll turn this feller over to you, sir," he said, indicating Eddie with a gesture. "Hold him until the sheriff comes."

"I told you I was not going to prosecute," said White.

"But I am," said Mason. "I am a deputy sheriff and I deputize you to take custody of this prisoner;" and then he turned and walked away, leading the four horses toward the corral.

"Don't let him get away, Mr. White," cried Olga. "Do something. Don't let him getaway."

"What can I do?" asked White with a shrug. "He is a known killer; and he's carrying two guns, while I am unarmed."

In her room Kay White was troubled. There had been something in the way that her father had listened to her praise of Marvel that had seemed cold and austere. Perhaps it was a woman's intuition that all was not right that brought her out onto the veranda while Olga was pleading with her father.

"I tell you something must be done," cried Olga. "He must not be permitted to escape."

"I have telephoned the sheriff," replied White. "He is on his way here now."

"That will be too late," replied the girl. "He may get away, and then we may never be able to catch him again."

"Who?" demanded Kay. "Who may get away?"

"Buck Mason, the murderer of my father," replied Olga.

"Buck Mason!" exclaimed Kay. "Who is he?"

White pointed toward Marvel who was leading the horses into the corral. "He is Buck Mason," he replied.

XXII--"YOU'RE UNDER ARREST"

KAY WHITE stood for a moment looking at the man unsaddling the horses in the corral. "Buck Mason," she murmured, and then turning to Olga, "He may be Buck Mason," she said; "but no one can ever make me believe that he is a murderer."

"It is immaterial to me what you believe," snapped Olga; "and if your father won't arrest him, Cory Blaine will." As she spoke she started down the veranda steps and walked rapidly toward the bunkhouse.

Kay White followed her. "Don't," she cried. "You don't know what you are doing. They will kill him. They want to kill him. All they want is the excuse."

"I pray to God that they will kill him," said Olga, "for he killed my father."

As Olga hurried on toward the bunkhouse, Kay White broke into a run and, passing her, hastened to the corral, where Mason was just turning the horses into pasture. As he fastened the gate and turned back he saw her.

"I thought I told you to go to bed," he said.

"Oh, Bruce," she cried. "Hurry and get away from here. That girl, I suppose she is Miss Gunderstrom from what she said, has gone to get Cory Blaine to arrest you."

"Why should I run away, Kay?" he asked. "Don't tell me that you think I done it."

"Oh, I don't care whether you did or not. I don't want them to kill you, and I know that they will kill you. They won't give you a chance, Bruce."

"It's worth being killed a dozen times for, Kay, to hear you say that," he said; "but don't you worry. You get back to the house quick in case there's goin' to be any shootin'. I can take care of myself, now that you've warned me."

Breathlessly, Olga Gunderstrom broke into the bunkhouse. Butts was sitting on the edge of his bunk rolling a cigarette, and Blaine was already stretched out on his asleep.

"Buck Mason is here," she cried, "the man who murdered my father." Blaine sat upon his bunk.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"The man who murdered my father is here," she cried, "and there's five thousand dollars reward for him dead or alive."

"Where is he?" demanded Blaine, leaping to his feet.

The girl pointed through the window to the corral. "There he is," she said.

The two men looked. "My God!" exclaimed Butts.

"If it aint the damn dude."

The two men hastily buckled on their cartridge belts and guns. "You beat it back to the house in a hurry, Miss," said Blaine.

"Be careful," said Olga. "He's a dangerous character."

"Shucks," scoffed Butts, as the girl left the bunkhouse and hastened toward the ranch house, "that dude couldn't even hit a tree at fifty feet."

Kay White reached the house a moment after Olga. "What did you do? Did you warn him?" demanded the latter.

"Of course I did," replied Kay.

"Then you ought to be killed, too," cried Olga. "You are as bad as the murderer."

John White, hearing the girls' voices, came from the office where he had deposited Eddie and taken the further precaution of binding the man's ankles together. "Come, Kay," he said. "You girls are both nervous and distraught. Please go to your rooms, both of you. If they try to take Marvel, or Mason, or whatever his name is, there will unquestionably be shooting and it will not be safe for you out here."

Olga was pacing up and down the veranda like a caged tigress as Kay entered the house and went to her room. In the doorway she turned. "I wish that

you would come with me, father," she said. "You must listen to me. You must know the truth." And then suddenly, "Where is Eddie?"

"Eddie! Who is Eddie?" demanded White. "You mean the prisoner?"

"Yes."

"He's tied up as tight as a Scotchman's pursestrings and stowed away in the office," replied her father, as he followed Kay to her room.

Eddie, sitting upon a chair in the office, saw Olga pacing up and down the veranda, back and forth past the office window. He had heard the girl accuse Marvel as the murderer of her father. He had heard her call him Buck Mason; and now a faint light burst upon his dull intellect, so that he understood much that he had not understood before. He saw not only the immediate necessity for escape but something that held out a hope for its accomplishment; and so as Olga approached the office window again, he hailed her.

"Hey, Miss," he cried.

The girl stopped and looked into the office. "What do you want?" she asked.

"Let me loose," he said, "and I'll help Blaine and Butts get that fellow, Mason. I got it in for him myself, and two of 'em aint enough."

She hesitated. "Why not?" she thought, for her mind was obsessed only with revenge. She stepped quickly into the office and, after some difficulty, untied the knot that secured Eddie's wrists. His hands free, the man quickly loosened the cords about his ankles. Then he sprang through the doorway, vaulted over the rail and started diagonally across the valley toward the hills on the opposite side.

"Come back!" cried Olga Gunderstrom. "You are going the wrong way."

"The hell I am," said Eddie, bursting into a new spurt of speed.

From the corral Buck Mason had watched Kay White until she reached the safety of the house. Then he stepped inside the stables. He withdrew his guns from their holsters one at a time and examined them carefully. Then he waited.

In the bunkhouse Butts and Cory each satisfied himself likewise that his weapons were in good condition.

Butts was the first to emerge. He wanted that five thousand dollars very badly; but Cory Blaine was more interested in having Mason out of the way; and if Butts wanted to take the risk, he could have the five thousand. Neither man knew that Kay White had been to the corral and warned their quarry; and so it was with considerable confidence that they advanced. Blaine a little to the rear and to

Butts' left.

The latter was a hundred feet from the stable door when Marvel stepped out into the open. Without a word, without warning, Butts drew and fired. Marvel had drawn one of his guns before stepping from the stables, but his arm had been hanging at his right side and the weapon concealed from the two men by his body. As Butts drew, Mason fired from the hip. Then Blaine fired as Butts stumbled forward, a bullet through his forehead. Blaine missed and Mason fired again.

At the sound of the first shot, the guests had poured from their rooms onto the veranda. Birdie Talbot went into hysterics; and as Blaine crumpled to Mason's second shot, Olga Gunderstrom screamed and fainted. Kay stood tense and white, her hands clenched, her nails biting into her palms. She kept repeating to herself, "He lives! He lives!"

Mason stood now with a gun in each hand. His attitude was defiant as he looked about him for other possible enemies. And then two men rode into the yard. They came at a gallop, for they heard the shots. At a glance they took in the scene by the corral. One of the men was elderly. It was the younger who drew his gun. Buck Mason leaped back into the stables just as the man fired, the bullet burying itself in the door frame in front of which Mason had been standing but an instant before.

"Put up your gun, sheriff," said the older man. "I'll

get him without no gunplay." He rode slowly toward the stables. "It's all up, Buck," he called. "Limber up your artillery and come on out. I'll see you get a square deal."

Instantly Mason stepped from the doorway. "Why the gunplay?" he demanded.

"You're under arrest, Buck," said the older man. "Let me have your guns."

"What you arrestin' me for, boss?" asked Buck.

"For killin' old man Gunderstrom," replied the sheriff of Comanche County; "but I won't never believe you done it, Buck. How-some-ever I got a warrant for your arrest and the law's the law."

Mason unbuckled his cartridge belt and handed it up to the sheriff, the two guns hanging in their holsters.

"Tie up your horses and come up to the house," said Buck. "I got a long story to tell and there's others besides you I want to have hear it. Incidental-like, boss, I got the gang that killed Gunderstrom."

"Who done it?" asked the sheriff of Comanche County.

Mason pointed at Blaine, lying in the dust of the ranch yard.

"You'll have hard work provin' that, young feller," said the other man.

"Who the hell are you anyway?" demanded Buck.

"This is the sheriff of Porico County, Buck," explained the older man.

"O.K.," said Mason.

As the three men walked toward the house, a body of horsemen approached the ranch from the south, riding down the Mill Creek trail. Those in the lead saw a man on foot running toward the brush along the river. In a cow country a man on foot is always an object of suspicion. When he is caught running for cover, he is already convicted, even though no one may be aware that a crime has been committed.

The result was that instantly the men rode forward to intercept the lone pedestrian. As they approached him he stopped, for he could not possibly have reached the brush ahead of them. He turned and faced them.

"Who are you and what's your hurry?" demanded one of the men.

"I come out to meet you fellers," said Eddie, his brain spurred to unwonted activity by stress of circumstances. "Buck Mason, the guy that killed old man Gunderstrom over in New Mexico, is down at the stables and two of the fellers are tryin' to get

him. There's been some shootin', but I couldn't see what happened."

"A couple of you fellows bring this guy in," said the deputy sheriff of Porico County, "and the rest of you come along with me."

And so it was that the deputy sheriff and his posse galloped into the ranch yard just as Buck and the two sheriffs ascended the steps to the veranda.

"Hello, sheriff," called the deputy to his chief. "You got your man?"

"You bet," exclaimed the sheriff of Porico County. "You know me. I always get my man. This is the feller that killed old man Gunderstrom over in Comanche County and run off with Mr. White's gal here. I reckon he's the head of this here gang that's been raisin' hell in New Mexico and Arizona for the past year."

XXIII--THE BRASS HEART

Olga Gunderstrom had fully regained consciousness before Buck and the sheriffs ascended the veranda steps. The reaction to the nervous ordeal through which she had passed had left her silent and exhausted, and she sat now staring with wide eyes at the man who had been her childhood playmate and who she now believed to be the slayer of her father. She saw the slender, blond-haired girl in blue overalls come forward and take Buck Mason's hand. "I'm so glad they did not kill you," she heard her say.

"After you came to the corral and told me, there couldn't anybody have killed me," he said in a whisper that not even Olga Gunderstrom could hear.

"Who's this girl?" demanded the sheriff of Porico County.

"She is my daughter," replied John White.

"The girl that was kidnaped?" demanded the sheriff.

"Yes."

"And hobnobbin' with the man that kidnaped her?" demanded the sheriff.

"Don't be foolish," said Kay. "This man did not kidnap me. Two men named Mart and Eddie took me away from Cory Blaine, but I have learned since that the whole--thing was arranged by Blaine. This man risked his life many times to ride after me and save me from them. Even Eddie will testify to that. Where is he, father?"

Olga Gunderstrom shrank fearfully into her chair; but almost immediately she regained something of her self assurance, since she was confident that Eddie had made good his escape.

"Why there comes Eddie now," exclaimed John White. "How did he get out of the office?"

"That must have been Eddie we picked up on our way in," said the deputy sheriff of Porico County. "He sure was hot footin' it for parts unknown. Bring him up here, boys," he called to the men escorting Eddie. "We want to talk to that young feller."

When Eddie came onto the porch, Buck Mason turned toward him. "Remember what I told you, Eddie," he said.

"Shut up," snapped the sheriff of Porico County. "Don't you try to influence no witness around here."

"I was just remindin' Eddie to tell the truth," said Mason. "Sometimes it aint so easy for him to remember that."

"Eddie," asked Kay, "who persuaded you to help to kidnap me?"

Eddie looked about as though searching for someone. His eyes finally came to rest on Mason's face. "He didn't get the drop on you; so he must be dead," he said.

"Yes, he is dead," replied Mason.

"Go on, answer the young lady's question," urged the sheriff of Porico County. "Who persuaded you to kidnap her?"

"Cory Blaine," replied Eddie.

"Didn't this feller, Buck Mason, have a hand in it?" demanded the sheriff.

"Naw," said Eddie. "He come after us. Hi Bryam tried to kill him and Hi is dead. Then Mart tried to beat him to the draw and Mart's dead. The only kidnapin' he done was when he kidnaped her away from us."

"Well, maybe he didn't kidnap the gal," said the sheriff of Porico County. "Leastways, we don't seem to have much of a case agin him now; but he killed old man Gunderstrom, and I want you folks here to bear witness that I took him single-handed and that I'm entitled to all the reward."

"Before you spend any of it, I want you to listen to me for a minute," said Mason. "I got to tell my story

the old man, said Mason. "I got to tell my story in court anyway, and maybe it seems a waste of time to tell it now; but there's reasons why I want some of these people here to know the truth." He turned to the sheriff of Comanche County. "May I tell it, boss?" he asked.

"Sure, Buck, hop to it," replied the older man.

"In the first place," said Mason, "for the benefit of those of you who don't know it, I am deputy sheriff of Comanche County in New Mexico."

"That's right," said the sheriff. "He's my chief deputy."

"The afternoon of the night Gunderstrom was killed I rode up to his shack to talk about a line fence that's been a matter of dispute between our families for twenty years. I couldn't get any satisfaction out of the old man, but we did not quarrel. There wasn't enough at stake there anyway to furnish a reasonable cause for me to kill him, and there was another good reason why I couldn't have killed Gunderstrom." He glanced at Olga. "Me and his daughter was playmates ever since we were kids. I liked her better than anybody else I knew. I couldn't have killed her paw.

"When the murder was reported and the boss sent me over to investigate, I seen three things that interested me. There were signs at the tie rail that five horses had been tied there the night before. There were foot prints of five men; two of 'em easy

to identify again. One fellow had a heart shaped piece of metal set in the bottom of each heel of his boots, and that heart left a plain imprint in the soft ground. Another one of 'em had the biggest feet I ever seen on a man.

"Then I went into the house. The first thing I seen was one of Ole's boots lyin' in front of the cot, like it had been kicked around. I examined it very carefully and I seen the imprint of that metal heart on it where the murderer had stepped real heavy on the boot, like he stumbled on it first and then, in trying to catch himself, had stamped down real heavy on it. Did you save that boot, boss, as I asked you to?"

"Yes, I saved it; and we seen that heart shaped mark on it," replied the sheriff.

"Of course the coroner saved the bullet that killed Gunderstrom, too, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"What caliber was it?"

"Forty-five."

"And you know, boss, that I've always packed my old man's forty-fours ever since he died, don't you?"

"Yes, I told them that," replied the sheriff of Comanche County. "They don't nobody think you

done it down there, Buck, except Olga Gunderstrom."

"There was another thing I forgot to tell you," continued Mason. "The hoof prints of the horses showed that one of 'em had a big piece broken out of the inside of the off hind hoof, which made it mighty easy to track.

"They rode awful fast and I never did get within sight of 'em, but I could follow 'em easy by that broken hoof; and whenever they dismounted, I seen the heart shaped imprint of that feller's heel, and I noticed that it was always beside the horse with the broken hoof; so I figured that that was his horse; and then old big foot always showed up too whenever they dismounted.

"I trailed 'em right down to the town on the railroad here; and then I got to makin' inquiries there and I heard about this feller Cory Blaine and his dude ranch, and somebody told me that he just come in from his mine the day before. This feller that told me said that Blaine sure was a hard rider, that his horse was about used up when he come through town.

"Still I didn't think I had enough to go on, and I wanted to be sure; so I cached my saddle and bridle, hopped the train to Denver and telegraphed this feller Blaine for accommodations on his dude ranch. As soon as I got word from him that he could take care of me I shaved off my mustache, burn a lot of funny clothes that I had seen pictures

buys a lot of funny clothes that I had seen pictures of in magazines, and comes down here to the TF, expectin' to clean up everything in a couple of days; but it wasn't so easy. There wasn't nobody with a heart shaped piece of metal in the heel of his boot. There wasn't nobody with the biggest feet in the world, and there wasn't no horse with a broken hoof.

"The first clue I got, and it was a darn slim one at that, was when Dora Crowell and Blaine were discussin' the news that had just come to the ranch that I had been accused of Gunderstrom's murder. Do you remember, Dora, that you said I must be a terrible man because I shot Mr. Gunderstrom right through the heart while he was lyin' asleep on his bed?"

Dora nodded. "Yes," she said, "I remember."

"And then Blaine spoke up and says, 'Between the eyes;' and you said, 'It didn't say that in the paper.'

"That gave me my first hunch that Cory Blaine knew too much about the murder, and so I made up my mind that I'd have to hang around and get to the bottom of it. The next day we goes on a lion hunt; and still there wasn't any boots with hearts on 'em, or big feet, or broken hoofs; but when we got up to Hi Bryam's shack and I seen Hi Bryam and his feet and seen how chummy he and Blaine and Butts were, I commenced to have hopes again.

"Bryam wasn't very chummy with me; but I finally

managed to sit down beside him on the step of his cabin one evenin' and put my foot down alongside of his, and there was just the same difference that I'd measured between the length of my foot and the length of the big print around Gunderstrom's cabin, about an inch and a half I should say.

"Then the last night we was up to Bryan's I overheard a conversation between Blaine and Bryam and Butts that gave me an idea that the three of 'em were workin' together on some crooked deal."

He turned to Mr. White. "It was a good thing I overheard that conversation, Mr. White, because, while I didn't know it at the time, it was the outline of a part of the scheme to kidnap Kay. It give me just the clue I needed to follow them.

"I was gettin' closer now, but I didn't have anything to pin on Blaine, although I was dead sure he was the murderer. I knew that the boss here would save the bullet that killed Gunderstrom. As you all know, the rifling in the barrel of any weapon makes a distinguishing mark upon the bullet that aint like the marks that the rifling in any other weapon makes on its bullet; so I was particularly anxious to get hold of a bullet that had been fired from Blaine's gun. I done that one night by asking him to let me shoot at a target and then, being a tenderfoot," he grinned, "I accidentally fired the gun into my bedroll. I got the bullet here now for comparison when you get back home, boss."

"Good," said the sheriff.

"About this time somebody dropped a remark about Blaine's horse droppin' dead from exhaustion after he come in from his last trip; and, of course, that made me want to see that particular horse pretty bad; so I started talkin' about horse's teeth." He looked at Dora Crowell and grinned again.

"I got to figuring that you weren't as crazy as you, tried to make out," said the girl, "but you had me fooled for a while."

"If Cory Blaine had been as bright as you, Dora, I never would have caught him.

"What I wanted particular though was a heel print with a heart in it. Blaine never wore but one pair of boots, and they was just ordinary boots with nuthin' fancy about 'em. I made up my mind that he'd just have to change his boots, and so the night before we got back from the lion hunt I threw one of his boots into the campfire while he was asleep and made believe I'd thrown it at a coyote who had probably ran off with it."

He looked almost shyly at Kay White. "Some folks thought it was a mean thing to do," he continued, "but they didn't know why I done it. Well, the next day after we gets back to the TF Ranch Blaine comes out with an old pair of boots on. They'd been a awful fancy pair of boots in their day, with different colored patent leather trimmin'

and sure enough brass hearts set right in the bottom of the heels. It was right then I beat it for town and sent that letter to you, boss.

"I had two of 'em now; and I was pretty sure of Butts, because he was an ornery sort of a cuss anyway, and him and Blaine was mighty thick. Then some time about this time comes a letter tellin' about this feller with a harelip callin' up on the telephone and say in' that it was Buck Mason that killed Ole Gunderstrom. There wasn't nobody around with a harelip; so I just sort of forgot that for awhile; but I still wanted to see that horse that Blaine rode to death, and so I got Bud to take me to it the day the rest of you folks rode over to Crater Mountain and sure enough there was a piece broken out of the inside of the off rear hoof. I was sure right then that I had Blaine tied up, and I was only waitin' for the sheriff to come when this here kidnagin' blew everything to pieces.

"But in a way it helped, too, for it give me a line on the other two guys, 'dart and Eddie. I spotted Eddie the same day Bud took me huntin' horses' teeth. I seen Core Blaine ridin' over the hills to the west; and after I was able to shake Bud, I followed him and seen him talkin' to two fellers down in the dry gulch on the other side of the hills.

"I wanted a closer view of those two fellers, and so I beat it around to the mouth of the canyon when they started down and met 'em there." He turned to Eddie. "Do you remember, Eddie?" he asked.

The prisoner nodded sullenly. "Yes, I remember," he said.

"I pretended I was a dude and that I was lost, and when this guy Eddie speaks to me I was pretty sure that I had number four and that probably the other feller was number five, for Eddie sure talked like he has a harelip. He just got about half his tongue shot away once. He told me about it in camp yesterday.

"In fact Eddie told me a lot of things. Some of 'em I'd rather not tell to all of you; but the five of 'em, Blaine, Butts, Bryam, Mart, and Eddie was the gang that's been raisin' all this hell around here for the past year. They were with Blaine when he went up to kill Ole Gunderstrom. They had no part in the actual killing, though they were in the cabin when Blaine went in and shot Ole."

Olga Gunderstrom rose from her chair and came up to Eddie. She stood directly in front of him and seized him by the shoulders, her eyes blazing into his. "Is that the truth?" she demanded through clenched teeth, shaking him viciously.

"Leave me go," he cried. "I didn't do it."

"Is Buck Mason telling the truth?" she demanded. "That's what I asked you."

"Yes, he's tellin' the truth," said Eddie sullenly.

"I don't believe you," she cried. "It was Buck

Mason that killed my father. Why should this man Blaine have wanted to kill him? He didn't even know him."

"Because your old man was trying to double-cross him," said Eddie. "He handled the stock that we rustled, and we used to cache a lot of the money at one of his ranches here in Arizona. He double-crossed us and wouldn't never give us our share of what he got on the horses and cattle we rustled; and then, just before Blaine croaked him, he comes to this ranch that I'm tellin' you about here in Arizona and swipes most of the money we got hid there; and that's why Cory Blaine killed him, if you want to know."

Olga Gunderstrom swayed slightly and Mason stepped to her side to support her. "Don't touch me," she said. Then she steadied herself and walking slowly from among them, entered the house.

"I'm sorry that happened," said Mason. "That is what I did not want to tell.

"I guess that's about all," said Mason in conclusion. "Some of you folks have been mighty nice to me, and I wanted you to know the truth. You see I really felt worse about them funny pants and the boot garters than I did about being accused of killin' a man; for I knew that I could clear myself from the latter in court, but I might never live down the other."

The sheriff of Porico County cleared his throat. "I reckon we'll be goin', sheriff," he said. "I guess you can take care of the prisoners all right, can't you?"

"You take this Eddie with you, and I'll take care of Buck. I reckon that indictment against him will be quashed at the preliminary hearing."

"I reckon so," said the sheriff of Porico County, "but he'll have to appear here at the coroner's inquest on the shootin' of these four hombres. I'll see that he aint delayed none, though. Good-bye."

"Thanks, Sheriff," said Mason.

"What do you want to do now, Buck?" asked the sheriff of Comanche County. "Start for town now or wait till the cool of the evening?"

"I want to go to bed," said Mason. "I aint slept for two nights."

"Just a moment, Mason," said John White; "I'd like a word with you."

Mason turned and faced him. "Sure, sir," he said; "what do you want?"

"I want to apologize."

"That aint necessary," Mason assured him.

"I think it is."

Mason shook his head. "Blaine was pretty slick," he said. "Most anybody might have believed that story of his. I don't blame you none for not believin' me. That was about the slickest alibi and frame-up I ever heard. There was just one thing wrong with it."

"What was that?" asked White.

"His aim," said Mason.

White smiled in understanding.

"You seem to have handled this whole thing in an extremely clever manner, Mason," said White.

"It's the slickest piece of detective work I ever seen," said the Sheriff of Comanche County, "but he comes by it natural. His old man was the best sheriff Comanche or any other county ever had."

"He's done a fine piece of work for law, order, and justice," said White; "and while the size of the reward may not be commensurate with the obligation society and I owe him, it will not be inconsiderable."

"What do you mean?" asked Mason.

"The reward I promised for the safe return of Kay," replied "White.

Mason's eyes hardened. "I aint aimin' to collect no reward, mister." This was the fighting deputy of Comanche County speaking.

White flushed, but he held out his hand. "I understand," he said, "but in fairness to me you should let me do something--anything you ask."

"I'll be askin' something later, I hope," replied Mason, his eyes softening.

White smiled. "I hope so, too, my boy," he said; "and now go on to bed."

Before he turned in, Buck Mason cut a new notch on each of his father's forty-fours.

He was up early the next morning, for it does not take youth long to recuperate; and, furthermore, he was ravenously hungry. As he stepped out onto the veranda in the cool, fresh air of the morning, he saw a girl walking toward the river, a girl that he might not have recognized except for the blond head; for the lithe body was clothed in smart sport togs, which reminded him of illustrations he had seen in *Vogue*; but too often had he watched the sunlight playing in that blond hair to fail to recognize it, whatever the apparel of its owner. So he, too, hastened down toward the river.

Cottonwoods grow along the river, hiding much of the view from the veranda; but they do not hide everything; and when, a few minutes later, Dora Crowell stepped out of the TF Ranch house to fill her lungs with the early morning air, she caught a glimpse of a figure standing among the cottonwoods by the river; and when she looked more closely and

saw that the one figure was really two, she smiled and turned her eyes in another direction.

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Apache Devil

(1933)

Edgar Rice Burroughs

One--GERONIMO GOES OUT

THE silver light of Klego-na-ay, the full moon, shone down from out the star-lit heavens of an Arizona night upon the camp of the Be-don-ko-he Apaches; shone upon sleek copper shoulders; shone upon high cheek bones; softened the cruel lines of swart, savage faces--faces as inscrutable as is the face of Klego-na-ay herself.

Shone the silver moonlight upon Nan-ta-do-tash, the izzé- nantan of his people, as he led them in the dance, as he prayed for rain to save their parched crops. As he danced, Nan-ta-do-tash twirled his. tzi-ditinidi about his head, twirled it rapidly from front to rear, producing the sound of a gust of rain-laden wind; and the warriors and the women, dancing with Nan-ta-do-tash, listened to the tzi-ditinidi saw the medicine man cast hoddentin to the

chimed, saw the medicine man cast tobacco to the four winds, and knew that these things would compel the wind and the rain to come to the aid of their crops.

A little to one side, watching the dancers, sat Shoz- Dijji, the Black Bear, with Gian-nah-tah, friend of boyhood days, companion of the war trail and the raid. Little more than a youth was Shoz-Dijji, yet already a war chief of the Be-don-ko-he, proven in many battles with the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee; terror of many a scattered hacienda of Sonora and Chihuahua--the dread Apache Devil. The old men beat upon the es-a-daded, the primitive drum of buckskin stretched across a hoop; and to their cadence Nan-ta-do-tash led the dancers, his naked body painted a greenish brown with a yellow snake upon each arm; upon his breast, in yellow, a bear; and upon his back the zig-zag lines of lightning.

His sacred izee-kloth, passing across his right shoulder, fell over his left hip. Of a potency almost equal to this four strand medicine cord of twisted antelope skin was the buckskin medicine hat of Nan-ta-do-tash by means of which he was able to peer into the future, to foresee the approach of an enemy, cure the sick, or tell who had stolen ponies from other people.

The downy feathers and black-tipped plumes of the eagle added to the efficacy and decoration of this potent head-dress, the value of which was further enhanced by pieces of abalone shell, by

duklij, and a snake's rattle which surmounted the apex, while in brownish yellow and dirty blue there were depicted upon the body of the hat clouds, a rainbow, hail, the morning star, the God of Wind, with his lungs, the black Kan, and the great suns.

"You do not dance with the warriors and the women, Shoz- Dijiji," said Gian-nah-tah. "Why is it?"

"Why should I?" demanded the Black Bear. "Usen has forsaken the Shis-Inday. No longer does He hear the prayers of His people. He has gone over to the side of the pindah- lickoyee, who have more warriors and better weapons.

"Many times went Shoz-Dijiji to the high places and made big medicine and prayed to Usen; but He let Juh steal my little Ish-kay-nay, and He let the bullet of the pindah- lickoyee slay her. Why should I dance to the Kans if they are blind and deaf?"

"But did not Usen help you to find Juh and slay him?" urged Gian-nah-tah.

"Usen!" The tone of the Black Bear was contemptuous. "No one helped Shoz-Dijiji find Juh. No one helped Shoz-Dijiji slay him. Alone he found Juh--alone, with his own hands, he killed him. It was Shoz-Dijiji, not Usen, who avenged Ish- kay-nay!"

"But Usen healed the wound of your sorrow," persisted Gian-nah-tah. "He placed in your heart a

persisted Gian- nah-tah. He placed in your heart a new love to take the place of the old that was become but a sad memory."

"If Usen did that it was but to add to the sorrows of Shoz- Dijji," said the Black Bear. "I have not told you, Gian- nah-tah."

"You have not spoken of the white girl since you took her from our camp to her home after you had saved her from Tats-ah-das-ay-go and the other Chi-e-a-hen,!" replied Gian-nah-tah; "but while she was with us I saw the look in your eyes, Shoz-Dijji, and it told me what your lips did not tell me."

"Then my eyes must have known what my heart did not know," said Shoz-Dijji. "It would have been better had my heart not learned, but it did."

"Long time have we been friends, Gian-nah-tah. Our tsochs, swinging from the branches of the trees, swayed to the same breezes, or, bound to the backs of our mothers, we followed the same trails across deserts and mountains; together we learned to use the bow and the arrow and the lance; and together we went upon the war trail the first time. To me you are as a brother. You will not laugh at me, Gian-nah- tah; and so I shall tell you what happened that time that I took the white-eyed girl, Wichita, back to the hogan of her father that you may know why I am unhappy and why I know that Usen no longer cares what becomes of me."

"Gian-nah-tah does not laugh at the sorrow of his

best friend," said the other.

"It was not in my heart to love the white-eyed girl," continued the Black Bear. "To Shoz-Dijiji she was as a sister. She was kind to me. When the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee were all about, she brought me food and water and gave me a horse to carry me back to my people. I knew that she did that because I had once saved her from a white-eyed man who would have harmed her. No thought of love was in my mind. How could it have been? How could I think that Shoz-Dijiji, an Apache, a war chief of the Be- don-ko-he, could love a girl of the pindah-lickoyee!

"But Usen deserted me. He let me look upon the face of the white-eyed girl for many days, and every day He made her more beautiful in my eyes. I tried not to think of love. I put it from my mind. I turned my thoughts to other things, but I could not keep my eyes from the face of the pindah- lickoyee girl.

"At last we came close to the hogan of her father; and there I stopped and told her to go on, but she wanted me to come with her that her father might thank me. I would not go. I dared not go. I, The Apache Devil, was afraid of this white-eyed daughter of the pindah-lickoyee!

"She came close to me and urged me. She laid her two hands upon my breast. The touch of those soft, white hands, Gian- nah-tah, was more powerful than the will of Shoz-Dijiji; beneath it crumbled all the pride and hate that was in the heart of the

the pride and hate that are of the heritage of the Apaches. A flame burst forth within me--the signal fire of love.

"I seized her and pressed her close; I put my mouth upon her mouth. And then she struck at me and tried to push me away, and I saw fear in her eyes; and something more terrible than fear--loathing--as though I were unclean.

"Then I let her go; and I came away, but I left my heart and happiness behind. Shoz-Dijji has left to him only his pride and his hate--his hate of the pindah-lickoyee."

"If you hate the white-eyed girl now, it is well," said Gian-nah-tah. "The pindah-lickoyee are low born and fools. They are not fit for an Apache!"

"I do not hate the white-eyed girl, Wichita," said Shoz-Dijji, sadly. "If I did I should not be unhappy. I love her."

Gian-nah-tah shook his head. "There are many pretty girls of the Shis-Inday," he said presently, "who look with bright eyes upon Shoz-Dijji."

"I do not love them," replied the Black Bear. "Let us talk no more of these things. Gian-nah-tah is my friend. I have spoken. Let us go and listen to the talk of Geronimo and the other old warriors."

"That is better talk for men," agreed Gian-nah-tah.

Then they turned and walked away, and joined the group of

together they strolled over and joined the group of warriors that surrounded the old war chief of the Apaches. White Horse, Geronimo's brother, was speaking.

"There is much talk," he said, "among the Indians at San Carlos that the chiefs of the white-eyed soldiers are going to put Geronimo and many other of our leaders in prison."

"They put me in prison once before and kept me there for four months," said Geronimo. "They never told me why they kept me there or why they let me out."

"They put you in prison to kill you as they did Mangas Colorado," said Na-tanh; "but their hearts turned to water, so that they were afraid."

"They will never get Geronimo in prison again," said the old war chief. "I am getting old; and I should like to have peace, but rather would I take the war trail for the rest of my life than be again chained in the prison of the pindah-lickoyee."

"We do not want to fight any more. We came in as Nan-tan- des-la-par-en ("Captain-with-the-brown-clothes"--Major- General George Crook, U. S. A.)asked us to. We planted crops, but the rain will not come. Usen is angry with us; and The Great White Chief cannot feed us because his Agent steals the beef that is meant for us, and lets us starve. He will not let us hunt for food if we live at San Carlos."

"Who is this white-eyed thief that he may say where an Apache warrior may make his kunh-gan-hay or where he shall hunt?" demanded Shoz-Dijiji. "The Black Bear makes his camp where he will, hunts where he will!"

"Those are the big words of a young man, my son," said Geronimo. "It is fine to make big talk; but when we would do these things the soldiers come and kill us; every white-eyed man who meets our hunters upon the trails shoots at them. To them we are as coyotes. Not content with stealing the land that Usen gave to our fore-fathers, not content with slaughtering the game that Usen put here to feed us, they lie to us, they cheat us, they hunt us down like wild beasts."

"And yet you, Geronimo, War Chief of the Apaches, hesitate to take the war trail against them!" Shoz-Dijiji reproached him. "It is not because you are afraid. No man may say that Geronimo is afraid. Then why is it?"

"The son of Geronimo speaks true words," replied the old chief. "Go-yat-thlay (Geronimo), the son of Tah-clish-un, is not afraid to take the war trail against the pindah-lickoyee even though he knows that it is hopeless to fight against their soldiers, who are as many as the needles upon the cedars, because Go-yat-thlay is not afraid to die; but he does not like to see the warriors and the women and the children slain needlessly, and so he waits

and hopes--hopes that the pindah-lickoyee will some day keep the words of the treaties they have made with the Shis-Inday--the treaties that they have always been the first to break.

"If that day should come, the Shis-Inday could live in peace with the pindah-lickoyee; our women and children would have food to eat; we should have land to till and land to hunt upon; we might live as brothers with the white-eyed men, nor everagain go upon the war trail."

"I do not wish to live with the white-eyed men in peace or otherwise," cried the Black Bear. "I am an Apache! I was born to the war trail. From my mother's breasts I drew the strong milk that makes warriors. You, my father, taught me to string a bow, to hurl a lance; from your lips my childish ears heard the proud deeds of my ancestors, the great warriors from whose loins I sprung; you taught me to hate the pindah-lickoyee, you saw me take my first scalp, you have seen me kill many of the warriors of the enemy, and always you approved and were proud. How then may I believe that the words you have just spoken are true words from your heart?"

"Youth speaks from the heart, Shoz-Dijiji, as you speak and as I spoke to you when you were a child; but old age speaks from the head. My heart would go upon the war trail, my son; my heart would kill the white-eyed men wherever it found them, but my head tells me to suffer and be sad a little longer in the hope of peace and justice for my people."

people.

For a time after Geronimo had spoken there was silence, broken only by the beating of the es-a-daded and the mumbling of the medicine man, as he led the dancers. Presently a figure stepped into the outer rim of the circle of firelight from the darkness beyond and halted. He gave the sign and spoke the words of peace, and at the command of Geronimo approached the group of squatting braves.

It was Klo-sen, the Ned-ni. He came and stood before the Be-don-ko-he warriors and looked into the face of Geronimo.

"I bring word from the white-eyed chiefs at San Carlos," he said.

"What message do they send?" asked Geronimo.

"They wish Geronimo and the other chiefs to come to Fort Thomas and hold a council with them," replied Klo-sen.

"Of what matters would they speak?" demanded the old war chief.

"There are many things of which they wish to speak to the chiefs of the Apaches," replied Klo-sen. "They have heard that we are dissatisfied, and they have promised to listen to our troubles. They say that they want to live in peace with us, and that if we come, they will have a great feast for us, and that together we shall plan how the white-eyes and the Geronimo will live together." "I will go," said Geronimo.

the Shis-Inday may live together like brothers."

Shoz-Dijiji grunted skeptically.

"They want to make reservation Indians of us forever," said a warrior.

"Tell them we shall hold a council here and send word to them," said Geronimo.

"If you do not come," said Klo-sen, "neither will the Ned- ni--this word De-klu-gie sends to Geronimo and the Be-don- ko-he."

With the coming of the messenger the dance had stopped and the warriors had gathered to listen to his words, forming naturally and in accordance with their rank in a circle about a small fire, so that they were all present when Geronimo suggested that they hold a council to determine what action they should take; and as Chief of the Be-don- ko-he he was the first to speak. "We, the Shis-Inday, are vanishing from the earth," he said sadly, "yet I cannot think we are useless, or Usen would not have created us. He created all tribes of men, and certainly had a righteous purpose in creating each.

"For each tribe of men Usen created He also made a home. In the land created for any particular tribe He placed whatever would be best for that particular tribe.

"When Usen created the Apaches, He also created their homes in the mountains and the valleys

of New Mexico, Arizona, Sonora, and Chihuahua. He gave to them such grain, fruits, and game as they needed to eat. To restore their health when disease attacked them, He made many different herbs to grow. He taught them where to find these herbs and how to prepare them for medicine. He gave them a pleasant climate, and all they needed for clothing and shelter was at hand.

"Usen created, also, the white-eyed men; and for them He created a country where they could live; but they are not satisfied. They want the country that Usen created for them and also the country that He created for the Apaches. They wish to live in the way that Usen intended that they should live, but they are not satisfied that the Apaches should live as Usen wished them to. They want the Apaches to live as the white-eyes live.

"The Apaches cannot live as the white-eyed men live. They would not be happy. They would sicken and die. They must have freedom to roam where they will in their own country; they must be able to obtain the food to which they are accustomed; they must have freedom to search for the herbs that will cure them of sickness.

"These things they cannot do if they live upon the reservations set aside by the white-eyed men for them. They cannot live their own lives if their chiefs must take orders from an Indian Agent who knows little about Indians and cares less.

"As I grow older my mind turns more to peace

AS I grow older my mind turns more to peace than to the war trail. I do not wish to fight the pindah-lickoyee, but neither do I wish to be told i by the pindah-lickoyee how and where I shall live in my own country." The old man paused and looked around the circle of savage faces.

"I want peace. Perhaps there are wiser men sitting about this council fire who can tell me how the Shis-Inday may have both peace and freedom. Perhaps if we go to this council with the white-eyes they may tell us how we may have peace with freedom.

"Geronimo would like to go; but always there is in his mind the recollection of that day, long ago, when the chiefs of the white-eyed soldiers invited the Be-don-ko-he to a council and a feast at Apache Pass. Mangas Colorado was Chief then, and he went with many of his warriors.

"Just before noon the soldiers invited the Be-don-ko-he into a tent where, they were told, they would be given food to eat. When they were all in the tent the soldiers attacked them. Mangas Colorado and several other warriors, by cutting through the tent, escaped; but most of them were killed or captured.

"I have spoken."

A warrior at Geronimo's right hand arose. "I, too, want peace," he said, "but I hear the spirit voices of Sanza, Kla-de-ta-he, Ni-yo-ka-he, Gopi, and the other warriors who were killed that day by the soldiers at Apache Pass. They tell me not to trust

the white-eyed men. The spirit of Kla- de-ta-he, my father, reminds me that the white-eyed men are all liars and thieves. This they have proved to us many times. They make treaties and break them; they steal the beef and the other provisions that are intended for us. That, all men know. I do not think that we should go to this council. I have spoken."

Thus, one after the other, all who wished to speak spoke, some for and some against attending the council; and when the final vote was taken the majority had spoken against it.

That same night Klo-sen left to carry the word back to the white men and to De-klu-gie, chief of the Ned-ni, and also to De-klu-gie an invitation to him and his people to join the Be-don-ko-he on a hunting trip into Mexico.

"You know," said Geronimo to his warriors, "that this will mean war! The white-eyed ones will not permit us to leave the reservation and hunt in peace."

"It is more manly to die on the warpath than to be killed in prison," replied Shoz-Dijiji.

Two days later the Ned-ni Apaches joined the Be-don-ko-he, and that all felt that their contemplated move meant war was evidenced by their hurried preparations for departure and for the war trail. Disordered hair was shampooed with tallow and slicked down; war bands were adjusted; smaller, lighter ear-rings replaced the heavy pendants of

finger and rings replaced the heavy ornaments of peace times; necklaces were discarded down to a single strand; many a bronze forefinger was stained with color as each brave laid on the war paint in accordance with his individual taste, ability, and imagination.

The squaws, with awl and deer sinew, sewed the final patches to worn war moccasins, gathered together their few belongings, prepared for the grueling marches, the days of hunger, of thirst, of battle.

From many an eminence, eagle eyed, scouts watched the approaches to the camp. In advance of these, other scouts ranged far in the direction from which troops might be expected to advance. These scouts knew the hour at which the Be-don-ko-hes and Ned-nis would start their southward march toward Sonora; and, as the main body of the Apaches broke camp and moved out along the selected route, the scouts fell slowly back; but always they watched toward the north, and the eyes of the marching tribes were turned often in the same direction. So it was that, shortly after they had left camp, the Indians saw little puffs of smoke arising in quick succession from the summit of a mountain range far to the north. Those rapidly multiplied and repeated puffs of smoke told them that a large, well armed, enemy party was approaching; but it was still a long way off, and Geronimo had little fear that it could overtake him. On they moved, well armed, well mounted, secure in the belief that all the white-eyed soldiers lay to the north of them. Shoz-Diiiii

astride his pinto stallion, Nejeunee, rode in advance leading the way toward Apache Pass. Suddenly from a hill top close to the pass they were approaching a column of smoke rose into the air--it broke into a puff--was followed by another and another in quick succession. Another body of the enemy was approaching Apache Pass from the opposite side! Shoz-Dijiji reined about and raced Nejeunee back to Geronimo who, with the balance of the Apaches, had already seen the smoke signal.

"Take ten warriors and ride through the pass," instructed Geronimo. "If the pindah-lickoyee are too close to permit us to get through send one back with the word, and we will turn south through the mountains on this side of the pass. With the other warriors you will hold them as long as you can--until dark if possible--and then follow us. With stones we will tell you which way we have gone.

"If they are not already too close, advance until you find a good place to hold them. That will give us time to get through the pass and past them on the trail toward Sonora. Go!"

Shoz-Dijiji asked Gian-nah-tah and nine other braves if they wished to accompany him; and turned and raced off toward Apache Pass without waiting for a reply, for he knew that they would all follow him. He had little fear of meeting the soldiers unexpectedly in the pass, for he knew that the scout who had sent up the smoke signal would never cease to watch the enemy and that he would fall

back before them, keeping always between the soldiers and the Apaches.

Shoz-Dijji and his ten reached the far end of the pass. There were no soldiers in sight yet; but a half mile to the west they saw their scout signalling them to hasten forward, and when they reached him he took Shoz-Dijji to the hill top and pointed toward the south.

Half a mile away Shoz-Dijji saw three troopers in dusty blue riding slowly in the direction of the pass. They were the point. Behind them, but hidden by an intervening hill, was the main body, its position well marked by the dust cloud hovering above it. That the soldiers had seen the smoke signal was apparent by the extreme caution with which the point advanced. Now a small advance party came into view with flankers well out, but Shoz-Dijji did not wait to see more--the warriors of the pindah-lickoyee were coming, and they were prepared. The young War Chief of the Be-don-ko-he had fought against the soldiers of the white-eyed men before and he knew what they would do when attacked. He thought that he could hold them long enough for the main body of the Apaches to get through the pass and so he sent one messenger racing back to urge Geronimo to hasten; he sent a warrior to the hilltop to fire upon the point, and he sent two warriors with all the ponies upon the new trail toward the south that the tribes would now have to follow. Thus he burned his bridges behind him, but he was confident of the result of his plan.

Counting himself, there were now nine warriors opposing the enemy; and Shoz-Dijiji lost no time in disposing his little force to carry out the strategy of his defense of Apache Pass. The point, having uncovered the enemy, did what Shoz-Dijiji had known that it would do--turned and raced back toward the advance party, which now deployed. The main body halted and was dismounted to fight on foot, the terrain not justifying mounted action.

This delay, which Shoz-Dijiji had counted on, was utilized by him and six of his warriors in racing through the hills, just out of sight of the enemy, toward a point where they could overlook the main body. Two warriors he left upon the hilltop that commanded the approach to the pass.

When the seven painted warriors reached their stations they were spread along the low hills looking down upon the enemy and at intervals of about fifty yards. Shoz-Dijiji was farthest from the pass. It was his rifle that spoke first from above and behind the troopers holding the horses of those who were now slowly advancing in skirmish line on foot. A struck horse screamed and lunged, breaking away from the trooper that held it. Along the line of hills now the seven rifles were cracking rapidly down upon the unprotected rear and flank of the enemy. Riderless horses, breaking away from those who held them, ran, snorting, among the dismounted troopers, adding to the confusion. The commanding officer, steadying his men by word and example, ordered them to seek shelter and lie down, forming

them in a ragged line facing the hills. A lieutenant directed the removal of the remaining horses to a place of safety.

The Apaches did not fire again after the first few disconcerting rounds. Shoz-Dijiji had no wish to precipitate a charge that might reveal his weakness, his sole aim being to delay the advance of the enemy toward the pass until Geronimo should have come through with the two tribes.

The officer commanding the cavalry had no means of knowing that he was not faced by the entire strength of the renegades; and in the lull that followed the first attack he started withdrawing his men to a safer position, and as this withdrawal took them away from the pass Shoz-Dijiji made no effort to embarrass it but waited until the troopers had found shelter. He watched them dig little trenches for their bodies and pile rocks in front of their heads; and when he was sure that they felt more secure, he passed the word along his line to fire an occasional shot and that after each shot the warrior should change his position before he fired again that an impression might be given the enemy that it faced a long line of warriors.

The soldiers had formed their line some hundred yards from where their horses were hidden in a dry wash; and at every effort that was made to cross this space and reach the horses the Apaches concentrated their fire upon this zone, effectually discouraging any considerable enthusiasm in the

project, since as long as they remained passive there were no casualties.

The commanding officer was mystified by the tactics of the Apaches. He hoped they were preparing to charge, and in that hope he hesitated to order his own men up the steep hillside in the face of the fire of an unknown number of savages. Then, too, he could afford to wait, as he was suffering no losses and was momentarily expecting the arrival of the infantry that was following with the baggage train.

And so the afternoon wore on. A messenger came to Shoz- Dijiji with word that the two tribes had passed safely through the pass. Shoz-Dijiji fired a shot at the line of dusty blue and sent two of his warriors to join the main body of the Apaches. During the following half hour each of the remaining braves fired once, and then two more left to overtake the renegades. The next half hour was a busy one for the three remaining warriors as each fired two or three rounds, changing his position after each shot and thus giving the impression of undiminished strength. Then two more warriors retired.

Now only Shoz-Dijiji remained. In the north rose a great dust cloud that drew constantly nearer. The infantry was coming.

Shoz-Dijiji fired and scuttled to a new position nearer Apache Pass. The troopers peppered away at the spot from which the smoke of his shot had

at the spot from which the smoke of his shot had arisen, as they had all the long hot afternoon. Shoz-Dijji fired again and moved on.

The infantry was met by a messenger from the cavalry. All afternoon they had heard the firing and had hastened forward. Hot, dusty, tired, they were in bad humor.

Spitting dust from swollen tongues, they cursed all Indians in general and Apaches in particular as they deployed and started up the hillside to flank the embattled reds. This time, by God, they would get old Geronimo and all his dirty, sneaking Siwashes!

Simultaneously the dismounted troopers charged straight into the face of the enemy. Fat chance the doughboys had of beating them to it!

It was a race now to see which would reach the renegades first--cavalry or infantry. The cavalry, having the advantage of propinquity, arrived first, and they got something, too--when the infantry arrived they got the laugh. There was not an Indian insight!

From a hilltop a mile to the south of them a lone warrior watched them, estimating the numbers of the infantry, the size of the wagon train. Satisfied, he turned and trotted along the trail made by his fellows as they moved southward.

Down into Sonora the long trail was leading, down to a camp in the Sierra de Sahuaripa mountains.

Geronimo had gone out again!

Two--SPOILS OF WAR

THE camp of Be-don-ko-he and Ned-ni Apaches lay in the Sierra de Sahuaripa not far from Casa Grande, but the activities of the renegades led them far afield in both Sonora and Chihuahua during the ensuing year.

Shoz-Dijiji, restless, unhappy, filled with bitterness against all men who were not Apaches, often brooding over the wrongs and justices inflicted upon his people, became a living scourge throughout the countryside.

Sometimes alone, again with Gian-nah-tah and other young braves, he raided shops and ranches and isolated cottages, or waylaid travellers upon the road.

He affected a design in face painting that was distinctive and personal; so that all who saw him knew him, even though they never had seen him before. He laid a broad band of white from temple to temple across his eyes--the remainder of his face, above and below the band, was blue.

Entering a small village alone, he would step into the little tienda and stand silently upon the threshold for a moment watching the effect of his presence

upon the shop keeper and his customers. He derived pleasure from seeing the pallor of fear overspread their faces and hearing their mumbled prayers; he loved the terror in their voices as they voiced his name, "The Apache Devil!"

If they ran he let them go, but if they offered resistance he shot them down; then he took what he wanted and left. He did not kill women or children, nor did he ever mutilate the dead or torture the living; but others did--Apaches, Indians of other tribes, Mexicans--and The Apache Devil was held responsible for every outrage that left no eye-witness living to refute the charge.

In the year that they remained in Mexico the Apaches collected a considerable herd of horses and cattle by similar means and according to the same ethics that govern civilized troops in an enemy's country. They considered themselves at war with all mankind, nor was there any sufficient reason why they should feel otherwise. For over three hundred years they had been at war with the white men; for over three hundred years they had been endeavoring to expel the invader from their domain. In the history of the world no more courageous defense of a fatherland against overwhelming odds is recorded, but the only accolade that history will bestow upon them is that which ratifies the titles, thieves and murderers, conferred upon them by those who ravished their land for profit.

It was late summer. The growing herd of the

It was late summer. The growing herd of the Apaches was becoming unwieldy. Scouts and raiding parties were almost daily reporting to Geronimo the increasing activities of Mexican troops, proof to the old War Chief that the Mexican government was inaugurating a determined campaign against him, which he realized must assuredly result in the eventual loss of their hard-earned flocks, since the tactics of Apache warfare depend, for success, chiefly upon the marvelous mobility of the savages. From the summit of a mountain in the Sierra de Sahuaripa range rose a tall, thin column of smoke. It scarcely wavered in the still air of early morning. Fed by trained hands, its volume remained almost constant and without break. From a distance it appeared a white pillar topped by a white cloud that drifted, at last, lazily toward the north. Fifty, a hundred miles away keen eyes might see it through the thin, clear air of Sonora. Caballero and peon in little villages, in scattered huts, in many a distant hacienda saw it and, cursing, looked to their weapons, prepared the better to guard their flocks and their women, for it told them that the Apaches were gathering; and when the Apaches gathered, let honest folk beware!

Other eyes saw it, savage eyes, the eyes for which its message was intended; and from plain and mountain painted warriors, scouting, raiding, turned their ponies' heads toward the soft, white beacon; and thus the scattered members of the Be-don-ko-he and the Ned-ni joined forces in the Sierra de Sahuaripa and started north with the smoke of war.

Sanuanpa and started north with the spoils of war
sacely ahead of the converging troops.

"For more than a year,' Geronimo had said to them during the council in which they had determined to leave Mexico, "we have been absent from the country of the pindah-lickoyee. In all this time we have not struck a blow against them. We have shown them that we are not at war with them but with the Mexicans. Let us return with our herds to our own country and settle down in peace. With what we have won we can increase our cattle and our horses to such an extent that we shall not have to go upon the war trail again for a long time possibly never again. Thus we can live in peace beside the pindah-lickoyee. Let us not strike again at them. If our young men must go upon the war trail, there is always Mexico. The Mexicans are our natural enemies. They were our enemies before the pindah-lickoyee came; I do not forget Kas-ki-yeh, where my wife, my mother, and my children were treacherously slain. Let not the young warriors forget Kas-ki-yeh either! Many were the women and the children and the warriors killed there that day while most of the fighting braves were peaceably trading in the nearby village.

"Perhaps now that we have obtained the means to guard against hunger we may live in peace in our own country with the white-eyed men. I have made big medicine and prayed to Usen that this thing may be. I am tired of fighting. I am tired of seeing my people killed in the hopeless struggle against the white eyes."

white-eyes.

And so the two tribes came back to the reservation at San Carlos, bringing their great herd with them, and there was feasting and dancing and much tizwin was consumed.

The White Mountain Apaches, who had not gone out with Geronimo, profited however, for they had furnished many of the rifles and much of the ammunition that had aided in the success of the renegades; and they received their reward in the division of the spoils of war.

After the freedom and excitement of the war trail it was difficult for the young braves to settle down to the monotony of reservation life. Herding cattle and horses was far from a thrilling occupation and offered little outlet for active, savage spirits; and it could as well be done by boys as by men.

The result was that they spent much time in gambling and drinking, which more often than not led to quarreling. Shoz-Dijiji suffered in a way, perhaps, more than the majority, for his was naturally a restless spirit which had not even the outlet afforded by strong drink, since Shoz- Dijiji cared nothing for this form of dissipation. Nausea and headaches did not appeal to him as particularly desirable or profitable. He found a certain thrill in gambling but most of all he enjoyed contests of skill and endurance. He challenged other braves to wrestle, jump, or run. The stakes were ornaments, ammunition, weapons, ponies, but as Shoz-Dijiji

always won it was not long before he was unable to find an antagonist willing to risk a wager against him.

Perhaps his chief diversion was pony racing and many a round of ammunition, many a necklace of glass beads, magical berries, and roots, bits of the valued duklij came into his possession because of the speed of Nejeunee and other swift ponies of his string.

Shoz-Dijiji, gauged by the standards of Apachedom, was wealthy. He possessed a large herd, fine raiment, the best of weapons and "jewelry" that was the envy of all. Many a scheming mother and lovelorn maiden set a cap for him, but the Black Bear was proof against all their wiles.

Sometimes his father, Geronimo, or his mother, Sons-ee-ah-ray, reproached him, telling him that it was not fitting that a rich and powerful war chief should be without women to wait upon him. They told him that it was a reflection on them; but Shoz-Dijiji only shrugged his shoulders and grunted, saying that he did not want to be bothered with women and children. Only Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah-tah knew the truth.

Just off the reservation was a place known locally as the Hog Ranch, though the only swine that frequented it were human; and while a single member of the family Suidae would have tended to elevate its standing in the community it was innocent

of even this slight claim to decency.

Its proprietor was what is still known in the vernacular of the Southwest as a tinhorn. "Dirty" Cheetim had tried prospecting and horse stealing but either of these vocations were dependent for success upon a more considerable proportion of courage and endurance than existed in his mental and physical endowment.

His profits were derived through the exploitation of the pulchritude of several blondined ladies from the States and about an equal number of dusky senoritas from below the border, from cheating drunken soldiers and cowboys at cards, from selling cheap, adulterated whiskey to his white patrons openly and to Indians surreptitiously. It was whispered that he had other sources of revenue which Washington might have found interesting had it been in any measure interested in the welfare of the Indians, but how can one expect overworked Christian congressmen to neglect their electorate in the interests of benighted savages who have no votes?

However; it seemed strange to those who gave it any thought that such a place as "Dirty" Cheetim's Hog Ranch should receive even the passive countenance of the Indian Agent.

Tall and straight, silently on moccasined feet, an Apache brave stepped through the doorway of the Hog Ranch. Pausing within he let his quick, keen glance pass rapidly over the faces of the inmates

gamepass rapidly over the faces of the inmates. The place was almost deserted at this hour of the day. Two Mexicans, an American cowboy, and a soldier were playing stud at a table in one corner of the room. Two other soldiers and two girls were standing at the bar, behind which one of "Dirty" Cheetin's assistants was officiating. One of the soldiers turned and looked at the Indian.

"Hello! Black Bear!" he called. "Have a drink?"

Shoz-Dijiji looked steadily at the soldier for a moment before replying.

"No sabe!" he said, presently, his eyes moving to a closed door that led to a back room.

"He's a damn liar!" said the soldier. "I'll bet he savvies English as good as me."

"Gee!" exclaimed one of the girls; "he's sure a good lookin' Siwash." She looked up into Shoz-Dijiji's face and smiled boldly as he approached them on his way across the room toward the closed door; but the face of the Indian remained expressionless, inscrutable.

"They don't none of 'em look good to me," said the other soldier. "This guy was out with Geronimo, and every time I lamp one of their mugs I think maybe it's The Apache Devil. You can't never tell."

The first soldier took hold of Shoz-Dijiji's arm as he was passing and stopped him; then from the bar

he picked up a glass filled with whiskey and offered it to the Apache. , Shoz-Dijiji grunted, shook his head and passed on. The girl laughed.

"I reckon he's got more sense than we have," she said; "he knows enough not to drink 'Dirty's' rot-gut."

"You must be stuck on the Siwash, Goldie," accused the first soldier.

"I might have a mash on a lot o' worse lookin' hombies than him," she shot back, with a toss of her faded, golden curls.

Shoz-Dijiji heard and understood the entire conversation. He had not for nothing spent the "the months of Geronimo's imprisonment at San Carlos in the post school, but not even by the quiver of an eye-lid did he acknowledge that he understood.

At the closed door, unembarrassed by the restrictions of an etiquette that he would have ignored had he been cognizant of it, he turned the knob and stepped into the room beyond without knocking.

Two men were there- a white man and an Indian. They both looked up as Shoz-Dijiji entered. This was the first time that Shoz-Dijiji had been in "Dirty" Cheetim's Hog Ranch. It was the first time that he had seen the proprietor or known who "Dirty" Cheetim was; but he had met him before, and he recognized him immediately.

Instantly there was projected upon the screen of memory a sun scorched canyon, bowlder strewn, through which wound a dusty wagon road. At the summit of the canyon's western wall a young Apache brave crouched hidden beneath a grey blanket that, from the canyon's bottom, looked but another bowlder. He was watching for the coming of the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee that he might carry the word of it back to Geronimo.

Presently three bearded men rode into view. The Apache gazed down upon them with contempt. His fingers, resting upon his rifle, twitched; but he was scouting and must forego this Usen-given opportunity. The men were not soldiers; so they were of no concern to Shoz-Dijiji, the scout.

Suddenly the Apache's attention was attracted by a sound coming from the south, a rhythmical sound that announced the approach of a loping horse. Two of the three men drew quickly behind a great bowlder, the third behind another upon the opposite side of the road. Silence once more enveloped the seemingly deserted canyon.

The Apache waited, watching. The loping horse drew nearer. It entered the lower end of the canyon and presently came within range of Shoz-Dijiji's vision. Its rider was a girl --a white girl. As she came abreast of the three whites they rode directly into the trail and barred her passage, and as she sought to wheel her horse one of them reached out and seized her bridle rein.

The girl reached for a six-shooter that hung at her hip, but another of the three had slipped from his saddle and run to her side. Now he grasped her wrist, tore the weapon from its holster, and dragged the girl to the ground. It was all done very quickly. Shoz-Dijiji watched. His hatred of the men mounted.

He heard the conversation that passed between the men and the girl and understood it--understood that the men were going to take the girl away by force. He saw one of them-- the one that he was facing now in the back room of the Hog Ranch-- jerk the girl roughly and order her to remount her horse.

Then the barrel of a rifle slid quietly from beneath the edge of a grey bowlder at the top of the canyon's wall, there was a loud report that resounded thunderously, and the man whose hand lay upon Wichita Billings dropped in his tracks.

From that moment to this Shoz-Dijiji had thought "Dirty" Cheetim dead, yet here he was in the flesh, looking him straight in the eye and smiling. Shoz-Dijiji knew that Cheetim would not be smiling if he had recognized Shoz- Dijiji.

"How, John!" exclaimed the white man. "Mebby so you want red-eye, eh?"

In no slightest degree did Shoz-Dijiji register by

any changed expression the surprise he felt at seeing this man alive, nor the hatred that he felt for him, nor the terrific urge he experienced to kill him. He looked at him just once, briefly, and then ignored him as he did his greeting and his question. Instead he turned to the Apache standing behind Cheetim.

It was Gian-nah-tah. In one hand he held a glass of whiskey, in the other a bottle. Shoz-Dijiji looked straight into the eyes of his friend for a moment, and those of Gian-nah-tah wavered and dropped beneath the steady, accusing gaze of the Black Bear; then the latter spoke in the language of the Shis-Inday.

"Gian-nah-tah, you are a fool!" said Shoz-Dijiji. "Of all the things that the white-eyed men have to offer the Apache only their weapons and their ammunition are of any value to us--all else is vile. And you, Gian-nah-tah, choose the vilest. You are a fool!

"Our own tizwin and the mescal of the Mexicans is bad medicine, but this fire-water of the white-eyed men is poison. To drink it is the madness of a fool, but even worse is the drinking of it in friendship with the white-eyed dogs.

"You are a fool to drink it- you are a traitor to drink with the enemies of your people. Put down the glass and the bottle, and come with me!"

Gian-nah-tah looked up angrily now. Already he had had a couple of drinks of the vile concoction

and had a couple of drinks of the fine concoction, and they had had their effect upon him.

"Gian-nah-tah is a warrior!" he exclaimed, "not a child. Who are you to tell Gian-nah-tah to do this, or not to do that, or to come or go?"

"I am his best friend," said Shoz-Dijiji, simply.

"Then go away and mind your own business!" snapped Gian-nah-tah, and he raised the glass to his lips.

With the swift, soft sinuosity of a cat Shoz-Dijiji stepped forward and struck the glass from his friend's hand and almost in the same movement seized the bottle and hurled it to the floor.

"Here, you damn Siwash!" cried Cheetim; "what the hell you think you're doin'?" He advanced belligerently. Shoz-Dijiji turned upon the white man. Towering above him he gave the fellow one look that sent him cowering back. Perhaps it was fortunate for the peace of San Carlos that "Dirty" Cheetim had left his gun behind the bar, for he was the type of bad-man that shoots an unarmed adversary.

But Gian-nah-tah, Be-don-ko-he warrior, was not thus a coward; and his finer sensibilities were numbed by the effects of the whiskey he had drunk. He did not shrink from Shoz-Dijiji. Instead, he whipped his knife from its scabbard and struck a savage blow at the breast of his best friend.

Shoz-Dijiji had turned away from Cheetim just in time to meet Gian-nah-tah's attack. Quickly he leaped aside as the knife fell and then sprang close again and seized Gian-nah-tah's knife wrist with the fingers of his left hand. Like a steel vise his grip tightened. Gian-nah-tah struck at him with his free hand, but Shoz-Dijiji warding the blow.

"Drop it !" commanded the Black Bear and struck Gian-nah-tah across the face with his open palm. The latter struggled to free himself, striking futilely at the giant that held him.

"Drop it!" repeated Shoz-Dijiji. Again he struck Gian-nah-tah--and again, and again. His grasp tightened upon the other's wrist, stopping the circulation--until Gian-nah-tah thought that his bones were being crushed. His fingers relaxed. The knife clattered to the floor. Shoz-Dijiji stooped quickly and recovered it; then he released his hold upon Gian-nah-tah.

"Go!" commanded the Black Bear, pointing toward the doorway.

For an instant Gian-nah-tah hesitated; then he turned and walked from the room. Without even a glance in the direction of Cheetim, Shoz-Dijiji followed his friend. As they passed the bar the girl called Goldie smiled into the face of Shoz-Dijiji.

"Come down and see me sometime, John," she said.

Without a word or a look the Apache passed out of the building, away from the refining influences of white man's civilization.

Sullenly, Gian-nah-tah walked to where two ponies were tied. From the tie-rail he unfastened the hackamore rope of one of them and vaulted to the animal's back. In silence Shoz-Dijiji handed Gian-nah-tah his knife. In silence the other Apache took it, wheeled his pony, and loped away toward the Be-don-ko-he village. Astride Nejeunee Shoz-Dijiji followed slowly--erect, silent, somber; only his heart was bowed, in sorrow.

As Shoz-Dijiji approached the village he met Geronimo and two warriors riding in the direction of the military post. They were angry and excited. The old War Chief beckoned Shoz-Dijiji to join them.

"What has happened?" asked the Black Bear.

"The soldiers have come and driven away our herd," replied Geronimo.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to see Nan-tan-des-la-par-en," replied Geronimo, "and ask him why the soldiers have stolen our horses and cattle. It is always thus when we would live at peace with the white-eyed men they will not let us. Always they do something that arouses the anger of the Shis-Inday and makes the young braves want to go upon the war trail. Now, if

they do not give us back our cattle, it will be difficult to keep the young men in peace upon the reservation--or the old men either."

At the post Geronimo rode directly to headquarters and demanded to see General Crook, and a few minutes later the four braves were ushered into the presence of the officer.

"I have been expecting you, Geronimo,," said Crook.

"Then you knew that the soldiers were going to steal our herds?" demanded the War Chief.

"They have not stolen them, Geronimo," replied the officer. "It is you who stole them. They do not belong to you. The soldiers have taken them away from you to return them to their rightful owners. Every time you steal horses or cattle they will be taken away from you and returned. You promised me once that you would not steal any more, but yet you went out and killed and stole."

"We did not go upon the war trail against the white-eyed men," replied Geronimo. "We were going down into Mexico, and your soldiers attacked us and tried to stop us."

"It was the Apaches who started the fight at Apache Pass," Crook reminded him.

"It was the Apaches who fired the first shot," corrected Geronimo. "but they did not start the

fight. You started it by sending troops to stop us. We are neither fools nor children. We knew why those troops were marching to Apache Pass. Had they seen us first they would have fired the first shot. you cannot say that we started the fight just because our chiefs and our warriors are better soldiers than yours. You would have been glad enough to have surprised us, but you were not wise enough."

Crook smiled. "You say you are not a fool nor a child, Geronimo," he said. "Well, neither am I. You went out with a bad heart to kill innocent people and rob them. It got too hot for you in Mexico, and so you came back here and brought your stolen herds with you. You are no fool, Geronimo! and so I know you were not foolish enough to think that we would let you keep these cattle. I do not know why you did it, unless you just wanted to make more trouble."

"I did not want to make trouble," replied the chief. "We were at war with the Mexicans. We took the horses and cattle as spoils of war. They belong to us. They do not belong to you. They were not taken from your people but from Mexicans. Your own country has been at war with Mexico in the past. Did you return everything that you took from them at that time?"

"But we are not at war with them now. We are friends. You cannot steal from our friends. If we let you they will say that we are not their friends."

"That IS not true," replied Geronimo. "The Mexicans are not fools, either. They know the difference between Apaches and white-eyed men. They know that it was the Apaches, with whom they are at war, who took their herds. They do not think that it was you. If you take the herds from us and return them to the Mexicans, both the Mexicans and the Apaches will think that you are fools. If you took them and kept them, that would be different. That is precisely what I, we did and what we would do again. You say that you do not want to be at war with the Apaches--that we are good friends! How then can you make me believe that it is right to take cattle from your friends?" Crook shook his head. "It's no use, Geronimo," he said. "How can we live if you take our herds from us?" demanded the Apache. "With these cattle and horses we were rich. We did not intend to kill them. We were going to breed them and thus, become richer, so that we would not have to go out raiding again. It was our chance to live comfortably and in peace with the white-eyed men. Now you have taken this chance from us. We cannot live here and starve."

"You do not have to starve," replied Crook. "The government rations are ample to take care of you."

"We do not get them. You know that we do not get them. The Agent robs us. Every man knows that. Now you rob us. I told you that I wished to live in peace with the white-eyed men, but I cannot

control the young men when they learn that you will not return their cattle and horses. If they make trouble do not blame me. I did not do it. You did it. I have spoken!"

"There will be no trouble, Geronimo," said Crook, "if you do not start it. I cannot give you back the cattle. Go back to your camp and tell your people that. Tell them that the next time they go out and kill and steal I shall not be as easy with them. The next time they will be punished, just as any murderers are. Do you hear?"

"Geronimo hears, but he does not understand," replied the War Chief. "Usen seems to have made one set of laws for the Apaches and another for the white-eyed men. It is right for the white-eyed men to come into the country of the Apaches and steal their land and kill their game and shut the Apaches up on reservations and shoot them if they try to go to some other part of their own country; but it is wrong for the Apaches to fight with the Mexicans who have been their natural enemies since long before the white-eyed men came to the country. It is wrong for the Apaches to profit by their victories against their enemies.

"Yes, Geronimo hears; but he does not understand."

Three--"No SABLE!"

AS Shoz-Dijiji followed Geronimo and the two braves from General Crook's office, a white girl chanced to be passing in front of head-quarters. Her eyes and the eyes of Shoz-Dijiji met, and into the eyes of the girl leaped the light of recognition and pleasure.

"Shoz-Dijiji!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad to see you again." The brave stopped and looked gravely into her face, listening to her words. "I am visiting with Mrs. Cullis. Won't you come and see me?"

"No sabe," said Shoz-Dijiji and brushed past her to rejoin his fellows.

A flush of mortification colored the face of Wichita Billings; and the fire of anger and resentment lighted her eyes, but the flush quickly faded and, as quickly, an expression of sorrow supplanted that of displeasure. For a moment she stood looking after the tall, straight form of the Apache as he walked toward his pony; and then, with a sigh, she resumed her way.

A white man, coming from the canteen, had witnessed the meeting between Shoz-Dijiji and Wichita Billings. He had recognized the girl immediately and the Indian as the same that had, a short time before, spoiled a sale for him and smashed a bottle of whiskey upon the floor of his back room.

He was surprised to see Wichita Billings at the next end of the room again in his direction he

post, and as she turned again in his direction he stepped quickly behind the corner of a building and waited there until she had passed.

The natural expression that mirrored in the face of "Dirty" Cheetim, whatever atrophied thing may have done questionable duty as his soul, was evil; but peculiarly unclean was the look in his eyes as he watched the girl walking briskly along the path that led to the officers' quarters.

Presently his eyes wandered to the figure of the Apache brave riding across the parade on the pinto stallion, and his brows contracted in thought. Where had he seen that buck before? --a long time before. There was something mighty familiar about him--something that Cheetim had not noticed until he saw the Indian talking with Wichita Billings; but even so he failed to connect the associated ideas that had subconsciously aroused the suggestion of previous familiarity, and so, dismissing the matter from his mind, he went on about his affairs.

Geronimo rode back to the camp of the Be-donko-he in silence. It was as impossible for him to get the viewpoint of the white man as it was for the white man to get the viewpoint of the Apache. He felt that he had been treated with rank injustice and treachery. Geronimo was furious', yet his stern, inscrutable face gave no evidence of what was passing in his savage brain. He did not rant nor rave, raising his voice in loud oaths, as might a white man under stress of similar circumstance.

Geronimo dismounted before his hogan and turned to Shoz- Dijiji and the others who had accompanied him. "Tell the braves of the Be-don-ko-he that Geronimo is going away from San Carlos," he said. "Perhaps they would like to come and talk with Geronimo before he goes."

As the three braves rode away through the village Geronimo sat down before the entrance to his hogan. "Geronimo cannot live in peace with thieves and liars, Morning Star," he said to his wife. "Therefore we shall go away and live as Usen intended that we should live. He never meant that we should live with the white-eyed men."

"We are going on the war trail again?" asked Sons-ee-ah- ray.

Geronimo shook his head. "No," he replied. "If they will leave Geronimo alone he will not fight the pindah-lickoyee again. Geronimo wishes only to lead his own life in his own way far from any pindah-lickoyee. In that way only lies peace."

"Sons-ee-ah-ray will be glad to leave San Carlos," said the squaw. "She will be glad to go anywhere to get away from the white-eyed men. They are bad. Their women are bad, and ,they think because their women are bad that the Apache women are bad. The white-eyed men make bad talk to Sons-ee-ah-ray when she passes them on her way to the Agency. She will be glad not to hear this talk any more.

"Geronimo knows that Sons-ee-ah-ray, the mother of his children, is a good woman. Why, then, do the white-eyed men talk thus to her?"

The War Chief shook his head. "I do not know," he said. "I do not understand the white-eyed men."

When the warriors of the Be-don-ko-he gathered, many of the older men appeared apprehensive. They looked sad and worried but the young men were excited and gay. Many of the latter were already painting their faces, but when Geronimo saw this he frowned and shook his head.

"Geronimo is going away," he said, "because he can no longer live under the conditions that the white-eyed men impose and still maintain his self respect; but he does not mean, as some of the young men seem to think, that he is going to take the war trail against the pindah-lickoyee.

"With his family he is going up somewhere around Fort Apache and live in the mountains where he will not have to see any white-eyes."

"We will go with you!" said many of the Be-don-ko-he.

"No," remonstrated Geronimo. "If you go with me the Agent will say that Geronimo has gone out again with his warriors, but if only Geronimo and his own family go the Agent cannot say that Geronimo has gone upon the war trail. "If you come with me they

will send soldiers after us; and then there will be war, and already there have been enough of us killed. Therefore Geronimo goes alone.

"Shoz-Dijji, my son, will remain here for a while and learn if the white-eyed men are going to make trouble because Geronimo has left San Carlos. If they do, he will bring the word to me; and then I shall know what next to do; but I shall not return to San Carlos to be treated like a fool and a child--no, not I, Geronimo, War Chief of all the Apaches!"

And so that night Geronimo, with all his family except Shoz-Dijji, rode silently northward toward Fort Apache; and at San Carlos the Indians, the Agent and the soldiers slept in peaceful ignorance of this event that was so soon to lead to the writing of one of history's bloodiest pages. After Geronimo had left, Shoz-Dijji sought out Gian-nah-tah with whom he had had no opportunity to speak since the moment of their altercation in the Hog Ranch. In the heart of the Black Bear was only love for this friend of his childhood; and while he knew that Gian-nah-tah had been very angry with him at the time, he attributed this mostly to the effect of the whiskey he had drunk, believing that when this had worn off, and Gian-nah-tah had had time to reflect, he would harbor no ill will.

Shoz-Dijji found his friend sitting alone over a tiny fire and came and squatted down beside him. Neither spoke, but that was nothing unusual. Near by, before her hogan, a squaw was praying to the

moon. "Gun-ju-le, klego-m-ay," she chanted.

At a little distance a warrior cast hoddentin into the air and prayed: "Gun-ju-le, chil-jilt, Si-chi-zi, gun-ju-le, inzayu, ijanale," Be good, O Night; Twilight, be good; do not let me die. "Peace and quiet lay upon the camp of the Be-don-ko-he.

"Today," said Shoz-Dijiji, "I recognized the white-eyed man who sells fire-water to the Apaches. He is the man who tried to steal the white-eyed girl that day that Gian-nah-tah and Shoz-Dijiji were scouting near the hogan of her father.

"I thought that I killed him that day; but. today I saw him again, selling fire-water to Gian-nah-tah. He is a very bad man. Some day I shall kill him; but I shall do it when no one is around to see, for the white-eyed fools would put me in prison as quickly for killing a bad man as a good."

Gian-nah-tah made no reply. Shoz-Dijiji turned and looked into the face of his friend. "Is Gian-nah-tah still angry?" he asked.

Gian-nah-tah arose, turned around, and squatted down again with his back toward Shoz-Dijiji. The Black Bear shook his head sadly; then he stood up. For a moment he hesitated as though about to speak; but instead he turned, drew his blanket more closely about him, and walked away. His heart was heavy. During his short life he had seen many of his friends killed in battle; he had seen little Ish-kay-nav. his first love. die in his arms. slain by the bullet

of a white man; he had seen the look of horror in the eyes of the white girl he had grown to love, when he had avowed that love; he had just seen his father and his mother driven by the injustices of the white conqueror from the society of their own kind; and now he had lost his best friend. The heart of Shoz-Dijji, the Black Bear, was heavy indeed.

Wichita Billings was visiting in the home of Margaret Cullis at the post. The two were sitting in the modest parlor, the older woman sewing, the younger reading. Presently Wichita closed her book and laid it on the table.

"I can't seem to get interested," she said. "I don't feel very 'literary' tonight."

"You haven't been yourself all day," said Mrs. Cullis. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"I feel all right, physically," replied the girl, "but I'm blue."

"About what?"

"O, nothing--I just feel blue. Didn't you ever feel that way when there wasn't any reason for it?"

"There usually is a reason."

"I suppose so. Perhaps it's in the air." There was a silence that lasted a minute or two. Lieutenant King's calling this evening."

"I'm sure that shouldn't make you blue, my dear girl," exclaimed Margaret Cullis, laughing.

"Well, it doesn't cheer me up much, because I know what he's going to say; and I know what I'm going to answer. It's always the same thing." "I can't see why you don't love him, Wichita. It would be a wonderful match for you."

"Yes, for me; but not for him. His people would be ashamed of me,"

"Don't be silly! There isn't any man or any family too good for you--I doubt if there is any good enough for you."

"You're a dear, but the fact remains that they are stiff-backed Bostonians with more culture than there is in the whole state that I came from and a family tree that started as a seedling in the Garden of Eden, while I got most of my education out of a mail order catalog; and if I ever had a family tree it must have been blown away by a Kansas cyclone while my folks were fighting Indians.

"And speaking of Indians, whom do you think I saw today?"

"Who?"

"Shoz-Dijiji!"

Margaret Cullis looked up quickly. Was it the intonation of the girl's voice as she spoke the name!

The older woman frowned and looked down at her work again. "What did he have to say?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Oh, you didn't see him to talk with?"

"Yes, but he wouldn't talk to me. He just fell back on that maddening 'No sabe' that they use with strangers."

"Why do you suppose he did that?" asked Mrs. Cullis.

"I hurt him the last time I saw him," replied Wichita.

"Hurt one of Geronimo's renegades! Child, it can't be done."

"They're human!" replied the girl. "I learned that in the days that I spent in Geronimo's camp while Chief Loco was out with his hostiles. Among themselves they are entirely different people from those we are accustomed to see on the reservation. No one who has watched them with their children, seen them at their games, heard them praying to Dawn and Twilight, to the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars as they cast their sacred hoddentin to the winds would ever again question their possession of the finer instincts of sentiment and imagination.

"Because they do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves, because they are not blatant in the

declaration of their finer emotions, does not mean that they feel no affection or that they are incapable of experiencing spiritual suffering."

"Perhaps," said Margaret Cullis j "but you, who have lived in Indian country all your life, who have seen the heartless cruelties they inflict upon their helpless victims, who know their treachery and their dishonesty, cannot but admit that whatever qualities of goodness they possess are far outweighed by those others which have made them hated and feared the length and breadth of the Southwest."

"For every wrong that they have committed," argued Wichita, "they can point out a similar crime perpetrated upon them by the whites. O, Margaret, it is the old case again of the pot calling the kettle black. We have tortured them and wronged them even more than they have tortured and wronged us.

"We esteem personal comfort and life as our two most sacred possessions. When the Apaches torture and kill us we believe that they have committed against us the most hideous of conceivable crimes.

"On the other hand the Apaches do not esteem personal comfort and life as highly as do we and consequently, by their standards--and we may judge a people justly only by their own standards--we have not suffered as much as they, who esteem more highly than life or personal comfort the sanctity of their ancient rites and customs and the

chastity of their women. From the time of the white man's first contact with the Apaches he has ridiculed the one and defiled the other.

"I have talked with Shoz-Dijiji, and Geronimo, with Sons- ee-ah-ray, and many another Be-don-ko-he man and woman; they have laid bare their hearts to me, and never again can anyone convince me that we have not tortured the Apaches with as malignant cruelty as they have tortured us."

"Why you are a regular little Apache yourself, Wichita," cried Margaret Cullis. "I wonder what your father would say if he could hear you."

"He has heard me. Don't think for a minute that I am afraid to express my views to anyone."

"Did he enjoy them and agree with you?"

"He did not. He did everything but tear his hair and take me out to the woodshed. You know Mason was killed about two months ago, and it had all the ear-marks of an Apache killing. Mason was one of Dad's best friends. Now, every time he thinks or hears Apache he sees red."

"I don't blame him," said Margaret Cullis.

"It's silly," snapped Wichita, "and I tell him so. It would be just as logical to hate all French-Canadians because Guiteau assassinated President Garfield."

"Well, how in the world, feeling toward the Apaches as you do, could you have found it in your heart to so wound Shoz-Dijiji that he will not speak to you?"

"I did not mean to," explained the girl. "It--just happened. We had been together for many days after the Chi-e-a-hen attacked the Pringe ranch and Shoz-Dijiji got me away from them. The country was full of hostiles, and so he took me to the safest place he could think of--the Be- don-ko-he camp. They kept me there until they were sure that all the hostiles had crossed the border into Mexico. He was lovely to me--a white man could have been no more considerate--but when he got me home again and was about to leave me he told me that he loved me.

"I don't know what it was, Margaret--inherited instinct, perhaps--but the thought of it revolted me, and he must have seen it in my face. He went away, and I never saw him again--until today--three years."

The older woman looked up quickly from her work. There had been a note in the girl's voice as she spoke those last two words that aroused sudden apprehension in the breast of Margaret Cullis.

"Wichita," she demanded, "do you love this--this Apache?"

"Margaret," replied the girl. "you have been like a

sister to me, or a mother. No one else could ask me that question. I have not even dared ask myself." She paused. "No, I cannot love him!"

"It would be unthinkable that you would love an Indian, Wichita," said the older woman. "It would cut you off forever from your own kind and would win you only the contempt of the Indians. A white girl had better be dead than married to an Indian."

Wichita nodded. "Yes, I know," she whispered, "and yet he is as fine as any man, white or red, that I have ever known."

"Perhaps, but the fact remains that he is an Apache."

"I wish to God that he were white!" exclaimed the girl.

A knock on the door put an end to their conversation, and Wichita arose from her chair and crossed the room to admit the caller. A tall, good looking subaltern stood smiling on the threshold as the door swung in.

"You're prompt," said Wichita.

"A good soldier always is," said Mrs. Cullis. "That is equivalent to a medal of honor, coming from the wife of my troop commander," laughed King as he stepped into the room.

"Give me your cap," said Wichita. "and bring that

nice easy chair up here beside the table."

"I was going to suggest that we take a walk," said King, "that is if you ladies would care to. It's a gorgeous night."

"Suits me," agreed Wichita. "How about you, Margaret?"

"I want to finish my sewing. You young folks run along and have your walk, and perhaps Captain Cullis will be here when you get back. If he is we'll have a game of euchre."

"I wish you'd come," said Wichita.

"Yes, do!" begged King, but Mrs. Cullis only smiled and shook her head.

"Run along now," she cried gaily, "and don't forget the game."

"We'll not be gone long," King assured her. "I wish you'd come with us."

"Sweet boy," thought Margaret Cullis as the door closed behind them leaving her alone. "Sweet boy, but not very truthful."

As Wichita and King stepped out into the crisp, cool air of an Arizona night the voice of the sentry at the guard house rang out clearly against the silence: "Number One, eight o'clock!" They paused to listen as the next sentry passed the call on:

"Number Two, eight o'clock. All's well!" Around the chain of sentries it went, fainter in the distance, growing again in volume to the final, "All's well!" of Number One.

"I thought you said it was a gorgeous night," remarked Wichita Billings. "There is no moon, it's cloudy and dark as a pocket."

"But I still insist that it is gorgeous," said King, smiling. "All Arizona nights are."

"I don't like these black ones," said Wichita; "I've lived in Indian country too long. Give me the moon every time."

"They scarcely ever attack at night," King reminded her.

"I know, but there may always be an exception to prove the rule."

"Not much chance that they will attack the post," said King.

"I know that, but the fact remains that a black night always suggests the possibility to me."

"I'll admit that the sentries do suggest a larger assurance of safety on a night like this," said King. "We at least know that we shall have a little advance information before any Apache is among us."

Numbers Three and Four were mounted posts, and at the very instant that King was speaking a shadowy form crept between the two sentries as they rode slowly in opposite directions along their posts. It was Shoz-Dijji.

Though the Apache had demonstrated conclusively that Wichita Billings' intuitive aversion to dark nights might be fully warranted, yet in this particular instance no danger threatened the white inhabitants of the army post, as Shoz-Dijji's mission was hostile only in the sense that it was dedicated to espionage.

Geronimo had charged him with the duty of ascertaining the attitude of the white officers toward the departure of the War Chief from the reservation, and with this purpose in view the Black Bear had hit upon the bold scheme of entering the post and reporting Geronimo's departure in person that he might have first hand knowledge of Nantandes-la-par-en's reaction.

He might have come in openly in the light of day without interference, but it pleased him to come as he did as a demonstration of the superiority of Apache cunning and of his contempt for the white man's laws.

He moved silently in the shadows of buildings, making his way toward the adobe shack that was dignified by the title of Headquarters. Once he was compelled to stop for several minutes in the dense shadow at the end of a building as he saw two

shadow at the end of a building as he saw two figures approaching slowly. Nearer and nearer they came. Shoz-Dijiji saw that one was an officer, a war chief of the pindah-lickoyee, and the other was a woman. They were talking earnestly. When they were quite close to Shoz-Dijiji, the white officer stopped and laid a hand upon the arm of his companion.

"Wait, Wichita," he said. "Before we go in can't you give me some hope for the future? I'm willing to wait. Don't you think that some day you might care for me a little?"

The girl walked on, followed by the man. "I care for you a great deal, Ad," Shoz-Dijiji heard her say in a low voice just before the two passed out of his hearing; "but I can never care for you in the way you wish." That, Shoz-Dijiji did not hear.

"You love someone else?" he asked. In the darkness he did not see the hot flush that overspread her face as she replied. "I am afraid so," she said.

"Afraid so! What do you mean?"

"It is something that I cannot tell you, Ad. It hurts me to talk about it."

"Does he know that you love him?"

"No."

"Is it anyone I know?"

"Please, Ad, I don't like to talk about it."

Lieutenant Samuel Adams King walked on in silence at the girl's side until they reached Mrs. Cullis' door. "I'm going to wait--and hope, Chita," he said just before they entered the house.

Captain Cullis had not returned, and the three sat and chatted for a few minutes; but it was evident to Margaret Cullis that something had occurred to dash the spirits of her young guests, nor was she at a loss to guess the truth. Being very fond of them both; believing that they were eminently suited to one another, and, above all, being a natural born match maker, Margaret Cullis was determined to leave no stone unturned that might tend toward a happy consummation of her hopes.

"You know that Chita is leaving us in the morning?" she asked King, by way of inaugurating her campaign.

"Why, no," he exclaimed, "she did not tell me."

"I should have told you before you left," said the girl. "I wouldn't go without saying good-bye, you know."

"I should hope not," said King.

"She really should not take that long ride alone," volunteered Mrs. Cullis.

"It is nothing," exclaimed Wichita. "I've been riding alone ever since I can recall."

"Of course she shouldn't," said King. "It's not safe. I'll get leave to ride home with you. May I?"

"I'd love to have you, but really it's not necessary."

"I think it is," said King. "I'll go over to headquarters now and arrange it. I think there'll be no objections raised."

"I'm leaving pretty early," warned Wichita. "What time?"

"Five o'clock."

"I'll be here!"

Four--GIAN-NAH-TAH RELENTS

I CARE for you a great deal, Ad!" Shoz-Dijji heard these words and recognized the voice of the girl who had spurned his love. Now he recognized her companion also.

Wounded pride, racial hatred, the green eyed monster, jealousy, clamored at the gates of his self-restraint, sought to tear down the barriers and loose the savage warrior upon the authors of his misery. His hand crept to the hunting knife at his hip, the

the hand crept to the hanging knife at his hip, the only weapon that he carried; , but Shoz-Dijji was master of his own will; and the two passed on, out of his sight, innocent of any faintest consciousness that they had paused within the shadow of the Apache Devil.

A half hour later a tall, straight figure loomed suddenly before the sentry at Headquarters. The cavalryman, dismounted, snapped his carbine to port as he challenged: "Halt! Who is there?"

"I have come to talk with Nan-tan-des-la-par-en," said Shoz-Dijji in Apache.

"Hell!" muttered the sentry, "if it ain't a damned Siwash," and shouted for the corporal of the guard. "Stay where you are, John," he cautioned the Indian, "until the corporal comes, or I'll have to make a good Indian of you."

"No sabe," said Shoz-Dijji.

"You'd better savvy," warned the soldier.

The corporal of the guard appeared suddenly out of the darkness. "Wot the hell now?" he demanded. "Who the hell's this?"

"It's a God damn Siwash."

"How the hell did he get inside the lines?"

"How the hell should I know? Here he is, and he don't savvy United States."

The corporal addressed Shoz-Dijji. "Wot the hell you want here, John?" he demanded.

Again the Apache replied in his own tongue. "Try Mex on him," suggested the sentry.

"Some of'em savvy that lingo all right."

In broken, badly broken, Spanish the corporal of the guard repeated his questions.

"No sabe," lied Shoz-Dijji again.

"Hadn't you better shove him in the guard house?" suggested the sentry. "He aint got no business inside the post at night."

"I think he wants to talk to the Old Man--he keeps sayin' that fool Siwash name they got for Crook. You hold him here while I goes and reports to the O.D. And say, if he ain't good don't forget that it costs Uncle Sam less to bury a Injun than to feed him."

It chanced that the Officer of the Day was one of the few white men in the southwest who understood even a little of the language of the Apaches, and when he returned with the corporal he asked Shoz-Dijji what he wanted.

"I have a message for Nan-tan-des-la-par-en!!" replied the Apache.

"You may give it to me!" said the officer. "I will tell General Crook."

"My message is for General Crook! not for you," replied Shoz-Dijji.

"General Crook will be angry if you bother him now with some matter that is not important. You had better tell me."

"It is important," replied Shoz-Dijji.

"Come with me," directed the officer, and led the way into the headquarters building.

"Please inform General Crook," he said to the orderly in the outer office, "that Captain Crawford has an Apache here who says that he brings an important message for the General."

A moment later Shoz-Dijji and Captain Crawford stepped into General Crook's presence. Captain Cullis was sitting at one end of the table behind which Crook sat, while Lieutenant King stood facing the commanding officer from whom he had just requested leave to escort Wichita Billings to her home.

"Just a moment King," said Crook. "You needn't leave."

"Well, Crawford," turning to the Officer of the Day, "what does this man want?"

"He says that he has an important message for you, sir. He refuses to deliver it to anyone else; neither and as he apparently speaks nor understands English I came with him to interpret, if you wish, sir."

"Very good! Tell him that I say you are to interpret his message. Ask him who he is and what he wants."

Crawford repeated Crook's words to Shoz-Dijiji.

"Tell Nan-tan-des-la-par-en that I am Shoz-Dijiji, the son of Geronimo. I have come to tell him that my father has left the reservation."

Shoz-Dijiji saw in the faces of the men about him the effect of his words. To announce that Geronimo had gone out again was like casting a bomb into a peace meeting.

"Ask him where Geronimo has gone and how many warriors are with him," snapped Crook.

"Geronimo has not gone on the war trail," replied Shoz-Dijiji after Crawford had put the question to him, waiting always for the interpretation of Crook's words though he understood them perfectly in English. "There are no warriors with Geronimo other than his son. He has taken his wife with him and his small children. He wishes only to go away and live in peace. He cannot live in peace with the white-eyed men. He does not wish to fight the white-eyed soldiers any more."

"Where has he gone?" asked Crook again.

"He has gone toward Sonora," lied Shoz-Dijiji, that being the opposite of the direction taken by Geronimo; but Shoz-Dijiji was working with the cunning of an Apache. He knew well that Geronimo's absence from the reservation might well come to the attention of the authorities on the morrow; and he hoped that by announcing it himself and explaining that it was not the result of warlike intentions they might pass it over and let the War Chief live where he wished, but if not then it would give Geronimo time to make good his escape if the troops were sent upon a wild goose chase toward Sonora, while it would also allow Shoz-Dijiji ample time to overhaul his father and report the facts. Furthermore, by bringing the message himself and by assuming ignorance of English, he was in a position where he might possibly learn the plans of the white-eyed men concerning Geronimo. All-in-all, Shoz-Dijiji felt that his strategy was not without merit. Crook sat in silence for a moment, tugging on his great beard. Presently he turned to Captain Cullis. "Hold yourself in readiness to march at daylight, Cullis, with all the available men of your troop. Proceed by the most direct route to Apache Pass and try to pick up the trail. Bring Geronimo back, alive if you can. If he resists, kill him. Crawford, I shall have you relieved immediately. You also will march at dawn. Go directly south. You will each send out detachments to the east and west. Keep in touch with one another. Whatever

else you do, bring back Geronimo!"

He swung back toward Shoz-Dijiji. "Crawford, give this man some tobacco for bringing me this information, and see that he is passed through the sentries and sent back to his camp. Tell him that Geronimo had no business leaving the reservation and that he will have to come back, but do not let him suspect that we are sending troops after him."

The corporal of the guard escorted Shoz-Dijiji through the line of sentries, and as they were about to part the Apache handed the soldier the sack of tobacco that Captain Crawford had given him.

"You're not such a bad Indian, at that," commented the corporal, "but," he added, scratching his head, "I'd like to know how in hell you got into the post in the first place."

"Me no sabe," said Shoz-Dijiji.

Mrs. Cullis arose early the following morning and went directly to Wichita's room, where she found her guest already dressed in flannel shirt, buckskin skirt, and high heeled boots, ready for her long ride back to the Billings' ranch.

"I thought I'd catch you before you got dressed," said the older woman.

"Why?"

"You can't go today. Geronimo has gone out

again. 'B' Troop and Captain Crawford's scouts have started after him already. Both Captain Cullis and Mister King have gone out with 'B' Troop; but even if there were anyone to go with you, it won't be safe until they have Geronimo back on the reservation again."

"How many went out with him?" asked the girl.

"Only his wife and children. The Indians say he has not gone on the war path, but I wouldn't take any chances with the bloodthirsty old scoundrel."

"I'm not afraid,!" said Wichita. "As long as it's only Geronimo I'm in no danger even if I meet him, which I won't. You know we are old friends."

"Yes, I know all about that; but I know you can't trust an Apache."

"I trust them," said Wichita. She stooped and buckled on her spurs.

"You don't mean that you are going anyway!"

"Why of course I am."

Margaret Cullis shook her head. "What am I to do?" she demanded helplessly.

"Give me a cup of coffee before I leave," suggested Wichita.

The business at the Hog Ranch had been good that

night. Two miners and a couple of cattlemen, all well staked, had dropped in early in the evening for a couple of drinks and a few rounds of stud. They were still there at daylight, but they were no longer well staked.

"Dirty" Cheetim and three or four of his cronies had annexed their bank rolls. The four guests were sleeping off the effects of their pleasant evening on the floor of the back room.

"Dirty" and his pals had come out on the front porch to inhale a breath of fresh air before retiring. An Indian, lithe, straight, expressionless of face, was approaching the building.

"Hello, John!" said "Dirty" Cheetim through a wide yawn. "What for you want?"

"Whiskey," said the Apache. "Le'me see the' color of your dust, John."

A rider coming into view from the direction of the post attracted Cheetim's attention. "Wait till we see who that is," he said. "I don't want none of those damn long hairs catchin' me dishin' red-eye to no Siwash."

They all stood watching the approaching rider. "Why it's a woman," said one of the men.

"Durned if it ain't," admitted another. "Hell!" exclaimed Cheetim. "It's Billings' girl- the dirty --!"

"What you got agin' her ?" asked one of the party.

"Got against her? Plenty! I offered to marry her, and she turned me down flat. Then her old man run me offen the ranch. It was lucky for him that they was a bunch of his cow-hands hangin' around."

The girl passed, her horse swinging along in an easy, running walk- the gait that eats up the miles. Down the dusty trail they passed while the five white men and the Apache stood on the front porch of the Hog Ranch and watched.

"Neat little heifer," commented one of the former.

"You fellers want to clean up a little dust?" asked Cheetim.

"How?" asked the youngest of the party, a puncher who drank too much to be able to hold a job even in this country of hard drinking men.

"Help me c'ral that critter--she'd boom business in the Hog Ranch."

"We've helped you put your iron on lots of mavericks; Dirty," said the young man. "Whatever you says goes with me."

"Bueno! We'll just slap on our saddles and follow along easy like till she gets around Pimos Canyon. They's a old shack up there that some dude built for huntin', but it ain't been used since the bronchos went out under Juh in '81--say, that just natch'rly

scart that dude plumb out o' the country. I'll keep her up there a little while in case anyone raises a stink, and after it blows over I'll fetch her down to the Ranch. Now who's this a-comin' ?"

From the direction of the post a mounted trooper was approaching at a canter. He drew rein in front of the Hog Ranch.

"Hello, you dirty bums!" he greeted them, with a grin. "You ain't worth it, but orders is orders, and mine is to notify the whites in this neck o' the woods that Geronimo's gone out again. I hope to Christ he gets you," and the messenger spurred on along the trail.

Cheetim turned to the Apache. "Is that straight, John ?" he asked. "Has Geronimo gone out?"

The Indian nodded affirmatively.

"Now I reckon we got to hang onto our scalps with both hands for another couple months," wailed the young puncher.

"Geronimo no go on war trail," explained the Apache. "Him just go away reservation. Him no kill."

"Well, if he ain't on the war-path we might as well mosey along after the Billings heifer," said Cheetim, with a sigh of relief. He turned to the Indian. "I ain't got no time now!" he said. "You come round tomorrow--maybe so I fix you up then, eh?"

The Apache nodded. "Mebbe so, mebbe not," he replied, enigmatically; but Cheetim, who had already started for the corral, failed to note any hidden meaning in the words of the Indian. Perhaps none had been intended. One seldom knows what may be in the mind of an Apache.

As the five men saddled and prepared to ride after Wichita Billings the Indian started back toward the reservation. He had not understood every word that the white men had spoken; but he had understood enough, coupled with his knowledge of the sort of men they were, to fully realize their purpose and the grave danger that threatened the white girl.

In the heart of Gian-nah-tah was no love for her. In the breast of Gian-nah-tah burned sullen resentment and anger against Shoz-Dijiji. When Cheetim's purpose with the girl had first dawned upon him it had not occurred to him that he might interfere. The girl had spurned Shoz-Dijiji. Perhaps it would be better if she were out of the way. But he knew that Shoz-Dijiji loved her and that even though she did not love the war chief of the Bedon-ko-he he would protect her from injury if he could.

He recalled how Shoz-Dijiji had struck the whiskey from his hand the previous day; he felt the blows upon his face as Shoz-Dijiji slapped him; he burned at recollection of the indignities that had been put upon him before the eyes of the white-eyed man; but he kept on in the direction of the Be-

eyed man, but he kept on in the direction of the Ed-don-ko-he camp.

They say that an Apache is never moved by chivalry or loyalty- only by self-interest; but this day Gian-nah-tah gave the lie to the author of this calumny.

As Wichita Billings was about to pass the mouth of Pimos Canyon she heard the sound of galloping hoofs behind her. In effete society it is not considered proper for a young lady to turn and scrutinize chance wayfarers upon the same road; but the society of Arizona in the '80's was young and virile- so young and so virile that it behooved one to investigate it before it arrived within shooting distance.

Impelled, therefore, by a deep regard for Nature's first law Wichita turned in her saddle and examined the approaching horsemen. Instantly she saw that they were five and white. It occurred to her that perhaps they had seen her pass and were coming to warn her that Geronimo was out, for she knew that word of it would have passed quickly throughout the country.

As the riders neared she thought that she recognized something vaguely familiar in the figure and carriage of one of them, for in a country where people go much upon horseback individual idiosyncrasies of seat and form are quickly and easily observable and often serve to identify a rider at considerable distances.

Cheetim rode with an awkward forward hunch and his right elbow higher than his left. It was by these that Wichita recognized him even before she saw his face; though she was naturally inclined to doubt her own judgment, since she had believed "Dirty" Cheetim dead for several years.

An instant later she discerned his whiskered face. While she did not know that these men were pursuing her, she was quite confident that there would be trouble the instant that Cheetim recognized her; and so she spurred on at a faster gait, intending to keep ahead of the five without actually seeming to be fleeing them.

But that was to be more easily planned than executed, for the instant that she increased her speed they spurred after her at a run, shouting to her to stop. She heard them call that Geronimo was out, but she was more afraid of Cheetim than she was of Geronimo.

So insistent were they upon overtaking her that presently her horse was extended at full speed, but as it is seldom that a horse that excels in one gait is proportionally swift at others it was soon apparent that she would be overhauled.

Leaning forward along her horse's neck, she touched him again with her spurs and spoke encouraging words in his back-laid ears. The incentive of spur and spoken word, the lesser wind resistance of her new position, had their effects with

resistance of her new position, had their effects with the result that for a short time she drew away from her pursuers; but presently the young cow-puncher, plying long rowels, wielding pliant, rawhide quirt that fell with stinging blows alternately upon either flank of his wiry mount, edged closer.

"Hold on, Miss!" he called to her. "You gotta come back -- Geronimo's out!"

"You go back and tell 'Dirty' Cheetim to lay off," she shouted back over her shoulder. "If I've got to choose between him and Geronimo, I'll take the Apache."

"You better stop and talk to him," he urged. "He ain't goin' to hurt you none."

"You're damn tootin' cow-boy," she yelled at him; "he sure ain't if I know it."

The young puncher urged his horse to greater speed. Wichita's mount was weakening. The man drew closer. In a moment he would be able to reach out and seize her bridle rein. The two had far outdistanced the others trailing in the dust behind.

Wichita drew her six-shooter. "Be careful, cow-boy!" she warned. "I aint got nothin' agin you, but I'll shore bore you if you lay ary hand on this bridle."

Easily Wichita lapsed into the vernacular she had spent three years trying to forget, as she always and

unconsciously did under stress of excitement.

"Then I'll run that cayuse o' yourn ragged," threatened the man. "He's just about all in how."

"Yours is!" snapped Wichita, levelling her six-shooter at the horse of her pursuer and pulling the trigger.

The man uttered an oath and tried to rein in to avoid the shot. Wichita's hammer fell with a futile click. She pulled the trigger again and again with the same result. The man voiced a loud guffaw and closed up again. The girl turned her horse to one side to avoid him. Again he came on in the new direction; and when he was almost upon her she brought her mount to its haunches, wheeled suddenly and spurred across the trail to the rear of the man and rode on again at right angles to her former direction, but she had widened the distance between them.

Once more the chase began, but now the man had taken down his rope and was shaking out the noose. He drew closer. Standing in his stirrups, swinging the, great noose, he waited for the right instant. Wichita tried to turn away from him but she saw that he would win that way as easily, since she was turning back toward the other four who were already preparing to intercept her.

Her horse was heavier than the pony ridden by the young puncher and that fact gave Wichita a forlorn hope. Wheeling, she spurred straight toward the

man with the mad intention of riding him down. If her own horse did not fall too, she might still have a chance.

The puncher sensed instantly the thing that was in her mind; and just before the impact he drove his spurs deep into his pony's sides, and as Wichita's horse passed behind him he dropped his noose deftly to the rear over his left shoulder, and an instant later had drawn it tight about the neck of the girl's mount.

She reached forward and tried to throw off the rope, but the puncher backed away, keeping it taut; and then "Dirty" Cheetim and the three others closed in about her.

Five--THE SNAKE LOOK

GIAN-NAH-TAH entered the hogan of Shoz-Dijji. The young war chief, awakening instantly, sprang to his feet when he saw who it was standing in the opening.

"Does Gian-nah-tah come to the hogan of Shoz-Dijji as friend or enemy?" he asked.

"Listen, Shoz-Dijji, and you will know," replied Gian-nah-tah. "Yesterday my heart was bad. Perhaps the fire-water of the white-eyed man made it so, but it is not of that that Gian-nah-tah has come to sneak with Shoz-Dijji. It is of the girl. Wichita."

"Shoz-Dijji does not wish to speak of her," replied the war chief.

"But he will listen while Gian-nah-tah speaks," said the other, peremptorily. "The white-eyed skunk that sells poisoned water has ridden with four of his braves to capture the white-eyed girl that Shoz-Dijji loves," continued Gian-nah-tah. "They follow her to Pimos Canyon, and there they will keep her in the hogan that the white fool with the strange clothing built there six summers ago. Shoz-Dijji knows the place?"

The Black Bear did not reply. Instead he seized the cartridge belt to which his six-shooter hung and buckled it about his slim hips, took his rifle, his hackamore, ran quickly out in search of his hobbled pony.

Gian-nah-tah hastened to his own hogan for weapons. Warriors, eating their breakfasts, noted the haste of the two and questioned them. Nervous, restless, apprehensive of the results that might follow Geronimo's departure from the reservation, smarting under the injustice of the white-eyed men in taking their herds from them, many of the braves welcomed any diversion, especially one that might offer an outlet to their pent wrath against the enemy; and so it was that by the time Shoz-Dijji had found and bridled Nejeunee he discovered that instead of riding alone to the rescue of the white girl he was one of a dozen savage warriors.

Wrapped in blankets they rode slowly, decorously, until they had passed beyond the ken of captious white eyes, six-shooters and rifles hidden beneath the folds of their blankets; then the blankets fell away, folded lengthways across the withers of their ponies, and a dozen warriors, naked but for G strings, quirted their ponies into swinging lope.

Knowing that the troops were out, the Indians followed no beaten road but rode south across the Gila and then turned southeast through the hills toward Pimos Canyon.

"Dirty" Cheetim, with a lead rope on Wichita's horse, rode beside the girl.

"Thought you was too high-toned for 'Dirty' Cheetim, eh?" he sneered. "You was too damn good to be Mrs. Cheetim, eh? Well, you ain't a-goin' to be Mrs. Cheetim. You're just a- goin' to be one o' 'Dirty' Cheetim's girls down at the Hog Ranch. Nobody don't marry them."

Wichita Billings made no reply. She rode in silence, her eyes straight to the front. Hicks, the young puncher who had roped the girl's horse, rode a few paces to the rear. In his drink muddled brain doubts were forming as to the propriety of the venture into which Cheetim had led him. Perhaps he was more fool than knave; perhaps, sober, he might have balked at the undertaking. After all he was but half conscious of vaguely annoying questionings that might eventually have crystallized into regrets had

might eventually have crystallized into regrets that time sufficed, but it did not.

They were winding up Pimos Canyon toward the deserted shack. "Your old man kicked me out," Cheetim was saying to the girl. "I reckon you're thinking that he'll get me for this, but he won't. After you bin to the Ranch a spell you won't be advertising to your old man, nor nobody else, where you be. They's other girls there as good as you be, an' they ain't none of 'em sendin' out invites to their folks to come an' see 'em. You- Hell ! Look! Injuns!"

Over the western rim ,of Pimos Canyon a dozen yelling Apaches were charging down the steep hillside.

"Geronimo!" screamed Cheetim and, dropping the lead rope, wheeled about and bolted down the canyon as fast as spur and quirt and horse flesh could carry him.

The four remaining men opened fire on the Apaches, and in the first exchange of shots two had their horses shot from under them. Hicks' horse, grazed by a bullet, became unmanageable and started off down the canyon after Cheetim's animal, pitching and squealing, while a third man, realizing the futility of resistance and unhampered by sentiments of chivalry, put spur and followed.

One of the dismounted men ran to the side of Wichita's horse, seized her arm and dragged her

from the saddle before she realized the thing that was in his mind; then, vaulting to the horse's back, he started after his fellows while the girl ran to the shelter of a bowlder behind which the sole remaining white man had taken up a position from which he might momentarily, at least, wage a hopeless defense against the enemy.

Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah-tah, racing toward the girl, saw her dragged from her horse, saw her take refuge behind the bowlder, and the latter, knowing that the girl was safe, raced after the white man who had stolen her horse and left her, as he thought, to the merciless attentions of a savage enemy.

Shoz-Dijiji, calling his warriors together, circled away from the bowlder behind which the two were crouching. The white man looked from behind the bowlder. Slowly he raised his rifle to take aim. The girl raised her eyes above the level of the bowlder's top. She saw the Apache warriors gathered a hundred yards away, she saw the rifle of the white man leveled upon them, and then she recognized Shoz- Dijiji.

"Don't shoot!" she cried to her companion. "Wait!"

"Wait, hell!" scoffed the man. "We ain't got no more chanct than a snowball in Hell. Why should I wait?"

"One of those Indians is friendly," replied the girl. "I don't think he'll hurt us or let the others hurt us when he knows I'm here."

Gian-nah-tah, riding fast, had pulled alongside his quarry. With clubbed rifle he knocked the white man from the saddle and in a dozen more strides had seized the bridle rein of the riderless horse.

The man behind the bowlder drew a fine sight on the buck who appeared to be the leader of the renegades. It was Shoz-Dijiji. Wichita Billings snatched the white man's six- shooter from its holster and shoved the muzzle against his side.

"Drop that gun!" she cautioned; "or I'll bore you."

The man lowered his rifle to the accompaniment of lurid profanity.

"Shut up," admonished Wichita, "and look there!"

Shoz-Dijiji had tied a white rag to the muzzle of his rifle and was waving it to and fro above his head. Wichita stood up and waved a hand above her head. "Stand up!" she commanded, addressing the white man behind the bowlder. The fellow did as he was bid and, again at her command, , accompanied her as she advanced to meet Shoz-Dijiji, who was walking toward them alone. As they met, the Black Bear seized the white man's rifle and wrenched it from his grasp. "Now I kill him," he announced.

"No! Oh, no!" cried Wichita, stepping between them

Why not?" demanded Shoz-Dijji. "He steal you, eh?"

"Yes, but you mustn't kill him," replied the girl. "He came forward under the protection of your white flag."

"White flag for you--not for dirty coyote," the Black Bear assured her. "I give him his rifle, then. Him go back. Then I get him."

"No, Shoz-Dijji, you must let him go: He doesn't deserve it, I'll admit; but it would only bring trouble to you and your people. The troops are already out after Geronimo. If there is a killing here there is no telling what it will lead to."

"No sabe white-eyed men," said Shoz-Dijji disgustedly. "Kill good Indian, yes; kill bad white-eye, no." He shrugged. "Well, you say no kill, no kill." He turned to the white man. "Get out, pronto! You sabe? Get out San Carlos. Shoz-Dijji see you San Carlos again, kill. Get!"

"Gimme my rifle and six-gun," growled the white, sullenly.

Shoz-Dijji laid his hand on Wichita's arm as she was about to return the man's six-shooter. "Shut up, and hit the trail, white man," he snapped.

The other hesitated a moment, as though about to speak, looked into the savage face of the Apache, and then started down Pima Canyon toward the

and then started down Finks Canyon toward the main trail just as Gian-nah-tah rode up leading the girl's horse.

"Gian-nah-tah," said the Black Bear, "Shoz-Dijiji, the Be-don-ko-he Apache, rides with the white-eyed girl to the hogan of her father to see that she is not harmed by white-eyed men upon the way." There was the trace of a smile in the eyes of the Indian as he spoke. "Perhaps," he continued, "Gian-nah-tah will ride to the camp of my father and tell him that Nan-tan-des-la-par-en has sent troops toward the south to bring Geronimo in, dead or alive.

"When the white-eyed girl is safe Shoz-Dijiji will join his father. Perhaps other Apache warriors will join him. Who knows, Gian-nah-tah?"

"I shall join him," said Gian-nah-tah.

The other warriors, who had slowly drawn near, had overheard the conversation and now, without exception, each assured Shoz-Dijiji that he would join Geronimo at once or later.

As Wichita mounted her horse and looked about her at the half circle of savage warriors partially surrounding her it seemed incredible that yesterday these men were, and perhaps again tomorrow would be, the cruel, relentless devils of the Apache war-trail.

Now they were laughing among themselves and

poking fun at the white man plodding down the canyon and at the other whom Gian-nah-tah had knocked from Wichita's horse and who was already regaining consciousness and looking about him in a dazed and foolish manner.

It seemed incredible that she should be safe among them when she had been in such danger but a moment before among men of her own race. Many of them smiled pleasantly at her as she tried to thank them for what they had done for her; and they waved friendly hands in adieu as they rode off with Gian-nah-tah toward the north, leaving her alone with Shoz-Dijji.

"How can I ever thank you, Shoz-Dijji?" she said. "You are the most wonderful friend that a girl could have."

The war chief of the Be-don-ko-he looked her straight in the eyes and grunted.

"Me no sabe," he said, and wheeled his pinto down toward the main trail, beckoning her to follow.

Wichita Billings looked at the man at her side in astonishment. She opened her lips to speak, again but thought better of it and remained silent. They passed the two habitues of the Hog Ranch trudging disgustedly through the dust. The Apache did not even deign to look at them. They came to the main trail, and here Shoz-Dijji turned southeast in the direction of the Billings ranch. San Carlos lay to the

horthwest. Wichita drew rein.

"You may go back to the reservation," she said. "I shall be safe now the rest of the way home."

Shoz-Dijiji looked at her. "Come!" he said, and rode on toward the southeast.

Wichita did not move. "I shall not let you ride with me," she said. "I appreciate what you have done for me, but I cannot permit myself to be put under further obligations to you."

"Come!" said Shoz-Dijiji, peremptorily. Wichita felt a slow flush mounting her cheek, and it embarrassed and angered her.

"I'll sit here forever," she said, "before I'll let you ride home with me."

Shoz-Dijiji reined Nejeunee about and rode back to her side. He took hold of her bridle rein and started leading her horse in the direction he wished it to go.

For an instant Wichita Billings was furious. Very seldom in her life had she been crossed. Being an only child in a motherless home she had had her own way more often than not. People had a habit of doing the things that Wichita Billings wanted done. In a way she was spoiled and, too, she had a bit of a temper. Shoz-Dijiji had humiliated her and now he was attempting to coerce her. Her eyes flashed fire as she swung her heavy quirt above her head and

as she swung her heavy quilt above her head and brought it down across the man's naked shoulders.

"Let go of my bridle, you --" but there she stopped, horrified at what she had done. "Oh, Shoz-Dijji! How could I?" she cried, and burst into tears.

The Apache gave no sign that he had felt the stinging blow, but the ugly welt that rose across his back testified to the force with which the lash had fallen.

As though realizing that she had capitulated the Apache dropped her bridle rein; and Wichita rode on docilely at his side, dabbing at her eyes and nose with her handkerchief and struggling to smother an occasional sob.

Thus in silence they rode as mile after mile of the dusty trail unrolled behind them. Often the girl glanced at the rugged, granitic profile of the savage warrior at her side and wondered what was passing through the brain behind that inscrutable mask. Sometimes she looked at the welt across his shoulders and caught her breath to stifle a new sob.

They were approaching the Billings ranch now. In a few minutes Wichita would be home. She knew what Shoz-Dijji would do. He would turn and ride away without a word.

Battling with her pride, which was doubly strong because it was composed of both the pride of the

white and the pride of the woman, she gave in at last and spoke to him again.

"Can you forgive me, Shoz-Dijiji?" she asked. "It was my ugly temper that did it, not my heart."

"You only think that," he said, presently. "The thing that is deep down in your heart, deep in the heart of every white, came out when you lost control of yourself through anger. If Shoz-Dijiji had been white you would not have struck him!"

"Oh, Shoz-Dijiji, how can you say such a thing?" she cried. "There is no white man in the world that I respect more than I do you."

"That is a lie," said the Apache, quite simply. "It is not possible for a white-eyes to respect an Apache. Sometimes they think they do, perhaps, but let something happen to make them lose their tempers and the truth rises sure and straight, like a smoke signal after a storm."

"I do not lie to you--you should not say such a thing to me," the girl reproached.

"You lie to yourself, not to me; for you only try to deceive yourself. In that, perhaps, you succeed; but you do not deceive me. Shoz-Dijiji knows- you tell him yourself, though you do not mean to. Shoz-Dijiji will finish the words you started when you struck him with your quirt, and then you will understand what Shoz-Dijiji understands: 'Let go of my bridle, you --, dirty Si-wash!'"

Wichita gasped. "Oh, I didn't say that!" she cried.

"It was in your heart. The Apache knows." There was no rancor in his voice.

"Oh, Shoz-Dijiji, I couldn't say that to you--I couldn't mean it. Can't you see that I couldn't?"

They had reached the ranch gate and stopped. "Listen," said the Apache. "Shoz-Dijiji saw the look in the white girl's eyes when he kissed her. Shoz-Dijiji has seen that look in the eyes of white women when a snake touched them. Shoz-Dijiji understands!"

"You do not understand!" cried the girl. "God! you do not understand anything."

"Shoz-Dijiji understands that white girl is forwhite man --Apache for Apache.If not, you would not have looked that way when Shoz-Dijiji took you in his arms. Cheetim wanted you. He is a white man." There was a trace of bitterness in his tone. "Why did not you go with him ? He is no Apache to bring the snake-look to your eyes."

The girl was about to reply when they were interrupted by the sound of a gruff voice and looking up saw Billings striding angrily toward them.

"Get in here, Chita!" he ordered, roughly, and then turned to Shoz-Dijiji. "What the hell do you want ?" he demanded.

"Father!" exclaimed the girl. "This is my friend. You have no right --"

"No dirty, sneaking, murdering Siwash can hang around my ranch," shouted Billings angrily. "Now get the hell out of here and stay out!"

Shoz-Dijiji, apparently unmoved, looked the white man in the eyes. "She my friend," he said. "I come when I please."

Billings' fairly danced about in rage. "If I catch you around here again," he spluttered, "I'll put a bullet in you where it'll do the most good."

"Pindah-lickoyee," said the Apache, "you make big talk to a war chief of the Be-don-ko-he. When Shoz-Dijiji comes again, then may-be-so you not talk so big about bullets any more," and wheeling his little pinto stallion, about he rode away.

Attracted by the loud voice of Billings a cow-hand, loitering near the bunkhouse, had walked down to the gate, arriving just as Shoz-Dijiji left.

"Say," he drawled, "why that there's the Injun that give me water that time an' tol' me how to git here."

"So he's the damn skunk wot stole the ewe-neck roan!" exclaimed Billings.

"Yes," snapped Wichita, angrily, "and he's the 'damn skunk' that saved Luke's life that time. He's

the 'damn skunk' that kept 'Dirty' Cheetim from gettin' me three years ago. He's the 'damn skunk' that saved me from Tats-ah-das-ay-go down at the Pringe ranch. He's the 'damn skunk' that heard this mornin' that Chee-tim was after me again with a bunch of his burns and rode down to Pimos Canyon from San Carlos and took me away from them and brought me home. You ought to be damn proud o' yourself, Dad!"

Billings looked suddenly crestfallen and Luke Jensen very much embarrassed. He had never heard the boss talked to like this before, and he wished he had stayed at the bunkhouse where he belonged.

"I'm damned sorry," said Billings after a moment of silence. "If I see that Apache again I'll tell him so, but ever since they got poor Mason I see red every time I drops my eyes on one of 'em. I'm shore sorry, Chita."

"He won't ever know it," said the girl. "Shoz-Dijji won't ever come back again."

Six--THE WAR TRAIL

SHOZ-DIJIJI, riding cross-country, picked up the trail of Geronimo where it lay revealed to Apache eyes like a printed message across the open pages of Nature's book of hieroglyphs, and in the evening of the second day he came to the camp of the War Chief.

Gian-nah-tah and several of the warriors who had accompanied Shoz-Dijiji in the pursuit of Cheetim and his unsavory company were already with Geronimo, and during the next two days other warriors and many women came silent footed into the camp of the Be-don-ko-he.

The Apaches were nervous and irritable. They knew that troops were out after them, and though the cunning of Shoz- Dijiji had sent the first contingent upon a wild goose chase toward Sonora the Indians were well aware that it could be but a matter of days before their whereabouts might be discovered and other troops sent to arrest them.

Among those that urged upon them the necessity of immediately taking the war trail was Mangas, son of the great dead chief, Mangas Colorado;but Geronimo held back. He did not wish to fight the white men again, for he realized, pertraps better than any of them, the futility of continued resistance; but there were two forces opposing him that were to prove more potent than the conservatism of

mature deliberation. They were Sago-zhu-ni, the wife of Mangas, and the tizwin she was brewing. It was in the early evening of May 16, 1885 that Shoz- Dijiji rode into the camp of Geronimo. The sacred hoddentin had been offered up with the prayers to evening, and already the Be-don-ko-he had gathered about the council fire. Tizwin was flowing freely as was evidenced by the increasing volubility of the orators.

Mangas spoke forcefully and definitely for war, urging it upon Na-chi-ta, son of old Cochise and chief of the Chihuicahui Apaches and ranking chief of all those gathered in the camp of Geronimo; but Na-chi-ta, good-natured, fonder of tizwin and pretty squaws than he was of the war- trail and its hardships, argued, though half-heartedly, for peace.

Chihuahua, his fine head bowed in thought, nodded his approval of the moderate counsel of Na-chi-ta; and when it was his turn to speak he reminded them of the waste of war, of the uselessness and hopelessness of fighting against the soldiers of the white men; and old Nanay sided with him; but Ulzanna, respected for his ferocity and his intelligence, spoke for war, as did Kut-le, the bravest of them all.

Stinging from the insults of the father of Wichita Billings, Shoz-Dijiji was filled with bitterness against all whites; and when Kut-le had spoken, the young war chief of the Be-don-ko-he arose.

"Geronimo, my father," he said, "speaks with great wisdom and out of years filled with experience, but perhaps he has forgotten many things that have happened during the long years that the Shis-Inday have been fighting to drive the enemy from the country that Usen made for them. Shoz- Dijji, the son of Geronimo, has not forgotten the things that he has seen, nor those of which his father has told him; they are burned into his memory.

"Geronimo is right when he says that peace is better than war for those who may no longer hope to win, and I too would speak against the war-trail if the pindah-lickoyee would leave us in peace to live our own lives as Usen taught us to live them. But they will not. They wish us to live in their way which is not a good way for Apaches to live. If we do not wish to they send soldiers and arrest us. Thus we are prisoners and slaves. Shoz-Dijji cannot be happy either as a prisoner or as a slave, and so he prefers the war-trail and death to these things.

Na-chi-ta speaks against the war-trail because there will be no tizwin there but, instead, many hardships. Shoz- Dijji knew well the great Cochise, father of Na-chi-ta. Cochise would be angry and ashamed if he could have heard his son speak at the council fire tonight.

"Chihuahua speaks against war. Chihuahua thinks only of the little farm that the pindah-lickoyee are permitting him to use and forgets all the wide

expanse of country that the pindah-lickoyee have stolen from him. Chihuahua is a brave warrior. I do not think that Chihuahua will long be happy working like a slave for the Indian Agent who will rob him of the sweat of his brow as he robs us all.

Nanay is old and lives in memories of past war, trails when he fought with glory at the side of Victorio and Loco; his day is done, his life has been lived. Why should we young men, who Have our own lives to live, be content to live upon the memories of old men. We want memories of our own and freedom, if only for a short time, to enjoy them as our fathers did before us.

"Ulzanna and Kut-le are brave men. They do honor to the proud race from which we all spring. They know that it would be better to die in freedom upon the war-trail against the hated pindah-lickoyee than to live like cattle, herded upon a reservation by the white-eyes.

"They think of the great warriors, of the women, of the little children who have been murdered by the lies and treachery of the pindah-lickoyee. They recall the ridicule that is heaped upon all those things which we hold most sacred. They do not forget the insults that every white-eyed man hurls at the Shis-Inday upon every occasion except when the Shis-Inday are on the war trail. Then they respect us.

"Shall we wait here until they come and arrest and kill our chiefs. as Nan-tan-des-la-nar-en has

ordered them to do, or shall we take to the war trail and teach them once more to respect us? I, Shoz-Dijji, war chief of the Be-don-ko-he, speak for the war trail. I have spoken."

An old man arose. "Let us wait," he said. "Perhaps the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee will not come. Perhaps they will let us live in peace if we do not go upon the war trail. Let us wait." The tizwin had not as yet spoken its final word, and there were more who spoke against the war trail than for it, and before the council was concluded many had spoken. Among the last was Sago-zhu-ni Pretty Mouth- the wife of Mangas, for the voice of woman was not unknown about the council fires of the Apaches. And why should it be? Did not they share all the hardships of the war trail with their lords and masters? Did they not often fight, and as fiercely and terribly as the men? Were they not as often the targets for the rifles of the pindah- lickoyee? Who, then, had better right to speak at the councils of the Apaches than the wives and mothers of their warriors.

Sago-zhu-ni spoke briefly, but to the point. "Are you men, old women, or children?" she cried fiercely. "If you are old women and children, you will stay here and wait to receive your punishment; but if you are warriors, you will take, the war trail, and then Nan-tan-des-la-par-en must catch you before he can punish you. May-be-so, you go to Sonora, he no catch you. I have spoken."

Now Na-chi-ta, encouraged by tizwin and goaded by the reproaches of Shoz-Dijiji, spoke for war. Geronimo, his savage brain inflamed by the fumes of the drink, applauded Sago-zhu-ni and demanded the blood of every pindah-lickoyee.

With fiery eloquence he ranged back through the history of the Shis-Inday for more than three hundred years and reminded them of every wrong that white men had committed against them in all that time. He spoke for more than an hour, and while he spoke Sago-zhu-ni saw that no warrior suffered from lack of tizwin. Of all who spoke vehemently for the war trail Shoz-Dijiji alone spoke out of a clear mind, or at least a mind unclouded by the fumes of drink, though it was dark with bitter hatred and prejudice.

When Geronimo sat down they voted unanimously for the war trail; and the next morning they broke camp and headed south- thirty-four warriors, eight boys, and ninety-one women. Hair was slicked down with tallow, swart faces streaked with war paint, weapons looked to. Hoddentin was sprinkled on many a tzi-daltai of lightning riven pine or cedar or fir as copper warriors prayed to these amulets for protection against the bullets of the pindah-lickoyee, for success upon the war trail.

Shoz-Dijiji, with Gian-nah-tah and two other warriors, rode in advance of the main party, scouting far afield, scanning the distances from every eminence. No creature stirred in the broad

landscape before them that was not marked by those eagle eyes, no faintest spoor beneath their feet was passed unnoted.

The young war chief of the Be-don-ko-he was again the Apache Devil. His face was painted blue but for the broad band of white across his eyes from temple to temple; around his head was wound a vivid yellow bandana upon the front of which was fastened a silver disc in the center of which was mounted a single turquoise; small rings of silver, from each of which depended another of these valued gems, swung from the lobes of his ears; other bits of this prized duklij were strung in the yard-long necklace of glass beads and magical berries and roots that fell across the front of his brown, print shirt, which, with his heavy buckskin war moccasins and his G string, completed his apparel.

About his waist and across one shoulder were belts filled with ammunition for the revolver at his hip and the rifle lying across the withers of Nejeunee, and at his left side hung a pair of powerful field glasses that he had taken in battle from a cavalry officer several years before. From below the skirts of his shirt to the tops of his moccasins the Apache Devil's bronzed legs were naked, as he seldom if ever wore the cotton drawers affected by many of his fellows. The bracelets of silver and brass that adorned his muscular arms were hidden by the sleeves of his shirt, a shirt that he probably soon would discard,

being ever impatient of the confining sensation that clothing imparted.

Down into the mountains of southwestern New Mexico the Apaches marched, following trails known only to themselves, passing silently through danger zones by night, and established themselves among caves and canyons inaccessible to mounted troops.

Striking swiftly, raiding parties descended upon many an isolated ranch house both in Arizona and New Mexico, leaving behind horrid evidence of their ferocity as they rode away upon stolen horses from the blazing funeral pyres that had once been homes.

Scouts kept Geronimo informed of the location of the troops in the field against him; and the shrewd old war chief successfully avoided encounters with any considerable body of enemy forces, but scouting parties and supply trains often felt the full force of the strategy and courage of this master general of guerilla warfare and his able lieutenants.

It was during these days that the blue and white face of the Apache Devil became as well known and as feared as it was in Sonora and Chihuahua, for, though relentless in his war against the men of the pindah-lickoyee, Shoz-Dijiji killed neither women nor children, with the result that there were often survivors to describe the boldness and ferocity of his attacks.

Scouting far north for information relative to the movement of troops, Shoz-Dijji one day came upon an Indian scout in the employ of the enemy; and having recognized him as an old friend he hailed him.

"Where are the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee?" demanded Shoz-Dijji.

"They cannot catch you," replied the scout, grinning, "and so they are sending Apaches after you. Behind me are a hundred White Mountain and Cho-kon-en braves. They are led by one white-eyed officer, Captain Crawford. Tell Geronimo that he had better come in, for he cannot escape the Shis-Inday as he has escaped the pin-dah-lickoyee."

"Why do you and the others go upon the war trail against your own people?" demanded Shoz-Dijji. "Why do you fight as brothers at the side of the enemy?"

"We take the war trail against you because you are fools and we are not," replied the scout. "We have learned that it is useless to fight against the pindah-lickoyee. We do not love them more than you; and if we could kill them all we would, but we cannot kill them all--they are as many as the weeds that grow among our corn and beans and pumpkins--for though we cut them down they come again in greater numbers than before, flourishing best in soil that is wet with blood.

"When you go upon the war trail against the white-eyed men it only makes more trouble for us. Geronimo is a great trouble maker. Therefore we fight against him that we may live in peace."

"Either your mouth is full of lies or your heart has turned to water," said Shoz-Dijiji. "No Apache wants peace at the price of slavery, unless he has become a coward and is afraid of the pindah-lickoyee. Shoz-Dijiji has the guts of a man. He would rather die on the war trail than be a reservation Indian. You have not even the guts of a coyote, which snarls and snaps at the hand of his captor and risks death to regain his freedom."

"Be a coyote then," sneered the scout, "and I will put your pelt on the floor of my hogan."

"Here it is, reservation Indian," replied the Black Bear. "Take It."

Both men had dismounted when they met and were standing close and face to face. The scout reached quickly for his six-shooter, but the Apache Devil was even quicker. His left hand shot out and seized the other's wrist, and with his right he drew from its scabbard the great butcher knife that hung at his hip.

The scout warded the first blow and grasped Shoz-Dijiji's arm; and at the same instant tore his right arm free, but as he did so the renegade snatched the other's gun from its holster and tossed

it aside, while the scout, profiting by the momentary freedom of his right hand, drew his own knife, and the two closed in a clinch, each striving to drive his blade home in the body of his adversary.

At the time that their altercation had reached the point of physical encounter each of the men had dropped his hackamore rope with the result that Shoz-Dijji's horse, recently stolen from a raided ranch, took advantage of this God-given opportunity to make a break for freedom and home, while the scout's pony, lured by the call of consanguinity, trotted off with the deserter.

Each of the combatants now held the knife-arm of the other and the struggle had resolved itself into one of strength and endurance, since he who could hold his grip the longer stood the greater chance for victory, the other the almost certain assurance of death.

They struggled to and fro, pushing one another here and there about the sandy dust of a parched canyon bottom. The painted face of the Apache Devil remained almost expressionless, so well schooled in inscrutability were his features, nor did that of the scout indicate that he was engaged in a duel to the death.

Two miles to the north a detachment of twenty White Mountain Apaches from Crawford's Indian Scouts were following leisurely along the trail of their comrade. In twenty minutes, perhaps, they

would come within sight of the scene of the duel.

It is possible that the scout engaged with Shoz-Dijji held this hope in mind, for when it became obvious to him that he was no match in physical strength for his adversary he dropped his own knife and grasped the knife arm of his foe in both hands.

It was a foolish move, for no sooner did the Apache Devil regain the freedom of his left hand than he transferred his weapon to it and before his unfortunate antagonist realized his danger Shoz-Dijji plunged the blade between his ribs, deep into his heart.

Stooping over the body of his dead foe Shoz-Dijji tore the red band that proclaimed the government scout from his brow and with a deft movement of his knife removed a patch of scalp. Then he appropriated the ammunition and weapons of his late adversary and turned to look for the two ponies. Now, for the first time, he realized that they were gone and that he was afoot far from the camp of Geronimo, probably the sole possessor of the information that a hundred scouts were moving upon the stronghold of the War Chief.

A white man might doubtless have been deeply chagrined had he found himself in a similar position, but to the Apache it meant only a little physical exertion to which he was already inured by a lifetime of training. The country through which he might pass on foot by the most direct route to Geronimo's camp was practically impassable to

Gerónimo's camp was practically impassable to horses but might be covered by an Apache in less time than it would have required to make the necessary detours on horseback. However, Shoz-Dijiji would have preferred the easier method of transportation, and so he regretted that he had ridden the new pony instead of Nejeunee, who would not have run away from him.

Knowing that other scouts might be near at hand, Shoz-Dijiji placed an ear to the ground and was rewarded by information that sent him quickly toward the south. Clambering up the side of the canyon, he adjusted the red band of the dead scout about his own head as he climbed, for he knew that eyes fully as keen as his own were doubtless scanning the horizon through powerful field glasses at no great distance and that if they glimpsed the red band they would not hasten in pursuit.

He grinned as he envisaged the anger of the scouts when they came upon the dead body of their scalped comrade, and the vision lightened the dreary hours as he trotted southward beneath the pitiless sun of New Mexico.

Late in the afternoon Shoz-Dijiji approached a main trail that led west to Fort Bowie and which he must cross, but with the caution of the Apache he reconnoitered first.

From the top of a low hill the trail was in sight for a mile or two in each direction and to this vantage point the Black Bear crept. Only his eyes and the

top of his head were raised above the summit of the hill, and these were screened by a small bush that he had torn from the ground and which he held just in front of him as he wormed his way to the hilltop.

Below him the trail led through a defile in which lay scattered huge fragments of rock among which the feed grew thick and rank, suggesting water close beneath the surface; but it was not these things that caught the eyes and interest of the Apache Devil, who was already as familiar with them as he was with countless other square miles of New Mexico, Arizona, Chihuahua, and Sonora, or with the wrinkles upon the face of his mother, Sons-ee-ah-rav.

That which galvanized his instant attention and interest was a cavalryman sitting upon a small rock fragment while his horse, at the end of a long riata, cropped the green feed. Shoz-Dijiji guessed that here was a military messenger riding to or from Fort Bowie. Here, too, was a horse, and Shoz-Dijiji was perfectly willing to ride the rest of the way to the camp of Geronimo.

A shot would dispose of the white-eyed soldier, but it would, doubtless, also frighten the horse and send him galloping far out of the reach of Apache hands; but Shoz-Dijiji was resourceful.

He quickly cached the rifle of the scout, for the possession of two rifles might raise doubts that two six-shooters would not; he adjusted the red scout

band and with a bandana carefully wiped from his face the telltale war paint of the Apache Devil. Then he arose and walked slowly down the hillside toward the soldier, who sat with his back toward him. So silently he moved that he was within four or five feet of the man when he halted and spoke.

The soldier wheeled about as he sprang to his feet and drew his pistol, but the sight of the smiling face of the Indian, the extended hand and the red band of the government scout removed his fears instantly.

"Nejeunee, nejeunee," Shoz-Dijiji assured him, using the Apache word meaning friend, and stepping forward grasped the soldier's hand.

Smiling pleasantly, Shoz-Dijiji looked at the horse and then at the riata approvingly.

"You belong Crawford's outfit?" inquired the soldier.

"Me no sabe," said Shoz-Dijiji. He picked up the riata and examined it. "Mucho bueno!" he exclaimed.

"You bet," agreed the cavalryman. "Damn fine rope."

The Apache examined the riata minutely, passing it through his hands, and at the same time walking toward the horse slowly. The riata, a braided hair "macarthy," was indeed a fine specimen, some sixty feet in length, of which the soldier was pardonably

proud, a fact which threw him off his guard in the face of the Indian's clever simulation of interest and approval.

When Shoz-Dijji reached the end of the rope which was about the horse's neck he patted the animal admiringly and turned to the soldier, smiling enthusiastically. "Mucho bueno," he said, nodding toward the horse.

"You bet," said the trooper. "Damn fine horse."

With his back toward the white man, Shoz-Dijji drew his knife and quickly severed the rope, holding the two ends concealed in his left hand. "Mucho bueno," he repeated, turning again toward the soldier, and then, suddenly and with seeming excitement, he pointed up the hill back of the trooper. "Apache on dahl!" he shouted - "The Apaches are coming!"

Quite naturally, under the circumstances, the soldier turned away to look in the direction from which the savage enemy was supposed to be swooping upon him, and as he did so the Apache Devil vaulted into the saddle and was away. The great boulders strewn the floor of the canyon afforded him an instant screen and though the soldier was soon firing at him with his pistol he offered but a momentary and fleeting target before he was out of range, carrying away with him the cavalryman's carbine, which swung in its boot beneath the off stirrup of the trooper's McClellan.

Shoz-Dijji was greatly elated. He knew that he might have knifed the unsuspecting pindah-lickoyee had he preferred to; but a victory of wits and cunning gave him an even greater thrill of satisfaction, for Apache to the core though he was, the Black Bear killed not for the love of it but from a sense of duty to his people and loyalty to the same cause that inspired such men as Washington and Lincoln -- freedom.

Seven--HARD PRESSED

RE MOUNTED, and richer by a carbine, a six-shooter and many rounds of ammunition, Shoz-Dijji rode into the camp of Geronimo late at night. When he had awakened the War Chief and reported the approach of the hundred scouts under Crawford, preparations were immediately started to break camp; and within an hour the renegades were moving silently southward.

Down into Sonora they went, raiding and killing as they passed through the terror stricken country, but moving swiftly and avoiding contact with the enemy. In the mountains west of Casa Grande Geronimo went into camp again, and from this base raiding parties took relentless toll throughout the surrounding country.

In the mountains above Casa Grande Pedro Mariel, the woodchopper, felled trees, cut them into

proper lengths which he split and loaded upon the backs of his patient burros. This he did today as he had done for many years. With him now was Luis, his nineteen year old son. Other woodchoppers, joining with the Mariels for company and mutual protection, camped and worked with them. In all there were a dozen men--hardy, courageous descendants of that ancient race that built temples to their gods upon the soil of the Western Hemisphere long before the first show boat stranded on Ararat.

As the sound of their axes rang in the mountains, a pair of savage eyes set in a painted face looked down upon them from the rim of the canyon in which they labored. The eyes were the eyes of Gian-nah-tah, the Be-don-ko-he Apache. They counted the number of the men below, they took in every detail of the nearby camp, of the disposal of the men engaged in felling new trees or cutting those that had been felled. For a half hour they watched, then Gian-nah-tah withdrew, silently as a shadow. The Mexicans, unsuspecting, continued at their work, stopping occasionally to roll a cigaret or pass some laughing remark. Luis Mariel, young and light hearted, often sang snatches of songs which usually concerned senioritas with large, dark eyes and red lips, for Luis was young and light hearted.

An hour passed. Gian-nah-tah returned, but not alone. With him, this time, were a dozen painted warriors, moving like pumas--silently, stealthily. Among them was Shoz-Dijiji, the Apache Devil.

Down the canyon side they crept and into the bottom below the woodchoppers. Spreading out into a thin line that crossed the canyon's floor and extended up either side they advanced slowly, silently, hiding behind trees, crawling across open spaces upon their bellies. They were patient, for they were Apaches--the personification of infinite patience.

Luis Mariel sang of a castle in Spain, which he thought of vaguely as a place of many castles and beautiful senoritas somewhere across a sea that was also "somewhere." Close beside him worked his father, Pedro; thinking proudly of this fine son of his.

Close to them cruel eyes looked through a band of white out of a blue face. The Apache Devil, closest to them, watched the pair intently. Suddenly a shot rang above the ringing axes. Manuel Farias clutched his breast and crumpled to the ground. Other shots came in quick succession, and then the air was rent by wild Apache war-whoops as the savages charged the almost defenseless woodchoppers.

Luis Mariel ran to his father's side. Grasping their axes they stood shoulder to shoulder, for between them and whatever weapons they had left in camp, were whooping Apaches. Some of the other men tried to break through and reach their rifles, but they were shot down. Three surrendered. A huge warrior confronted Pedro and Luis.

"Pray," said Pedro, "for we are about to die." He

They said Pedro, for we are about to die. He was looking at the face of the warrior. "It is the Apache Devil!"

"Who is that?" demanded the Indian, pointing to the lad.

"He is my oldest son," replied Pedro, wondering.

"Put down your axes and come here," ordered the Apache. "You will not be harmed."

Pedro was not surprised to hear the Indian speak in broken Spanish, as most Apaches understood much and spoke a little the language of their ancient enemies; but he was surprised at the meaning of the words he heard, surprised and skeptical. He hesitated. Luis looked up at him, questioningly.

"If we lay down our axes we shall be wholly unarmed," said Pedro.

"What difference does it make?" asked Luis. "He can kill us whether we have axes in our hands or not--they will not stop his bullets."

"You are right," said Pedro and threw down his axe. Luis did likewise and together they approached the Apache Devil. "May the Holy Mary protect us!" whispered the father.

The other Mexicans, having been killed or captured, Gian- nah-tah and the balance of the braves came running toward Pedro and Luis; but Shoz-Diiiiii stepped in front of them and raised his

Shoz-Dijji stepped in front of them and raised his hand.

"These are my friends," he said. "Do not harm them."

"They are enemies," cried one of the warriors, excited by blood and anticipation of torture. "Kill them!"

"Very well," said Shoz-Dijji quietly. "You may kill them, but first you must kill Shoz-Dijji. He has told you that they are his friends."

"Why does Shoz-Dijji protect the enemy?" demanded Gian- nah-tah.

"Listen," said Shoz-Dijji. "Many years ago Shoz-Dijji was hunting in these mountains. He was alone. He often saw this man felling trees, but he did not harm him because the Apaches were not upon the war trail at that time. A tree fell upon the man in such a way that he could not free himself. He must have died if no one came to help him. There was no one to come but Shoz-Dijji.

"Shoz-Dijji lifted the tree from him. The man's leg was broken. Shoz-Dijji placed him upon one of his burros and took him to Casa Grande, where he lived.

"You all remember the time when we made the treaty of peace with the people of Casa Grande and while we were celebrating it the Mexican soldiers came and attacked us. They made us prisoners and

came and attacked us. They made us prisoners and were going to shoot us.

"This man came to look at the captives and recognized Shoz-Dijiji. He begged the war chief of the Mexicans to let me go, and he took me to his home and gave me food and set me free. It was Shoz-Dijiji who was able to release all the other Apache prisoners because of what this man did. The other here is his son.

"Because of what his father did for Shoz-Dijiji neither of them shall be killed. We shall let them take their burros and their wood and go back in safety to their home. I have spoken."

"Shoz-Dijiji speaks true words when he says that these two shall not be harmed," said Gian-nah-tah. "Let them go in peace."

"And look at them well," added Shoz-Dijiji, "that you may know them and spare them if again you meet them." He turned to Pedro. "Get your burros and your wood and go home quickly with your son. Do not come again to the mountains while the Apaches are on the war-trail, for Shoz-Dijiji may not be always near to protect you. Go!"

Bewildered, stammering their thanks, Pedro and Luis hastened to obey the welcome mandate of the savage while Shoz-Dijiji's companions fell to with savage ardor upon the hideous business that is the aftermath of an Apache victory.

Uninterested, Shoz-Dijji stood idly by until the Mariels had hastily packed their few belongings and departed, leaving their wood behind them. No longer did his fellows ridicule or taunt Shoz-Dijji for his refusal to join them in the torture of their captives or the mutilation of the dead. His courage had been proved upon too many fields of battle, his hatred of the enemy was too well known to leave any opening for charges of cowardice or disloyalty. They thought him peculiar and let it go at that. Perhaps some of the older braves recalled the accusation of the dead Juh that Shoz-Dijji was no Apache but a white-eyed man by birth; but no one ever mentioned that now since Juh was dead, and it was well known that he had died partly because he had made this charge against the Black Bear.

Back in the camp of the renegades Gian-nah-tah and the others boasted loudly of their victory, exhibited the poor spoils that they had taken from the camp of the woodchoppers, while the squaws cooked the flesh of one of the burros for a feast in celebration. Perhaps they were off their guard, but then, even Homer is charged with carelessness.

Just as a bullet had surprised the camp of the woodchoppers earlier in the day, so a bullet surprised the camp of the renegades. A little Indian boy clutched his breast and crumpled to the ground. Other shots came in quick succession, and then the air was rent by wild Apache war whoops. Apache had surprised Apache. Perhaps no other could have done it so well.

As Crawford's Scouts charged the camp of Geronimo, the renegades, taken completely off their guard, scattered in all directions. Pursued by a part of the attacking force, Geronimo's warriors kept up a running fight until all the fighting men and a few of the women and children had escaped; but a majority of the latter were rounded up by the scouts and taken back to Crawford's camp, prisoners of war. Only the dead body of a little boy remained to mark the scene of happy camp, of swift, fierce battle. In the blue sky, above the silent pines, a vulture circled upon static wings.

That night the renegades gathered in a hidden mountain fastness, and when the last far flung scout had come they compared notes and took account of their losses. They found that nearly all of their women and children had been captured. Of Geronimo's family only Shoz-Dijiji remained to the old War Chief. Sons-ee-ah-ray was a captive.

When their brief council was concluded, Geronimo arose. "Above the water that falls over the red cliff in the mountains south of Casa Grande there is a place that even the traitors who hunt us for the pindah-lickoyee may find difficult to attack. If you start now you will be almost there before the rays of chigo-na-ay light the eastern sky and reveal you to the scouts of the enemy. If Geronimo has not returned to you by the second darkness he will come no more. Pray to Usen that he may guide and protect you. I have spoken." The War Chief turned and strode away into the darkness.

and strode away into the darkness.

Shoz-Dijji sprang to his feet and ran after him. "Where do you go, Geronimo?" he demanded.

"To fetch Sons-ee-ah-ray from the camp of the enemy," replied Geronimo.

Two other braves who had followed Shoz-Dijji overheard. One of them was Gian-nah-tah.

"Shoz-Dijji goes with Geronimo to the camp of the enemy," announced the Black Bear.

Gian-nah-tah and the other warrior also announced their intention of accompanying the War Chief, and in silence the four started off single file down the rugged mountains with Geronimo in the lead. There was no trail where they went; and the night was dark, yet they skirted the edge of precipice, descended steep escarpment, crossed mountain stream on slippery boulders as surely as man trods a wide road by the light of day.

They knew where Crawford's camp lay, for Gian-nah-tah had been one of the scouts who had followed the victorious enemy; and they came to it while there were yet two hours before dawn.

Crawford had made his camp beside that of a troop of United States Cavalry that had been scouting futilely for Geronimo for some time, and in addition to the Indian Scouts and the cavalymen in the combined camps there were a number of

refugees who had sought the protection of the troops. Among them being several Mexican women and one American woman, the wife of a freighter.

Never quite positive of the loyalty of the Indian scouts, Crawford and the troop commander had thought it advisable to post cavalymen as sentries; and as these rode their posts about the camp the four Apaches crept forward through the darkness.

On their bellies, now, they wormed themselves forward, holding small bushes in front of their heads. When a sentry's face was turned toward them they lay motionless; when he passed on they moved forward.

They had circled the camp that they might approach it up wind, knowing that were their scent to be carried to the nostrils of a sentry's horse he might reveal by his nervousness the presence of something that would warrant investigation.

Now they lay within a few paces of the post toward which they had been creeping. The sentry was coming toward them. There was no moon, and it was very dark. There were bushes upon either side of him, low sage and greasewood. That there were four more now upon his left than there had been before he did not note, and anyway in ten minutes he was to be relieved. It was this of which he was thinking--not bushes.

He passed. Four shadowy patches moved slowly across his post. A moment later he turned to retrace

his monotonous beat. This time the four bushes which should now have been upon his right were again upon his left. His horse pricked up his ears and looked in the direction of the camp. The horse had become accustomed to the scent of Indians coming from the captives within the camp, but he knew that they were closer now. However, he was not startled, as he would have been had the scent come from a new direction. The man looked casually where the horse looked--that is second nature to a horse-man--then he rode on; and the four bushes merged with the shadows among the tents.

The American woman, the wife of the freighter, had been given a tent to herself. She was sleeping soundly, secure in the knowledge of absolute safety, for the first time in many weeks. As she had dozed off to sleep the night before she had hoped that her husband was as comfortable as she; but, knowing him as she had, her mind had been assailed by doubts. He had been killed by Apaches a week previously.

She was awakened by a gentle shaking. When she opened her eyes she saw nothing as it was dark in the tent; but she felt a hand upon her arm, and when she started to speak a palm was slapped across her mouth.

"Make noise, gettum killed," whispered a deep voice. "Shut up, no gettum killed."

The hand was removed. "What do you want?" whispered the woman. "I'll keep shet up."

"Where is the wife of Geronimo?" pursued the questioner.

"I dunno," replied the woman, sullenly. "Who are you--one o' them Injun Scouts? Why don't you go ask some other Injun? I dunno."

"May-be-so you find out pronto. Me Apache Devil. She my mother. You tellum damn pronto or Apache Devil cut your damn fool throat. Sabe?"

The woman felt the edge of a knife against the flesh at her throat.

"She's in the next tent," she whispered hastily.

"You lie, me come back and kill," he said, then he bound her hands and feet and tied a gag in her mouth, using strips torn from her own clothing for these purposes.

In the next tent they found Sons-ee-ah-ray, and a few minutes later five bushes crossed the post that four had previously crossed.

In the new camp south of Casa Grande the renegades found peace but for a few days, and then came Mexican troops one morning and attacked them. The skirmishing lasted all day. A few Mexican soldiers were killed; and at night the Apaches, having sustained no loss, moved eastward

into the foothills of the Sierra Madres.

A few more days of rest and once again the Mexican troops, following them, attacked; but the Apaches had not been caught unawares. Their women and children were sent deeper into the mountains, while the warriors remained to hold the soldiers in check.

During a lull in the fighting Geronimo gathered several of his followers about him. "The Mexicans now have a large army against us," he said. "If we stand and fight them many of us will be killed." "We cannot hope to win. It is senseless to fight under such circumstances. Let us wait until our chance of victory is greater."

The others agreed with the War Chief, and the renegades withdrew. Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah-tah were sent to ascertain the strength of the troops against them and their location, while the main body of the renegades followed the squaws to the new camp.

It was very late when Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah-tah rejoined their fellows. They came silently into camp after having been challenged and passed by savage sentries. They wore grave faces as they approached Geronimo. The War Chief had been sleeping; but he arose when he learned that his soouts had returned, and when he had had their report he summoned all the warriors to a council.

"Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah-tah with the speed of

Shoz-Dijji and Gian-nah-tah, with the speed of the deer, the cunning of the fox, and the vision of the eagle, have gone among the enemy and seen much. Let Shoz-Dijji tell you what he told Geronimo."

"For many days," said Shoz-Dijji, "we have been pressed closely by the enemy. First by the Scouts of the pindah-lickoyee, then by the warriors of the Mexicans. Wherever we go, they follow. We have had no time to hunt or raid. We are almost without food. Usen has put many things in the mountains and upon the plains for Apaches to eat. We can go on thus for a long time, but I do not think we can win.

"These things you should know. We are but a few warriors, and against us are the armies of two powerful nations. Shoz-Dijji thinks that it would be wise to wait a little until they forget. In the past they have forgotten. They will forget again. Then the Apaches may take up the war trail once more or remain in peaceful ways, hunting and trading.

"Today Gian-nah-tah and Shoz-Dijji saw soldiers in many places all through the mountains. There were soldiers of the Mexicans, there were soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee, there were the Apache Scouts of Crawford. They are all waiting to kill us. Perhaps we can escape them, perhaps we cannot. It would be foolish to attack them. We are too few, and our brothers have turned against us."

"How many soldiers did you see ?" asked Na-chi-

ta.

"Perhaps two thousand, perhaps more," replied Shoz-Dijiji. "There are infantry and cavalry, and cannon mounted on the backs of mules."

"Chihuahua thought Shoz-Dijiji wished only to fight against the pindah-lickoyee," said Chihuahua. "He made big talk before we went on the war trail after we left San Carlos. Has Shoz-Dijiji's heart turned to water?"

"I do not know," said Shoz-Dijiji. "I think it has not turned to water, but it is very sad. Shoz-Dijiji learned at his mother's breast to love nothing better than fighting the enemies of the Shis-Inday, but he did not learn to love to fight his own people. I think it made his heart sick that day that he saw White Mountain firing upon White Mountain, Cho-kon-en upon Cho-kon-en. That is not war, that is murder.

"Every man's hand is against us, but that Shoz-Dijiji did not mind. What he does mind is to know that our own hands are against us, too."

"Shoz-Dijiji has spoken true words," said Kut-le. "It sickens the heart in the breast of a warrior to see brother and cousin fighting against him at the side of his enemies.

"We know that we are surrounded by many soldiers. We cannot fight them. Perhaps we can escape them, but they will follow us. It will be hard to find food and water. for these things they will first

to make the white men, for these things they had not
try to deprive us of.

"I think that we should make peace with our
enemies. I have spoken."

Thus spoke Kut-le, the bravest of the rene- gades.
Savage heads nodded approval.

"Let us go to the camp of the white-eyed soldiers
in the morning," suggested one, "and lay down our
weapons."

"And be shot down like coyotes," growled
Geronimo. "No! Geronimo does not surrender. He
makes peace. He does not stick his head in a trap,
either. We will send a messenger to Crawford to
arrange a parley with Nan-tan-des-la-par-en. The
heart of Crawford is good. He does not lie to the
Shis- Inday. By the first light of Chigo-na-ay Shoz-
Dijji shall go to the kunh-gan-hay of the scouts and
carry the message of Geronimo to Crawford. If he
promises to protect us from the soldiers of the
pindah-lickoyee and the Mexicans, we will
accompany him north and hold a peace parlay with
Nan- tan-des-la-par-en." He turned toward Shoz-
Dijji. "You have heard the words of Geronimo.
When dawn comes go to Crawford. You will know
what to say to him."

**Eight--GERONIMO
CROOK**

AND

CRAWFORD'S Scouts were preparing to ride with the coming of the new day when there appeared upon a little eminence near their camp the figure of an Indian. Silent and erect it stood--a bronze statue touched by the light of the rising sun. Slowly, to and fro, it waved a white rag that was attached to the muzzle of a rifle. A scout called Crawford's attention to the flag of truce; and the cavalry officer, bearing a similar emblem, went out alone. and on foot toward the messenger, who now came slowly forward until the two met a couple of hundred yards from the camp.

Crawford recognized the Black Bear and nodded, waiting for him to speak.

"Shoz-Dijji brings a message from Geronimo," said the Apache.

"What message does Geronimo send me?" asked the officer. Both men spoke in the language of the Shis-Inday.

"Geronimo has heard that Nan-tan-des-la-par-en wishes to hold a parley with him," replied Shoz-Dijji.

"Nan-tan-des-la-par-en wishes only that Geronimo surrenders with all his warriors, women, and children," said Crawford. "There is no need for a parley. Tell Geronimo that if he will come to my camp with all his people, bringing also all his horses and mules, and lay down his arms, I will take him to

Nan-tan-des-Ia-par-en in safety."

"That is surrender," replied Shoz-Dijji. "Geronimo will not surrender. He will make peace with Nan-tan-des-Ia-par-en, but he will not surrender."

"Black Bear," said Crawford, "you are a great warrior among your people, you are an intelligent man, you know that we have you surrounded by a greatly superior force, you are worn by much fighting and marching, you are short of food, you cannot escape us this time. I know these things; you know them; Geronimo knows them.

"It will be better for you and your people if you come in peaceably now and return with me. Nan-tan-des-Ia-par-en will not be hard on you if you surrender now, but if you cause us any more trouble it may go very hard indeed with you. Think it over."

"We have thought it over," replied the Black Bear. "We know that a handful of braves cannot be victorious over the armies of two great nations, but we also know that we can keep on fighting for a long time before we are all killed and that in the meantime we shall kill many more of our enemies than we lose. You know that these are true words. Therefore it would be better for you to arrange for a parley with Nan-tan-des-la-par-en than to force us back upon the war trail.

"Geronimo is a proud man. The thing that you demand he will never consent to, but a peace parley

with Nan-tan-des-la- par-en might bring the same results without so greatly injuring the pride of Geronimo.

"These things I may say to you because it is well known that your heart is not bad against the Apaches. Of all the pindah-lickoyee you are best fitted to understand. That is why Geronimo sent me to you. He would not have sent this message to any white-eyed man ,but you or Lieutenant Gatewood. Him we trust also. We do not trust Nan-tan-des-la-par-en any more; but if we have your promise that no harm shall befall us we will go with you and talk with him, but we must be allowed to keep our weapons and our live- stock. I have spoken."

"I get your point," said Crawford after a moment of thought. "If Geronimo and the warriors in his party will give me their word that they will accompany us peaceably I will take them to General Crook and guarantee them safe escort, but I cannot promise what General Crook will do. Geronimo knows that I have no authority to do that."

"We shall come in and make camp near you this afternoon," said Shoz-Dijiji. "Tell your scouts not to fire upon us."

"When you come stop here, and I will tell you where to camp," replied Crawford. "Geronimo and two others may come into my camp to talk with me, but if at any time more of you enter my camp armed I shall consider it a hostile demonstration. Do you

understand?"

Shoz-Dijiji nodded and without more words turned and retraced his steps toward the camp of the renegades, while Crawford stood watching him until he had disappeared beyond a rise of ground. Not once did the Apache glance back. The cavalry officer shook his head. "It is difficult," he mused, "not to trust a man who has, such implicit confidence in one's honor."

That afternoon, January 11, 1886, promised to witness the termination of more than three hundred years of virtually constant warfare between the Apaches and the whites. Captain Crawford and Lieutenant Maus were jubilant--they were about to succeed where so many others had failed. The days of heat and thirst and gruelling work were over.

"Geronimo is through," said Crawford. "He is ready to give up and come in and be a good Indian. If he wasn't he'd never have sent the Black Bear with that message."

"I don't trust any of them," replied Maus, "and as for being a good Indian--there's only one thing that'll ever make Geronimo that"--he touched the butt of his pistol.

"That doctrine is responsible to a greater extent than any other one thing for many of the atrocities and the seeming treachery of the Apaches," replied Crawford. "They have heard that so often that they

do not really trust any of us, for they believe that we all hold the same view. It makes them nervous when any of us are near them, and as they are always suspicious of us the least suggestion of an overt act on our part frightens them onto the war trail and goads them to reprisals.

"It has taken months of the hardest kind of work to reach the point where Geronimo is ready to make peace--a thoughtless word or gesture now may easily undo all that we have accomplished. Constantly impress upon the scouts by word and example the fact that every precaution must be taken to convince the renegades that we intend to fulfill every promise that I have made them."

Shoz-Dijiji came and stood before Geronimo. "What did the white-eyed chief say to you?" demanded the old war chief.

"He said that if we lay down our arms and surrender he will take us to Nan-tan-des-la-par-en," replied Shoz-Dijiji.

"What did Shoz-Dijiji reply?"

"Shoz-Dijiji told the white-eyed man that Geronimo would not surrender, but that he would hold a parley with Nan-tan-des-la-par-en. At last the white-eyed chief agreed. We may retain our arms, and he promises that we shall not be attacked if we accompany him peaceably to the parley with Nan-tan-des-la-par-en."

"What did you reply?"

"That we would come and make camp near him this afternoon. He has promised that this scouts will not fire upon us."

"Good!" exclaimed Geronimo. "Let us make ready to move our camp, and let it be understood that if the word made between Shoz-Dijiji and the white-eyed chief be broken and shots fired in anger the first shot shall not be fired by a member of my band. I have spoken!"

As the renegades broke camp and moved slowly in the direction of Crawford's outfit a swart Mexican cavalryman, concealed behind the summit of a low hill, watched them, and as he watched a grim smile of satisfaction played for an instant about the corners of his eyes. Ten minutes later he was reporting to Captain Santa Anna Perez.

"They shall not escape me this time," said Perez, as he gave the command to resume the march in pursuit of the illusive enemy.

A short distance from Crawford's camp Geronimo halted his band and sent Shoz-Dijiji ahead to arrange a meeting between Geronimo and Crawford for the purpose of ratifying the understanding that Shoz-Dijiji and the officer had arrived at earlier in the day.

With a white rag fastened to the muzzle of his rifle the Black Bear approached the camp of the Scouts

the Black Bear approached the camp of the Scouts and, following the instructions of Crawford to his men, was permitted to enter. Every man of Crawford's command Shoz-Dijji knew personally. With many of them he had played as a boy; and with most of them he had gone upon the war trail, fighting shoulder to shoulder with them against both Mexicans and pindah-lickoyee; but today he passed among them with his head high, as one might pass among strangers and enemies.

Crawford, waiting to receive him, could not but admire the silent contempt of the tall young war chief for those of his own race whom he must consider nothing short of traitors; and in his heart the courageous cavalry officer found respect and understanding for this other courageous soldier of an alien race.

"I am glad that you have come, Shoz-Dijji," he said. "You bring word from Geronimo? He will go with me to General Crook?"

"Geronimo wishes to come and make talk with you," replied the Black Bear. "He wishes his own ears to hear the words you spoke to Shoz-Dijji this morning."

"Good!" said Crawford. "Let Geronimo--" His words were cut short by a fusilade of shots from the direction of the renegades' position.

Crawford snatched his pistol from its holster and covered Shoz-Dijji.

"So that is the word Geronimo sends?" he exclaimed. "Treachery!"

The Apache wheeled about and looked in the direction of his people. The scouts were hastily preparing to meet an attack. Every eye was on the renegades--in every mind was the same thought that Crawford had voiced--treachery!

Shoz-Dijiji pointed. "No!", he cried. "Look! It is not the warriors of Geronimo. Their backs are toward us. They are firing in the other direction. They are being attacked from the south. There! See! Mexican soldiers!"

The renegades, firing as they came, were falling back upon the scouts' camp; and, following them, there now came into full view a company of Mexican regulars.

"For God's sake, stop firing!" cried Crawford. "These are United States troops."

Captain Santa Anna Perez saw before him only Apaches. It is true that some of them wore portions of the uniform of the soldiers of a sister republic; but Captain Santa Anna Perez had fought Apaches for years, and he well knew that they were shrewd enough to take advantage of any form of deception of which they could avail themselves, and he thought this but a ruse.

Two of his officers lay dead and two privates,

while several others were wounded, and now the Apaches in uniform, as well as those who were not, were firing upon him. How was he to know the truth? What was he to do? One of his sbordinates ran to his side. "There has been a terrible mistake!" he cried. "Those are Crawford's scouts --I recognize the captain. In the name of God, give the command to cease firing!"

Perez acted immediately upon the advice of his lieutenant, but the tragic blunder had not as yet taken its full toll of life. In the front line a young Mexican soldier knelt with his carbine. Perhaps he was excited. Perhaps he did not hear the loudly shouted command of his captain. No one will ever know why he did the thing he did.

The others on both sides had ceased firing when this youth raised his carbine to his shoulder, took careful aim, and fired. Uttering no sound, dead on his feet, Captain Emmet Crawford fell with a bullet in his brain.

Shoz-Dijji, who had been standing beside him, had witnessed the whole occurrence. He threw his own rifle to his shoulder and pressed the trigger. When he lowered the smoking muzzle Crawford had been avenged, and that is why no one will ever know why the Mexican soldier did the thing he did.

With difficulty Perez and Maus quieted their men, and it was with equal difficulty that Geronimo held his renegades in check. They were gathered in a

little knot to one side, and Shoz-Dijji had joined them.

"It was a ruse to trap us!" cried a brave. "They intended to get us between them and kill us all."

"Do not talk like a child," exclaimed Shoz-Dijji. "Not one of us has been killed or wounded, while they have lost several on each side. The Mexicans made a mistake. They did not know Crawford's scouts were near, nor did Crawford know that the Mexican soldiers were approaching."

The brave grunted. "Look," he said, pointing: "the war chiefs of the Mexicans and the pindah-lickoyee are holding a council. If they are not plotting against us why do they not invite our chiefs to the council? It is not I who am a child but Shoz-Dijji, if he trusts the pindah-lickoyee or the Mexicans."

"Perhaps they make bad talk about us," said Geronimo, suspiciously. "Maus does not like me; and, with Crawford dead, there is no friend among them that I may trust. The Mexicans I have never trusted."

"Nor does Shoz-Dijji trust them," said the Black Bear. "The battle they just fought was a mistake. That, I say again; but it does not mean that I trust them. Perhaps they are plotting against us now; for Crawford is dead."

"Maus and the Mexican could combine forces against us," suggested Geronimo, nervously. "Both

the Mexicans and pindah-lickoyee have tricked us before. They would not hesitate to do it again. We are few, they are many--they could wipe us out, and there would be none left to say that it happened through treachery."

"Let us attack them first," suggested a warrior. "They are off their guard. We could kill many of them and the rest would run away. Come!"

"No!" cried Geronimo. "Our women are with us. We are very few. All would be killed. Let us withdraw and wait. Perhaps we shall have a better chance later. Only fools attack when they know they cannot win. Perhaps Nan-tan-des-la-par-en will come and we shall make peace. That will be better. I am tired of fighting."

"Let us go away for a while, at least until the Mexicans have left," counseled Shoz-Dijji. "Then, perhaps, we can make terms with Maus. If not we can pick our own time and place to fight."

"That is good talk," said Geronimo. "Come! We shall move away slowly."

Maus and Perez, engaged in arranging terms for the removal of Crawford's body and exchanging notes that would relieve one another of responsibility for the tragic incident of the battle between the troops of friendly nations, paid little attention to the renegades, and once again Geronimo slipped through the fingers of his would-be captors, and as Maus' and Perez' commands

be captors, and as Maus and Perez continued marched away together toward Nacori the scouts of the old war chief watched them depart and carried the word to Geronimo.

"They have marched away together--the Mexicans and the pindah-lickoyee?" demanded Geronimo. "That is bad. They are planning to join forces against us. They will return, but they will not find us here."

Again the renegades changed camp; this time to a still more remote and inaccessible position. The days ran into weeks, the weeks to months. The band scattered, scouting and hunting. At all times Geronimo knew the location of Maus' command; and when he became reasonably convinced that Maus was waiting for the arrival of Crook and was not planning a hostile move against the renegades he made no further attempt to conceal his location from the white officer, but he did not relax his vigilance.

It was late in March. Geronimo, Shoz-Dijiji, Gian-nah-tah, and several others were squatting in the shade of a sycamore, smoking and chatting, when two Apaches entered the camp and approached them. One was one of Geronimo's own scouts, the other wore the red head-band of a government scout. When the two halted before Geronimo the war chief arose.

"What do you want in the camp of Geronimo?" he asked, addressing the government scout as though

he had been a total stranger.

"I bring a message from Maus," replied the other. "Nan-tan- des-la-par-en has come. He is ready to hold a parley with you. What answer shall I take back?"

"Tell Nan-tan-des-la-par-en that Geronimo will meet him tomorrow in the Canyon of Los Embudos."

When the morning came Geronimo set out with a party of chiefs and warriors for the meeting place. Mangas was with him and Na-chi-ta, and there were Shoz-Dijji, Gian-nah- tah, Chihuahua, Nanay, and Kut-le in the party. General Crook was awaiting them in the Canyon of Los Embudos. The two parties exchanged salutations and then seated themselves in a rough circle under the shade of large sycamore and cottonwood trees.

General Crook addressed Geronimo almost immediately. "Why did you leave the reservation?" he demanded.

"You told me that I might live in the reservation the same as white people live," replied Geronimo, "but that was not true. You sent soldiers to take my horses and cattle from me. I had a crop of oats almost ready to harvest, but I could not live in the reservation after the way you had treated me. I went away with my wife and children to live in peace as my own people have always lived. I did not go upon the war trail, but you told your soldiers

not go upon the war trail, but you told your soldiers to find me and put me in prison and if I resisted to kill me."

"I never gave any such orders," snapped Crook.

Geronimo did not reply.

"But," continued Crook, "if you left the reservation for that reason, why did you kill innocent people, sneaking all over the country to do it? What did those innocent people do to you that you should kill them, steal their horses, and slip around in the rocks like coyotes?"

"You promised me in the Sierra Madre that that peace should last, but you have lied about it. When a man has lied to me once I want some better proof than his own word before I can believe him again."

"So does Geronimo," interrupted the war chief.

"You must make up your mind," continued Crook, "whether you will stay out on the war path or surrender unconditionally. If you stay out I'll keep after you and kill the last one if it takes fifty years."

"I do not want to fight the white man," replied Geronimo; "but I do not want to return to the reservation and be hanged, as many of the white people have said that I should be. People tell bad stories about me. I do not want that any more. When a man tries to do right, people should not tell bad stories about him. I have tried to do right. Does

the white man try to do right? I am the same man. I have the same feet, legs, and hands; and the sun looks down upon me, a complete man.

"The Sun and the Darkness and the Winds are all listening to what we say now. They know that Geronimo is telling the truth. To prove to you that I am telling the truth, remember that I sent you word that I would come from a place far away to speak to you here; and you see me now. If I were thinking bad, or if I had done bad, I would never have come here."

He paused, waiting for Crook to reply.

"I have said all that I have to say," said the General; "you had better think it over tonight and let me know in the morning."

For two more days the parley progressed; and at last it was agreed that Geronimo and his band should accompany Lieutenant Maus and his battalion of scouts to Fort Bowie, Arizona. The northward march commenced on the morning of March 25th and by the night of the 29th the party had reached the border between Mexico and Arizona.

Nine--RED FOOLS AND WHITE SCOUNDRELS

IN THE camp of the Apaches, which lay at a little

distance from that of the troops, there was an atmosphere of nervousness and suspicion.

"I do not like the way in which Nan-tan-des-la-par-en spoke to me," said Geronimo. "I know that he did not speak the truth when he said that he had not ordered the soldiers to catch me and to kill me if I resisted. Perhaps he is not telling me the truth now."

"They have lied to us always before," said Na-chi-ta. "Now, if we go back with them to Fort Bowie, how do we know that they will not put us in prison. We are chiefs. If they wish to frighten our people they may kill us. The white-eyed men are crying for the blood of Geronimo."

"If they kill Geronimo they will kill Na-chi-ta also," said Shoz-Dijji.

"I have thought of that," replied Na-chi-ta. "They will not kill us," said Chihuahua. "They will be content to know that we are no longer on the war trail. We have taught them a lesson this time. Now, maybe, they will let us alone."

"Chihuahua thinks only of the little farm the white-eyes let him work--like a woman," scoffed Shoz-Dijji. "I hate them. I shall not go back to live upon a reservation. I shall not go back to be laughed at by white-eyed men, to hear them call me a damn Siwash, to listen while they make fun of my gods and insult my mother and my sisters."

"Shoz-Dijji will go upon the war-trail alone and do battle with all the soldiers of two great nations?" sneered Chihuahua.

"Then Shoz-Dijji will at least die like a man and a warrior," replied the Black Bear .

"Have we not troubles enough without quarreling among ourselves?" demanded Geronimo.

"And now Gian-nah-tah is bringing more trouble into our camp," said Chihuahua. "Look!" and he pointed toward the young warrior, who was walking toward them.

In each hand Gian-nah-tah carried a bottle of whiskey, and his slightly unsteady gait was fair evidence that he had been drinking. He approached the group of men, women, and children and extended one of the bottles toward Geronimo. The old chief took a long drink and passed the bottle to Na-chi-ta.

Shoz-Dijji stood eyeing them silently. By no changed expression did he show either disapproval or its opposite, but when Na-chi-ta passed the whiskey on to him, after having drunk deeply, he shook his head and grinned.

"Why do you smile?" demanded Na-chi-ta.

"Because now I shall not turn back into Mexico alone," replied the Black Bear.

"Why do you say that?" asked Geronimo.

The bottle went the rounds, though all did not drink. Chihuahua was one who did not.

"Where did you get this, Gian-nah-tah?" asked Geronimo.

"A white-eyed man is selling it just across the border in Mexico. He is selling it to the soldiers too. He says that they are boasting about what they are going to do to Geronimo and his band. They make much bad talk against you."

"What do they say they are going to do to us?" demanded Geronimo, taking another drink.

"They are going to shoot us all as soon as we are across the border."

Chihuahua laughed. "The foolish talk of drunken men," he said.

"Many of the white-eyed soldiers are drunk," continued Gian-nah-tah. "When they are drunk they may kill us. Let us turn back. If we must be killed let us be killed in battle and not shot down from behind by drunken white-eyes."

"Now would be a good time to attack them," said Na-chi-ta, "while they are drunk."

"If we do not kill them they will kill us," urged Gian-nah-tah. "Come!"

"Shut up, Gian-nah-tah!" commanded Shoz-Dijiji. "The strong water of the white-eyed men does not make you a war chief to lead the braves of the Shis-Inday into battle- it only makes you a fool."

"Shoz-Dijiji calls Gian-nah-tah a fool?" demanded the young warrior angrily. "Shoz-Dijiji does not want to fight the pindah-lickoyee because Shoz-Dijiji is a coward and himself a pindah-lickoyee."

Shoz-Dijiji's eyes narrowed as he took a step toward Gian- nah-tah. The latter drew his great butcher knife, but he retreated. Then it was that Geronimo stepped between them. "If you want to kill," he said, "there is always the enemy."

"I do not want to kill Gian-nah-tah, my best friend," said Shoz-Dijiji. "Perhaps it was the strong water of the pindah-lickoyee that spoke through the mouth of Gian-nah- tah. Tomorrow, when he is sober, Shoz-Dijiji will ask him; but no man may call Shoz-Dijiji a white-eyes and live. Juh learned that when Shoz-Dijiji killed him."

"Shut up, Gian-nah-tah," advised Na-chi-ta, "and go to the white-eyed fool who sold you this strong water and buy more. Here!" He handed Gian-nah-tah several pieces of silver money. "Get plenty."

Many of the braves already felt the effects of the adulterated, raw spirits that Tribollet was selling them at ten dollars a gallon, and most of those that had been drinking were drinking their fill with

had been drinking were daubing their faces with war paint and boasting of what they would do to the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee.

They greeted Gian-nah-tah with shouts of savage welcome when he returned with more whiskey, and as they drank they talked loudly of killing all the white soldiers first and then taking the war trail in a final campaign that would wipe out the last vestige of the white race from the land of the Shis-Inday.

Shoz-Dijiji looked on in sorrow--not because they were drunk or because they talked of killing the white-eyed people; but because he knew that if they were not stopped they would soon be so drunk that they could not even defend themselves in the event that the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee set upon them, as persistent rumors from Tribollet's ranch suggested might occur before dawn.

He went to Geronimo and urged him to make some effort to stop the drinking; but Geronimo, himself inflamed by drink, would do nothing. As a matter of fact there was really nothing that he could do since the Apache is a confirmed individualist who resents receiving orders from anyone.

Shoz-Dijiji considered the advisability of taking a few of the warriors who had not drunk to excess and leading them in a raid upon Tribollet's ranch, but he had to abandon the idea because he knew that it would lead to killing and that that would bring the soldiers down upon their camp.

In the end he hit upon another plan; and shortly after, he was in the camp of the Apache scouts where he aroused Alchise and Ka-e-ten-na.

"Listen," said Shoz-Dijiji, "to the sounds you can hear coming from the camp of Geronimo."

"We hear them," said Alchise. "Are you fools that you do not sleep when tomorrow you must march all day in the hot sun?"

"They are all drunk upon the tizwin of the white-eyes," said Shoz-Dijiji. "If more of it is brought into the camp of Geronimo there will be trouble. Already many of the braves have put on the war paint. Shoz-Dijiji has come to you to ask that you go to Nan-tan-des-la-par-en and tell him that he must send soldiers to prevent the white-eyed fool from selling more fire water to the Apaches and to stop the stories that are being told to our people. Otherwise there will be trouble."

"When did Shoz-Dijiji begin to fear trouble with the white-eyed men?" demanded Ka-e-ten-na.

"When he saw the warriors of his people getting so drunk that soon they will be unable to defend themselves, though not so drunk but that some one of them, who may be a bigger fool than the others, will certainly fire upon the first pindah-lickoyee he sees when dawn comes. That is when Shoz-Dijiji began to fear--not war but certain defeat."

"Did Na-chi-ta send you with this message?"

asked Alchise.

"Na-chi-ta is so drunk that he cannot stand upon his feet," replied Shoz-Dijji.

"We will go to Nan-tan-des-la-par-en," said Ka-e-ien-na, "and ask him to let us take some scouts and stop the sale of this stuff to all Apaches."

"Shoz-Dijji will wait here until you return," said the Black Bear.

As Shoz-Dijji waited, the sounds that came to his ears indicated restlessness and activity in the camp of the white soldiers that lay at no great distance from that of the scouts, and these sounds aroused his suspicions, for at this hour of the night the camp should have been quiet. He read in them preparation for attack--treachery. He could not know that they were caused by a few drunken soldiers and portended nothing more serious than a few days in the guard house for the culprits when they reached the Post.

The false rumors that Tribollet and his men had spread among the renegades were working in the mind of Shoz-Dijji, and he was already upon the point of returning to his own camp when Ka-e-ten-na and Alchise came back from their interview with Crook.

"Has Nan-tan-des-la-par-en told you to take warriors and stop the sale of fire water to the

Apaches?" demanded Shoz-Dijji.

"No," replied Alchise.

"He is going to send white-eyed soldiers instead?" asked the Black Bear.

"He will send no one," said Ka-e-ten-na.

"Why not?"

"We do not know."

Shoz-Dijji was worried when he came again to the camp of the renegades. Na-chi-ta was lying helpless upon the ground. Geronimo was drunk, though he still could walk. Most of the braves were asleep. Shoz-Dijji went at once to Geronimo.

"I have just come from the camp of the scouts," he said. "I could hear the white-eyed soldiers preparing for battle. Perhaps they will attack us before dawn. Look at your warriors, Geronimo. They are all drunk. They cannot fight. All will be killed. You would not listen to Shoz-Dijji then, but now you must. I am war chief of the Be-don-ko-he. You are war chief of all the Apaches, but you are too drunk to lead them in battle or to counsel them with wisdom. Therefore you shall listen to Shoz-Dijji and do what he says. Only thus may we save our people from being wiped out by the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee before chigo-na-ay has risen above the tree tops."

The words of Shoz-Dijji had a slightly sobering effect upon Geronimo. He looked about him. By the flickering light of dying fires he saw the flower of his fighting force lying in drunken stupor, prone upon the ground, like beasts.

Shoz-Dijji stood with a sneer upon his lip. "The pindah-lickoyee want the Shis-Inday to come out of the mountains and live as they live," he said. "They want the poor Apache to be like them. Here is the result. We have come out of the mountains, and already we are like the pindah-lickoyee. If we live among them long our women will be like their women; and then you will not see an Apache woman whose nose has not been cut off or an Apache man who is not always lying in the dirt, drunk.

"But that will not be for those of us who are here, Geronimo, if we stay here until after Tapida brings the new day, for we shall all be dead. The soldiers of the white-eyes are already preparing to attack us. How may drunken men defend their families and themselves? We shall all be killed if we do not go at once. I have spoken."

Slowly Geronimo gathered his muddled wits. The words of Shoz-Dijji took form within his brain. He saw the condition of his warriors, and he recalled not only the rumors that had come from Tribollet's but also the treacherous attacks that had been made upon his people by the white-eyed soldiers in the past.

"There is yet time," said Shoz-Dijji. "The night is dark. If we leave at once and in silence we can be far away before they know that we have left. Another day, when our warriors are sober, we can fight them but not today."

"Awake them all," said Geronimo. "Gather the women and children. Tell them that we are going back into the mountains of Mexico. Tell them that we are not going to remain here to be murdered by our enemies or taken back to Bowie to be hanged."

They did not all answer the summons of Geronimo. Na-chi-ta went but he did not know that he was going or where. They threw him across the back of a mule; and Shoz-Dijji loaded Gian-nah-tah upon another, and Geronimo rode silently out through the night with these and eighteen other warriors, fourteen women, and two boys, down into the mountains of Mexico; and the results of months of the hardest campaign that, possibly, any troops in the history of warfare ever experienced were entirely nullified by one cheap white man with a barrel of cheap whiskey.

Ten--Two THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR A HEAD

DOWN into the rugged mountain fastness of Sonora the remnants of Geronimo's band of renegades hurried from the menace of the white

man's justice. Suffering from the after effects of Tribollet's whiskey they marched in sullen silence, thinking only of escape, for the fighting spirit of a sick man is not wont to rise to any great heights.

For sixteen hours they marched with but a single brief rest, and it was again dark when they went into camp.

Water and a little food revived their spirits. There was even laughter, low pitched lest it reach across the night to the ears of an enemy.

Shoz-Dijiji squatted upon his haunches chewing upon a strip of jerked venison that was both dirty and "high" and that not only pleased his palate but gave him strength, renewing the iron tissue of his iron frame. Less fastidious, perhaps, than a civilized epicure in the preparation and serving of his food, yet, savage though he was, he appreciated the same delicate flavor of partial decay.

As he ate, a tall warrior came and stood before him. It was Gian-nah-tah. Shoz-Dijiji continued eating, in silence.

"At the kunh-gan-hay beside the soldiers of Nantan-des-la-par-en," commenced Gian-nah-tah, presently, "the poisoned water of the pindah-lickoyee spoke through the mouth of Gian-nah-tah, saying words that Gian-nah-tah would not have said." He stopped, waiting.

"Shoz-Dijiji knew that Gian-nah-tah his best

Shoz-Dijji knew that Gian-nah-tah, his best friend, did not speak those words," replied Shoz-Dijji. "It was the bad spirits that the white man puts into his strong water to make trouble between men. Gian-nah-tah is a fool to be tricked thus by the pindah-lickoyee."

"Yes," agreed Gian-nah-tah, "I am a fool." Shoz-Dijji scratched some criss-cross lines upon the ground where he squatted. With a bit of stick he scratched them. "These," he said, "are the troubles that have come between Shoz-Dijji and Gian-nah-tah--the bad talk--the bad thoughts." With his palm he smoothed the ground. "Now they are gone," he said. "Let us forget them." He offered Gian-nah-tah a piece of venison, and his friend squatted beside him.

"Do you think the soldiers of the white-eyed men will follow us?" asked Gian-nah-tah.

Shoz-Dijji shook his head. "I do not know," he replied. "I offered hoddentin to the winds and to the night, and I prayed that Usen would make the hearts of the pindah-lickoyee good that they might return to their own country and leave us in peace.

"I asked the tzi-daltai that Nan-ta-do-tash blessed for me if the white-eyed soldiers were pursuing us, but I have received no answer."

"Nan-tan-des-la-par-en said that if we did not come with him he would follow us and kill us all if it took fifty years," reminded Gian-nah-tah.

Shoz-Dijiji laughed. "That is just talk," he said. "Anyone can make big talk. For over three hundred years we have been fighting the pindah-lickoyee; and they have not killed us all, yet. Some day they will, but it will take more than fifty years. You and I shall have plenty of fighting before the last of the Shis-Inday is killed."

"I do not know," said Gian-nah-tah. "A spirit came to me while I slept the first night that we camped near the soldiers of Nan-tan-des-la-par-en. It was the spirit of my father. He said that he had waited a long time for me. He said that pretty soon I would come. I asked him when; but just then I awoke, and that frightened him away. Perhaps it will be tomorrow--who knows?"

"Do not say that, Gian-nah-tah," said Shoz-Dijiji. "Already have I seen too many of my friends go. One hundred and thirty four we were when we went out from-an Carlos less than twelve moons ago. Today we are thirty eight. The others are dead, or prisoners of the pindah-lickoyee. The heart of Shoz-Dijiji is sad, as are the hearts of all Apaches. The hand of every man is against us--even the hands of our brothers. We must not think of death. Gian-nah-tah and Shoz-Dijiji must live for one another. Surely Usen will not take everything that we love from us!"

"Usen has forgotten the Apache," said Gian-nah-tah, sadly.

For a month the renegades rested and recuperated in the high sierras, and then one day a scout brought word to Geronimo that he had sighted three troops of United States Cavalry as they were going into camp a day's march to the north.

Geronimo shook his head. "They are always talking of peace," he said, "and always making war upon us. They will not leave us alone." He turned to Shoz-Dijiji. "Go to the camp of the pindah-lickoyee and try to talk with some of their scouts. Take Gian-nah-tah with you. Do not trust too much in the honor of the scouts, but learn all that you can without telling them anything."

Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah-tah arose. "That is all?" asked the young war chief of the Be-don-ko-he.

"That is all," replied Geronimo. The soft rustle of their war moccasins faded into silence. The night swallowed them. Geronimo sat with bowed head, his eyes upon the ground. A girl looked after them and sighed. Then she cast hoddentin in the direction they had gone and whispered prayers for the safety of one of them. Also she prayed that some day she would be the mother of warriors and that Gian-nah-tah would be their father.

In four hours the two warriors covered the distance that it would take a troop of cavalry all of the following day to cover; but they travelled where no horse might travel, over trails that no cavalryman knew. They trod in places where only mountain

sheep and Apaches had trod before.

Quiet lay upon the camp of --th Cavalry. Three weary sentries; softly cursing because they must walk their posts to save their horses, circled the lonely bivouac. At a little distance lay the camp of the Apache scouts. The dismal voice of an owl broke the silence. It came from the summit of a low bluff south of the camp. At intervals it was repeated twice.

One of the sentries was a rookie. "Gosh," he soliloquized, "but that's a lonesome sound!"

Once more came the eerie cry--this time, apparently, from the camp of the scouts.

Number One sentry was a veteran. He stepped quickly from his post to the side of his top sergeant, who lay wrapped in a sweaty saddle blanket with his head on a McClellan.

"H-s-st! McGuire!" he whispered.

"Wot the' ell?" demanded the sergeant, sitting up.

"Hostiles! I just heard 'em signalling to our Siwashes -- three owl calls and an answer."

The sergeant came to his feet, strapping his belt about his hips. He picked up his carbine. "Git back on your post an' keep your ears unbuttoned," he directed. "I'll mosey out that way a bit an' listen. Maybe it was a owl."

Shoz-Dijji and Gian-nah-tah crept silently down the face of the bluff and approached the camp of the scouts. There was no moon, and light clouds obscured the stars. It was very dark. A figure loomed suddenly before them. "Who are you?" it demanded in a whisper that could not have been heard ten feet away.

"We are Be-don-ko-he," replied Shoz-Dijji. "We bring a message from Geronimo."

"What is it?"

"He wants the soldiers to go back to their own country and leave him alone. He is not fighting the pindah-lickoyee. If they will go away he will not again raid in Arizona or New Mexico."

"You are Shoz-Dijji," said the scout. "I am glad you came. We have word for Geronimo and all that are with him. His fight is hopeless. He had better come in. If he does, perhaps they will not kill him. If he stays out he is sure to be killed. Every one of his warriors will be killed. Tell him to come in."

"Why do you think we will be killed? They have not killed us yet, and they have been trying to ever since we were born."

"Now they will," insisted the scout, "for they have offered to pay fifty dollars for the head of every warrior that is brought in and two thousand dollars for the head of Geronimo. There are Apaches who

would kill their own fathers for fifty dollars."

"You do not kill us," said Shoz-Dijji, "and our heads are worth one hundred dollars."

"Give thanks to Usen, then, that he sent me to meet you and not another," replied the scout.

"What are the plans of the pindah-lickoyee?" asked Shoz- Dijji.

"Their orders are to get Geronimo and all his band. The Mexicans are helping them. It was the Mexicans who invited them down here to catch you."

"They shall pay," growled Shoz-Dijji. "So old Nan-tan-des- la-par-en will pay fifty dollars for my head, eh?" said Gian-nah-tah. "Very well, I shall go and get his head for nothing."

"It was not Nan-tan-des-la-par-en," said the scout. "He is no longer war chief of the pindah-lickoyee. They have taken him away and sent another. His name is Miles. It is he who has offered the money for your heads. He has ordered out many soldiers to follow you and catch you. Here there are three troops of the --th Cavalry; Lawton is coming with Apache scouts, cavalry, and infantry. As fast as men and horses are tired they will send fresh ones to replace them. A few men cannot fight against so many and win. That is why so many of us have joined the scouts. It is not that we love the white-eyed ones any better than you do. We know

white--you ones any better than you do. We know when we are beaten--that is all. We would live in peace. By going out you make trouble for us all. We want to put an end to all this trouble."

"I, too, like peace," said Shoz-Dijiji; "but better even than peace I like freedom. If you are content to be the slave of the pindah-lickoyee that is your own affair. Shoz-Dijiji would rather be forever on the war trail than be a slave. If you are men you will leave the service of the white-eyes and join Geronimo."

"Yes," said Gian-nah-tah, "take that message to our brothers who have turned against us."

"Come!" said Shoz-Dijiji, and the two warriors turned back toward the camp of Geronimo.

1st Sergeant McGuire, "K" Troop, --th Cavalry' strolled back to his blankets. On the way he paused to speak to Number One. "The next time you hear a owl," he said, "you just telegraph President Cleveland and let me sleep."

Chigo-na-ay was an hour high when Shoz-Dijiji and Gian-nah- tah stood again before the rude hogan of Geronimo deep hid upon the rough breast of the Mother of Mountains. The old war chief listened in silence while they narrated with primitive fidelity every detail of their interview with the scout.

"Fifty dollars for the head of a warrior, two thousand dollars for the head of Geronimo!" he

exclaimed. "It is thus that they offer a bounty for the heads of wolves and coyotes. They treat us as beasts and expect us to treat them as men. When they war among themselves do they offer money for the head of an enemy? No! They reserve that insult for the Apache.

"They will win because Usen has deserted us. And when they have killed us all there will be none to stop them from stealing the rest of our land. That is what they want. That is why they make treaties with us and then break them, to drive us upon the war trail that they may have an excuse to kill us faster. That is why they offer money for our heads.

"Oh, Usen! What have the Shis-Inday done that you should be angry with them and let their enemies destroy them?"

"Do not waste your breath praying to Usen," said Gian-nah- tah. "Pray to the God of the pindah-lickoyee. He is stronger than Usen."

"Perhaps you are right," said Geronimo, sadly. "He is a wicked God, but his medicine is stronger than the medicine of Usen."

"I," said Shoz-Dijji, "shall pray always to the god of my fathers. I want nothing of the pindah-lickoyee or their god. I hate them all."

A brave, moving at an easy run, approached the camp and stopped before Geronimo.

"Soldiers are coming," he said. "Their scouts have followed the tracks of Shoz-Dijji and Gian-nah-tah."

"Only Apaches could trail us," said Geronimo. "If our brothers had remained loyal and taken the war trail with us the pindah-lickoyee could not conquer us in a thousand rains."

"There is a place where we can meet them," said the brave who had brought the word, "and stop them."

"I know," replied Geronimo. He called four warriors to him. "Take the women and the boys," he said, "and cross over the summit to the burned pine by the first water. Those of us who live will join you there after the battle."

Stripped to breech-cloth and moccasins, eighteen painted savages filed silently through the rough mountains. A scout preceded them. Behind Geronimo walked the Apache Devil, his blue face banded with white. Stern, grim, terrible men these--hunted as beasts are hunted, retaliating as only a cornered beast retaliates--asking no quarter and giving none.

Equipped by civilization with the best of weapons and plenty of ammunition and by nature with high intelligence, courage, and shrewdness they had every advantage except that of numbers over any enemy that might take the field against them.

They stopped the --th Cavalry that day as they had stopped other troops before and without the loss of a man, and with the coming of night had vanished among the rocks of their beloved mountains and rejoined their women in the new camp by the burned pine at the first water beyond the summit.

Stern, grim, relentless, the cavalry pursued. Cooperating with them were the troops of Governor Torres of Sonora. The renegades were hard pressed. Skirmishes were of almost daily occurrence now. And then Lawton came with his hand picked force of seasoned veterans.

It was May again. For a year this handful of savage warriors and women and children had defied, eluded, and oftentimes defeated the forces of two civilized nations. The military strategy of their leader had been pitted against that of a great American general and proved superior. A score of West Pointers had exhausted their every resource and failed, but they were at last nearing their goal -- victory seemed imminent. Miles and Lawton would receive the plaudits of their countrymen; and yet, if the truth were known, Miles and Lawton might have continued to pursue Geronimo and his band to the day of their deaths, and without success, had it not been that Apache turned against Apache.

The Shis-Inday may date the beginning of the end from the day that the first Indian Scouts were organized.

Hunted relentlessly, given no opportunity to rest because their every haunt, their every trail, their every hiding place was as well known to the scouts who pursued them as it was to themselves, they found themselves at last practically surrounded.

With no opportunity to hunt they were compelled to kill their ponies for sustenance until at last only Nejeunee was left.

Geronimo sat in council after a day of running battle.

"The warriors of the pindah-lickoyee and the Mexicans are all about us," he said. "If we can break through and cross the mountains into Chihuahua perhaps we can escape them. Then we must separate and go in different directions. They will hear of us here today and there tomorrow. They will hurry from one place to another. Their horses will become tired and their soldiers footsore. Their force will be broken up into small parties. It will be easier for us to elude them. Tonight we shall move east. A camp of the enemy lies directly in our path, but if we can pass it before dawn we shall be in mountains where no cavalry can follow and tomorrow we shall be in Chihuahua.

"There is one pony left. Its meat will carry us through until we can find cattle in Chihuahua."

There was silence. Every warrior, every woman knew that Shoz-Diiiii had repeatedly refused to

known that Shoz-Dijji had repeatedly refused to permit the killing of the little pinto stallion for food.

"Nejeunee is more than a war pony," Shoz-Dijji had once said to Geronimo. "He is my friend. I will not eat my friend. Nor permit anyone to eat my friend."

Glances stole around the circle in search of Shoz-Dijji. He was not there.

Up toward the camp of the enemy--the camp that stood between the renegades and Chihuahua--a painted warrior rode a pinto stallion. A gentle May wind blew down to the nostrils of the man and his mount. To Nejeunee it carried the scent of his kind from the picket line of the --th Cavalry. He pricked up his ears and nickered. Shoz-Dijji slid from his back, slipped the primitive bridle from about his lower jaw and slapped him on the rump.

"Good-bye, Nejeunee," he whispered; "the pindah-lickoyee may kill you, but they will not eat you."

Slowly the Apache walked back toward the camp of his people. Like the stones upon the grave of Ish-kay-nay, many and heavy, his sorrows lay upon his heart.

"Perhaps, after all," he mused, "Gian-nah-tah is right and Usen has forgotten the Apaches. I have prayed to him in the high places; I have offered hoddentin to him upon the winds of the morning and

the evening; I have turned a deaf ear to the enemies who bring us a new god. Yet one by one the friends that I love are taken from me. Oh, Usen, before they are all gone take Shoz-Dijiji! Do not leave him alone without friends in a world filled with enemies!"

"Where is Shoz-Dijiji?" demanded Geronimo, his blue eyes sweeping the circle before him. "Gian-nah-tah, where is Shoz-Dijiji?"

"Here is Shoz-Dijiji!" said a voice from the darkness; and as they looked up, the war chief of the Be-don-ko-he stepped into the dim, flickering light of their tiny fire. "Shoz-Dijiji," said Geronimo, "there is but one pony left. It is Nejeunee. He must be killed for food. The others are all gone."

"Nejeunee is gone, also," said Shoz-Dijiji.

"Gone?"

"I have told you many times that no one would ever eat Nejeunee while Shoz-Dijiji lived. I have taken him away. What are you going to do about it?"

Geronimo bowed his head. "Even my son has turned against me," he said, sadly.

"Those are not true words, Geronimo," replied Shoz-Dijiji. "Nejeunee was more to me than a great war pony. When Shoz-Dijiji was a youth and Nejeunee a colt, Shoz-Dijiji broke him. Little Ish-kay-nay rode upon his back. It was Nejeunee that

was tied before the hogan of her father. It was Nejeunee that Ish-kay-nay led to water and fed the next morning. Nejeunee has carried me through many battles. His fleet feet have borne me from the clutches of many an enemy. He has been the friend of Shoz-Dijiji as well as his war pony. Now he is old and yet there is not a fleetier or braver pony in the land of the Shis-Inday. He deserves better of me than to be killed and eaten.

"Geronimo says that Shoz-Dijiji has turned against him. Every day Shoz-Dijiji offers his life for Geronimo, and all that he has asked in return is the life of his friend."

"Say no more," said Na-chi-ta, the son of Cochise. "Let Shoz-Dijiji have the life of his friend. We have been hungry before--we can be hungry again. It does not kill an Apache to be hungry. We are not pindah-lickoyee."

Eleven--A RED HERO

DAWN was breaking as the last of the renegades crept past the camp of the enemy, where the troopers, already astir an hour, stood to horse. It was known that the camp of the renegades lay just below them, surrounded. A sudden, surprise sortie at dawn would either overwhelm them or send them scattering into the arms of other troops stationed to cut off their retreat in any direction. It began to look as though Geronimo and his band were to be wiped

out or captured at last. Two scouts had gone down toward the camp of the Apaches to investigate. The commanding officer was impatiently awaiting their return. Presently it would be too light for a surprise attack.

The officers were congratulating their commander and themselves upon the nice work that had brought old Geronimo into a trap at last--a trap from which he could not conceivably escape. They were also talking about the pinto stallion that had wandered up to their picket line during the night.

"I know that pony, sir," said Lieutenant King to the commanding officer, "and I know the Indian who owns him -- he saved my life once. If it is possible, sir, I should like very much to take the pony back to Arizona with me. There is a rancher there whom I believe would be very glad to have him and take care of him."

"Well, it's not exactly regular, Mr. King, but perhaps the pony was stolen from this rancher--eh?" the C. O. grinned.

"Perhaps," agreed King.

"Very well, you may return it to its owner."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Here are the scouts," said the C. O. "Return to your troops, and be ready to move out at once!"

Two Apaches approached the commanding officer. They wore the red head-bands of government scouts.

"Well?" demanded the officer. "Did you find Geronimo?"

"Him gone," said one of the scouts.

"Gone! Where in hell has he gone?"

"Mebby so there," he pointed to the canyon behind them.

"Hell! He couldn't have gone there. What do you suppose we been doing here?"

"Me no sabe," replied the Apache. "Him gone--there!"

"How do you know?"

"Me follow tracks."

"You sure?"

"Sure!"

"How long?"

"Mebby so half hour."

The officer turned to his chief of scouts. "Did you hear that? Slipped through our fingers again. The old devil! Get after him at once. Pick up the trail

old devil. Get after him at once. Pick up the trail. Keep after him. We'll follow. If you get in touch with him don't attack. Just keep in touch with him until we come up."

"Yes, sir!"

Two scouts preceded Geronimo's little band up the canyon that would take them to the summit and over into Chihuahua. Precipitous walls hemmed them in on both sides, effectually keeping them to the bottom of the canyon. Here the going was good; but, also, it would be good going for horses and no escape for the fleeing renegades should they be overtaken. They were marching rapidly, needing no urging, for each of them knew the life and death necessity for speed.

Behind the two scouts came the women and the two boys. All the fighting men except the two scouts were in the rear. A little behind the others came Gian-nah-tah and three fellows. These would be the first to sight the enemy and give the word that would permit the main body to take a position from which they might best offer a defense. But half a mile remained of level going; then the canyon proper terminated in tumbled, terraced ledges leading upward among great boulders and tortured strata toward the summit that was their goal. Once they reached these ledges no cavalry could pursue.

The commanding officer of the pursuing --th knew this and sent one troop ahead with orders to overtake the renegades at all costs before they

reached the sanctuary of those rock strewn ledges. With clanking accouterments and the clash of iron shod hoofs on rocky ground "B" Troop galloped up the canyon, close upon the heels of the Apache scouts.

Just beyond a turn the canyon narrowed, "the beetling cliffs approaching close and the rubble at their base leaving a level path scarce ten feet wide. It was at this point that Gian-nah-tah sighted the leading scout. A half mile more and the renegades would have been safe--just a few minutes and the women and the main body could all be hidden among the boulders at the top of the first terrace, where a thousand cavalymen could not dislodge them.

Gian-nah-tah turned and fired at the first red banded scout. Beyond the scout Gian-nah-tah now saw the leading horsemen of "B" Troop rounding the turn in the canyon.

He called to one of his fellows. "Go to Geronimo," he said. "Tell him to hurry. Gian-nah-tah can hold them off until all are among the rocks."

He knelt upon the red blanket he had thrown off when battle seemed imminent and took careful aim. His shot brought down the horse of a cavalryman. With loud yells "B" Troop came tearing on. Those who rode in front fired as they charged. A bullet passed through Gian-nah-tah's shoulder. The Apache fired rapidly, but he could not stem that

avalanche of plunging horses and yelling men.

Another bullet passed through his chest; but still he knelt there, firing, holding the pass while his people fled to safety. The leading troopers were almost upon him. In an instant he would be ridden down! But he had not held them yet! If they passed him now they would overtake the little band before it won to safety.

He dropped his rifle and seizing the red blanket in both hands arose and waved it in the faces of the oncoming horses. They swerved--they turned, stumbling and plunging among the loose rock of the rubble heaps. Two fell and others piled upon them. For minutes--precious minutes -- all was confusion; then they came on again. And again Gian-nah-tah flourished the red blanket in the faces of the horses, almost from beneath their feet. Again the frightened animals wheeled and fought to escape. Once again there was delay.

Another bullet pierced Gian-nah-tah's body. Weak from loss of blood and from the shock of wounds he could no longer stand, kneeling, he held the pass against fifty men. A fourth bullet passed through him--through his right lung -- and, coughing blood, he turned them back again. Through the yelling and the chaos of the fight the troop commander had been trying to extricate himself from the melee and call his men back. Finally he succeeded. The troop was drawn off a few yards.

"Sergeant " said the captain "dismount and use

beginning, and the captain, however, and use your carbine on that fellow. Don't miss!"

Gian-nah-tah, kneeling, saw what they were doing, but he did not care.--He had held them. His people were safe!

The sergeant knelt and took careful aim.

"Usen has remembered his people at last," whispered Gian- nah-tah.

The sergeant pressed his trigger; and Gian-nah-tah fell forward on his face, a bullet through his brain. When Captain Cullis led his troop through that narrow pass a moment later he saluted as he passed the dead body of a courageous enemy.

That night Geronimo camped beyond the summit, in the State of Chihuahua. Shoz-Dijiji sat in silence, his head bowed. No one mentioned the name of Gian-nah-tah. None of them had seen him die, but they knew that he was dead. He alone was missing. A girl, lying upon her blanket, sobbed quietly through the night.

In the morning the band separated into small parties and, scattering, led the pursuing troops upon many wild and fruitless chases. Geronimo, with six men and four women, started north toward the United States. Shoz-Dijiji, silent, morose, was one of the party.

Even these small bands often broke up for a day or two into other smaller parties. Often the men

or two into other, smaller parties. Often the men hunted alone, but always there were meeting places designated ahead. Thus Geronimo and his companions ranged slowly northward through Chihuahua.

Cutting wood in the mountains near Casa Grande in Sonora had become too hazardous an occupation since Geronimo had been ranging the country; and so Luis Mariel, the son of Pedro Mariel, the woodchopper of Casa Grande, had come over into Chihuahua to look for other work.

He had never cared to be a woodchopper, but longed, as a youth will, for the picturesque and romantic life of a vaquero; and at last, here in Chihuahua, his ambition had been gratified and today, with three other vaqueros, he was helping guard a grazing herd upon the lower slopes of the Sierra Madre.

The four were youths, starting their careers with the prosaic duties of day herding and whiling away the hours with cigarettes and stories. Luis was quite a hero to the others, for he alone had participated in a real battle with Apaches. Chihuahua seemed a very dull and humdrum country after listening to the tales that Luis told of Apache raids and battles in wild Sonora. He told them of the Apache Devil and boasted that he was an old friend of the family.

Above the edge of a nearby arroyo unblinking eyes watched them. The eyes appraised the four cow ponies and sized up the grazing herd. They

were stern eyes, narrowed by much exposure to the pitiless sunlight of the southwest. They were set in a band of white that crossed a blue face from temple to temple. They scrutinized Luis Mariel and recognized him, but their expression did not change.

The Apache saw before him horses that he and his friends needed; he saw food on the hoof, and Usen knew that they needed food; he saw the enemies of his people, anyone of whom would shoot him down on sight, had they the opportunity. But it was he who had the opportunity!

He levelled his rifle and fired. A vaquero cried out and fell from his saddle. The others looked about, drawing their pistols. Shoz-Dijiji fired again and another vaquero fell. Now the two remaining had located the smoke of his rifle and returned his fire.

Shoz-Dijiji dropped below the edge of the arroyo and ran quickly to a new position. When his eyes again peered above the edge of his defense he saw the two galloping toward his former position. He appreciated their bravery and realized their foolhardiness as he dropped his rifle quickly on one of them and pressed the trigger; then he quickly tied a white rag to the muzzle of his smoking rifle and waved it above the edge of the arroyo, though he was careful not to expose any more of his person than was necessary.

Luis Mariel looked in astonishment. What could it mean? A voice called him by name.

"Who are you ?" demanded Luis, whose better judgment prompted him to put spurs to his horse and leave the victors in possession of the field.

"I am a friend," replied Shoz-Dijji. "We shall not harm you if you will throw down your pistol. If you do not we can shoot you before you can get away."

Luis appreciated the truth of this statement. Further, he thought that his enemies must number several men; also -- he did not know that he who addressed him was not a Mexican, for the Spanish was quite as good as Luis' own. So he threw down his pistol, being assured by this time that they had been attacked by bandits who wished only to steal the herd. Perhaps they would invite him to join the band, and when was there ever a red-blooded youth who did not at some time in his career aspire to be a brigand or a pirate?

A painted face appeared above the arroyo's edge. "Mother of God!" cried Luis, "protect me."

The Apache sprang quickly to level ground and came toward the youth.

"The Apache Devil!" exclaimed Luis.

"Yes," said Shoz-Dijji, stooping and picking up Luis' pistol. "I shall not harm you, if you will do as I tell you."

Won't the others kill me?" asked the youth.

"There are no others," replied Shoz-Dijiji.

"But you said 'we,'" explained Luis.

"I am alone."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Round up those three horses and then help me drive this herd to my camp."

"You will not harm me, nor let your friends harm me?"

"Have I harmed you or your father in the past?"

"No."

"Do as I tell you then," said Shoz-Dijiji, "and you will not be killed."

Luis rode after the three horses which were now grazing with the herd that had been but momentarily disturbed by the shots. When he returned with them the two men, each leading one of the riderless animals, started the cattle slowly toward the north in the direction of the next meeting place of Geronimo's party after Shoz-Dijiji had collected the arms and ammunition that had belonged to Luis and his three companions and secured them to the saddle of the horse led by the Apache.

Shoz-Dijiji rode in silence. If he felt any elation because of the success of his adventure it was not

apparent in his demeanor. Grim, morose, he herded the cattle onward. His eyes patrolled the world bounded by the horizon, searching for enemies.

Luis Mariel, partly frightened, wholly thrilled, glanced often at his companion. To ride with the Apache Devil-- ah, what an adventure. From earliest childhood Luis' ears had been filled with the stories of Apache ferocity, treachery, cruelty, yet against these were set the knowledge that the Apache Devil had twice befriended his father and had once before befriended him. Perhaps the Apache Devil would not harm him, then; but what of the others?

He had heard hideous stories of the tortures inflicted by the Apaches upon their prisoners. It might be that the Apache Devil could not protect him from the ferocity of his fellows. This thought worried Luis and to such effect that he commenced to formulate plans for escape. If they did not come to the camp of the Indians before dark his chances would be better than to risk making a break for liberty in the face of the menace of the Apache Devil's marksmanship, which he had reason to know constituted a very real menace.

The afternoon wore on. Angry clouds, gathering in the sky, portended early darkness and a black night. The patient herd plodded slowly on. The hopes of Luis Mariel rose high. Two hours more and escape would be assured if, in the meantime, they did not reach the camp of the Apaches.

"B" Troop of the --th had been dispatched into Chihuahua in the search for the scattered bands of the marauding renegades. Lieutenant Samuel Adams King, with four troopers, was scouting far afield. He had been following what appeared to be a fresh, though faint, Indian track that led toward the north; but now, with night coming down and a storm threatening, he had lost it. While one of the troopers held the horses of the others, King and his remaining men searched on foot for the elusive spoor. Proceeding in different directions the four walked slowly, scrutinizing every inch of ground, searching for a turned pebble, a down-pressed spear of vegetation, King's path took him through a deep arroyo and out upon the opposite bank. Absorbed in his search he took no note of the growing menace of the gathering storm nor of the distance, constantly increasing, between himself and his men. He knew that when the rain came it would wipe out all trace of the tracks they sought, and this knowledge constituted the urge that kept him oblivious to all other considerations.

The dusk of evening had fallen. Heavy clouds rolled angrily and low above the scene as a herd of cattle slowly topped a gentle rise to the south. Two men drove them, but only one of these saw the soldiers a couple of miles ahead--saw, and knew them for what they were. This one glanced quickly at the landscape ahead and at the gathering storm above. He knew that it was about to break. He knew, too, that the arroyo would soon be filled with

muddy, raging water--a barrier impassable by man or beast. All but one of the soldiers would be upon the opposite side of the arroyo from the herd and him.

Knowing these things, Shoz-Dijiji urged the cattle onward in the general direction of the enemy, for even though he passed close to them they would be unable to see him after the rain came--the rain and night.

Luis Mariel viewed the prospect of the impending storm hopefully. Soon it would be dark, but even before that the blinding rain would obliterate all objects within a few yards of him. They had not yet come to the camp of the renegades, and Luis had a horse under him.

The storm was in their rear. The cattle, doubtless, would move on before it; but Luis would turn back into it, and when it had passed he would be safely beyond the ken of the Apache Devil.

A great cloud! black and ominous, bellied low above them, sagging as though to a great weight of water; jagged lightning shot through it, followed by a deafening crash of thunder; the rent cloud spewed its contents upon the earth. It was not rain; it did not fall in drops nor sheets but in a great mass of solid water.

With the bursting of the cloud King found himself in water a foot deep on the level, and afterward the rain fell in torrents that shut everything from view.

rain fell in torrents that shut everything from view beyond a few yards. Lightning flashed and thunder roared, and the pounding of the rain between drowned all other sounds. The man floundered through the new made mud back in the direction of his men. All was water--above, below, around him. Suddenly there appeared before him, almost at his feet, a depression. Here the water swirled and eddied, running in a mighty current across his path.

At its very edge he stopped and, realizing what it was, staggered back a few steps--back from the brink of eternity. So close had he been to the shelving bank of the arroyo that another step might have hurled him into the racing, yellow flood that filled it now from brim to brim.

Disconcerted by the first great mass of water that fell upon them, the cattle stopped. The leaders turned back upon the herd. Shoz-Dijiji, in the rear, urged the stragglers forward until, presently, the herd was milling in a muddy circle; but with the coming of the steady torrent and beneath the heavy quirt of the Apache they gradually strung out again in the direction they had been travelling, the storm at their backs.

Shoz-Dijiji, seeing that he was handling the herd alone, looked about him for his companion; but the blinding torrent hid everything but the nearer cattle, and Shoz-Dijiji did not know that Luis was driving his unwilling pony into the teeth of the storm in an effort to escape.

An hour later the storm was over. A full moon shone out of a clear sky. Directly ahead of him Shoz-Dijiji saw something that was frightening the leaders of the herd, causing them to stop and then turn aside. A moment later the Apache recognized the cause of the distraction. It was a man on foot. At first Shoz-Dijiji thought that it was Luis, but when he had ridden nearer he discovered that the man was a soldier. Shoz-Dijiji drew a revolver from the holster at his hip. He would ride close enough to make sure of his aim before firing. He was not afraid that the other would fire first, since the soldier, before he fired, would wish to make sure that Shoz-Dijiji was an enemy. In this Shoz-Dijiji had a great advantage. Being an Apache he knew that all men were his enemies. He could make no mistake on that score.

The soldier hailed him in rather lame Spanish, but there was something in the voice that sounded familiar to the Apache Devil who never forgot anything. So he rode yet closer.

And then, in perfectly understandable English, he said: "Put up your hands, King, or I'll kill you."

Lieutenant King put his hands above his head. As yet he had not recognized the other as an Indian. The English, the use of his own name, mystified him.

"Who the hell are you?" he inquired.

"Turn your back," commanded Shoz-Dijiji. King

did as he was bid, and the Apache rode up and disarmed him.

"All right," said Shoz-Dijiji, after King lowered his arms and turned about.

"Shoz-Dijiji!" exclaimed King.

"Shoz-Dijiji, war chief of the Be-don-ko-he Apaches," replied the Apache Devil.

"And you're on the war path. That doesn't look so good for me, does it, Shoz-Dijiji?"

"Shoz-Dijiji not on war trail now. Shoz-Dijiji good Indian now. Go in cattle business."

In the moonlight King saw the grim half smile that accompanied the words of the Indian, but he made no reply. Apache humor was something that he did not pretend to understand. All he knew about it was that upon occasion it might be hideous.

"Mebbe so you like go in cattle business with Shoz-Dijiji?" suggested the Apache.

"I guess that whatever you say goes," replied the officer.

"All right. Take this horse." The Indian indicated the led horse at his side. "Now you help drive our cattle. Sabe?"

King grinned. "Perfectly," he said. Slowly the two men urged the cattle onward until at dawn they

came to a patch of meadow land well within the mountain range they had entered shortly after meeting. There was water there and good grazing and little likelihood that the tired animals would wander far from either.

Taking King with him, Shoz-Dijiji rode to the top of a high hill that commanded the broad valley to the south and west, across which they had come. For half an hour the Apache scanned the country below them, using field glasses that King recognized as having once belonged to him, glasses that had been taken from him several years before during an engagement with hostiles.

In the far distance the Indian saw a tiny speck and recognized it as Luis. Beyond Luis and approaching him from the southeast were horsemen. This was doubtless the company of soldiers to which King belonged. Shoz-Dijiji did not call the officer's attention to either Luis or the soldiers. In his mind he figured quickly just how long it would take the soldiers to reach this point should Luis put them upon the trail of the herd, which he knew that they could easily pick up and follow from the point at which the storm had overtaken them.

"Come," he said to King, and the two rode down from the hill and turned into a small canyon where they would be hidden from the view of anyone who might enter the meadow where the cattle grazed. In the canyon was a small spring and here they drank. Shoz-Dijiji proffered King a piece of jerked venison

that stunk to high heaven, but the officer assured the Apache that he was not hungry.

Having eaten, Shoz-Dijiji bound King's wrists and ankles. "Now sleep," he said. He stretched himself nearby and was soon asleep, but it was some time before King fell into a fitful doze. When he awoke, the Indian was removing the bonds from his wrists.

"Now we drive our cattle," said Shoz-Dijiji. The balance of that day and all the following night they drove the weary beasts through the mountains. There was no pursuit. After their sleep Shoz-Dijiji had again taken King to the hill top and scanned the back trail. The dust of a cavalry troop could be faintly seen in the distance, but it was moving north parallel to the range they had entered and was not upon their trail.

Twice they had stopped for brief rests, not for themselves but for the cattle; and now, at dawn, the trail debouched into an open canyon where there was water and good feed. At the edge of the pasture land Shoz-Dijiji drew rein and pointed up the canyon.

"There," he said to King, "is the camp of Geronimo. If you go there you will be killed. Mebbe so you like sell your half of the cattle business?"

King grinned. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Shoz-Dijiji buy" replied the Apache. "He give

Shoz-Dijji say, replied the Apache. "I give you a horse and--your life. You sell?"

"You've bought some cattle, Shoz-Dijji," exclaimed King; "but I can't understand you. You are not like any other Indian I ever heard of. Why have you done this?"

"Two men drive cattle easier than one," replied the Apache.

"Yes, I know that; but why are you giving me a chance to escape when you know that I'll go right back to chasing you and fighting you again? Is it because of Wichita Billings?"

"Shoz-Dijji no sabe English," grunted the Indian. "Now you go!" and he pointed back down the canyon along the trail they had just come over.

King wheeled his horse around. "Good-bye, Shoz-Dijji," he said. "Perhaps some day I can repay you."

"Wait!" said the Indian and handed the white man his pistol. Then he sat his horse watching until a turn in the canyon took the other from his sight.

Far away Luis Mariel rode with "B" Troop of the -th. He had not led the soldiers upon the trail of his friend, the Apache Devil.

Twelve--"SHOZ-DIJIJI"

KNOWS!"

LUIS MARIEL had attached himself to "B" Troop. He rode with it, made himself generally useful around camp; and, in return, they fed him. Incidentally he picked up a smattering of English that was much more effective than the original brand formerly purveyed by Mr. Webster, and learned to ask for either bacon or potatoes through the medium of set phrases that contained at least ten obscene or blasphemous words and did not mention either bacon or potatoes by their right names. He also discovered that one may call an American anything, provided that one smiles.

Much to his surprise he discovered that he liked the Gringoes, and because he was young and bright and good natured the soldiers liked Luis.

He had been with them four or five days when Lieutenant Samuel Adams King, half starved and rather the worse for wear, rode into camp upon an equally starved pony that Luis immediately recognized as having formerly belonged to one of his fellow vaqueros who had been killed by the Apache Devil.

Being a privileged character Luis was present when King reported to his troop commander; and when, through the medium of much profanity, a great deal of Spanish, and a few words of remote English origin he had indicated that he knew something about the pony King was riding, an

interpreter was summoned and Luis told his story to Captain Cullis and the officers accompanying him.

"Well, King," commented Cullis, "you have achieved all the distinction of a museum piece. You should have a place in the Smithsonian Institution."

"How so, sir?"

"As the only white man who ever fell into the hands of the Apache Devil and lived to tell about it. I can't account for it. Can you?"

For a moment King hesitated before he replied, and then: "No, sir," he said, "I cannot."

During that instant of hesitation King had weighed his duty as an officer against the demands of gratitude. He knew that there was a price upon the head of the Apache Devil that might spell his death at the hands of any white man, as an outlaw, even after peace was restored and the renegades returned to the reservation. He was confident that he alone knew that Shoz-Dijiji and the Apache Devil were one and the same, provided of course that the young Mexican was correct in his assumption that the Apache who had captured him actually was the Apache Devil.

Perhaps the lad was mistaken. King determined to give Shoz-Dijiji the benefit of the doubt. Gratitude would not permit him to do less.

It being evident that some of the renegades were

returning to the United States, "B" Troop was ordered above the border; and with it went Luis Mariel, seeking new adventures. He attached himself to Lieutenant King and crossed the border as the officer's civilian servant.

King, who had taken a liking to the lad, helped him with his English, learned to trust him, and eventually dispatched him to the Billings' ranch with Nejeunee and a note to Wichita Billings asking her to take care of the little pinto war pony until King returned from the campaign.

And so Luis Mariel, the son of the woodchopper of Casa Grande, rode away; and with him went Nejeunee.

Up into New Mexico, making their way toward the range of mountains near Hot Springs, rode Geronimo and Shoz-Dijiji with five other warriors and four women. They had found it necessary to abandon the herd that Shoz-Dijiji had captured because of the impossibility of moving it through hostile country where every trail was patrolled by soldiers and every water hole guarded.

Keeping to the mountains by day, crossing the valleys under cover of night, the eleven rode north. On several occasions they were forced to pass cattle ranches, but they committed no depredations other than the killing of an occasional beef for food.

Their greatest hardship was shortage of water as

they could not approach the well guarded water holes and wells, and there was a time during which they had no water for two days. They suffered greatly, and their horses all but died from thirst.

Any but Apaches would have been forced to surrender under like conditions; but, being Apaches, they knew every place where water might be found; and so they came at last to one such place, which was not guarded because the white men did not know of its existence. It was hidden in the depths of a remote, parched canyon far beneath the hard baked surface of the ground; but it was there for the digging, and in such an unlikely spot that there was scarcely a remote possibility that soldiers would interfere with the digging.

From hill tops that commanded a view of the country in all directions three keen eyed warriors watched while others dug for the precious water that would give them all, and their jaded mounts as well, a new lease on life.

And when they had drunk and their crude water bottles had been refilled, they replaced the sand and the rocks in the hole they had made; and so nicely did they erase every sign of their presence that only an Apache might have known that they had stopped there.

Into their old stamping grounds they came at last; and so cleverly had they eluded the soldiers that they ranged there in peace for weeks, while the troops searched for them in Arizona and Mexico.

Geronimo, handicapped by the paucity of his following, nevertheless kept scouts afield who watched the movements of the troops and kept fairly well in touch with the progress of the campaign through the medium of friendly reservation Indians.

Shoz-Dijiji was often engaged in some enterprise of this nature, and upon one occasion he went into the heart of the reservation at San Carlos. Returning, he rode through familiar mountains along an unmarked trail that recalled many memories of other days.

Shoz-Dijiji rode out of his way and against his better judgment. He was an Apache, iron willed and schooled to self-denial; but he was human, and so he would torture his poor heart by riding a trail that he had once ridden with her.

He would ride near the ranch. Perhaps he might see her, but she would never know that he was near.

The war chief of the Be-don-ko-he dreamed and, dreaming, relaxed his vigilance. Love, sorrow, reminiscence dulled his faculties for the moment. Otherwise he would never have been so easily surprised. The way he had chosen led here down the steep declivity of a canyon side and along the canyon's bottom for a few hundred yards to a point where a nimble pony might clamber up the opposite

side. It was very hot in the sun scorched cleft and very quiet. The only sound was the crunching of gravelly soil beneath unshod hoofs--the hoofs of the pony Shoz-Dijiji rode down the canyon and the hoofs of another pony bearing a rider up the canyon.

Perhaps chance so synchronized the gaits of the two animals that the footfalls of each hid those of the other from the ears of their riders. Perchance Fate--but why speculate?

The fact remains that as Shoz-Dijiji rounded an abrupt turn he came face to face with the other pony and its rider. Surprise was instantly reflected upon the face of the latter; but the Apache, though equally surprised, let no indication of it disturb the imperturbability of his countenance. Each reined in instantly and, for a moment, sat eyeing the other in silence. Shoz-Dijiji was the first to speak.

"You are alone?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Why you ride alone when the Apaches are on the war-trail?" he asked, sternly.

"The Apaches are my friends. They will not harm me."

"Some of the Be-don-ko-he Apaches are your friends, white girl; but there are others on the war trail who are not your friends," replied Shoz-Dijiji.

"There are Cho-kon-en and Ned-ni with Geronimo."

"Shoz-Dijji and Geronimo would not let them harm me."

"Shoz-Dijji and Geronimo are not like the God of the white-eyed men--they cannot be here, there, and everywhere at the same time."

Wichita Billings smiled. "But perhaps He guides them to the right place at the right time," she suggested. "Are you not here now, Shoz-Dijji, instead of a Cho-kon-en or a Ned-ni?"

"You have strong medicine, white girl; but so did the great izze-nantan, Nakay-do-klunni. He made strong medicine that turned away the bullets of the white-eyed soldiers, but at Cibicu Creek they killed him. The best medicine is to stay out of danger."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Shoz-Dijji," admitted the girl, "I did not dream that there was a renegade within a hundred miles of here."

"When the Shis-Inday are on the war trail they are like your God--they are here, there, and everywhere."

"Are there others with you, Shoz-Dijji?"

"No, I am alone."

"What are you doing here? Were you--were you

coming to the ranch, Shoz-Dijiji?" she asked, hesitatingly. "Were you coming to see me?" There was potential gladness in her voice.

"Shoz-Dijiji has been scouting," replied the Apache. "He is returning to the camp of Geronimo."

"But you were going to stop and see me, Shoz-Dijiji," she insisted.

"No. It would have made trouble. Your father does not like Shoz-Dijiji, and he would like to kill a renegade. Shoz-Dijiji does not wish to be killed. Therefore there would be trouble."

"My father is sorry for the things he said to you, Shoz-Dijiji. Come to the ranch, and he will tell you so. He was angry, because he was very fond of Mason; and you know that they had just found Mason murdered--and scalped."

"Shoz-Dijiji knows. He knows more about that than your father. Shoz-Dijiji knows that it was not an Apache that killed Mason."

"How do you know? Do you know who did kill him? He was scalped."

"Are the white-eyed men such fools that they think that only an Apache can scalp? If they were not such fools they would know that it is only occasionally that Apaches do take the scalps of their enemies. They do know this, but they do not want to admit it. They know that whenever a white-

eyed man wishes to kill an enemy he need only scalp him to convince everyone that Apaches did it, because everyone wishes to believe that every murder is done by Apaches.

"Yes, I know who killed Mason and why. He was robbed in Cheetim's Hog Ranch, and he had sworn to get Cheetim. He was looking for him with a gun. Cheetim hired a man to ride out with Mason and shoot him in the back. That is all.

"Now come. Shoz-Dijji ride back with you until you are near the ranch. You must not ride alone again even if you are not afraid of the Apaches, for there are bad men among the white-eyes--men who would harm you even more surely than an Apache."

He motioned her to precede him up the steep canyon side; and when the two ponies had scrambled to the summit he rode at her side, where the ground permitted, as they walked their ponies in the direction of the Billings ranch.

For a while they rode in silence, the Apache constantly on the alert against another and more dangerous surprise, the girl thoughtful, her face reflecting the cast of sadness in which her thoughts were molded.

Wichita Billings knew that the man at her side loved her. She knew that she was drawn to him more than to any other man that she had ever known, but she did not know that this attraction constituted love. Reared as she had been in an

constituted love. Raised as she had been in an atmosphere of racial hatred, schooled in ignorance and bigotry by people who looked upon every race and nation, other than their own race and nation, as inferior, she could scarce believe it possible that she could give her love to an Indian; and so her mind argued against her heart that it was not love that she felt for him but some other emotion which should be suppressed.

Shoz-Dijji, on his part, realized the barrier that prejudice had erected between them and the difficulty that the white girl might have to surmount it in the event that she loved him. He, too, had faced a similar barrier in his hatred of the white race, but that his love had long since leveled. A greater obstacle, one which he could not again face, was the hurt that his pride had suffered when she had recoiled from his embrace.

Thoughts such as these kept them silent for some time until Wichita chanced to recall Nejeunee.

"Shoz-Dijji," she exclaimed, "where is your pinto war pony?"

The Apache shrugged. "Who knows?"

"What became of him? Is he dead, or did you lose him in battle?"

"We were starving," said the Apache. "We had eaten all the ponies except Nejeunee. It was in Sonora. Your soldiers were pressing us on one

side, the Mexicans upon the other. At night I led Nejeunee close to the picket line of the white-eyed soldiers. I have not seen him since."

"You were very fond of Nejeunee, Shoz- Dijiji."

"In Apache Nejeunee means friend," said the man. "One by one all of my friends are being taken from me. Nejeunee was just one more. Usen has forgotten Shoz-Dijiji."

"Perhaps not," replied Wichita. "What would you say if I told you that Nejeunee is alive and that I know where he is?"

"I should say that after all Usen has at last been good to me in giving me you as a friend. Tell me where he is."

"He's on our ranch--in the back pasture."

"On your ranch? How did Nejeunee get there?"

"You left him near the picket line of Lieutenant King's troop, and when they got back across the border he sent him up to me."

"King did not tell me."

"You have seen the lieutenant?"

"We met in Chihuahua," said Shoz-Dijiji. "And you talked with him?"

"Yes "

"But you were on the war path, and he was after you. How could you have met and talked?"

"King and Shoz-Dijiji went into the cattle business together."

"What do you mean?" demanded Wichita.

"When you see King ask him. He will tell you."

"Were you two alone together?"

"Yes, for a day and a night."

"And you did not kill him?"

"No. Shoz-Dijiji does not kill anyone that you love."

"Oh, Shoz-Dijiji," exclaimed the girl, "I can't tell you how much I appreciate that; but really you are mistaken in thinking that I love Lieutenant King."

"All right, next time I kill him."

"No, oh, no, you mustn't do that."

"Why not? He is on the war trail against me. He kill me all right, if he get the chance. If you no love him, I kill him."

"But he is my friend, my very good friend," insisted the girl. "He is your friend, too, Shoz-Dijiji. If I ask you not to kill him will you promise me that you

you not to kill him will you promise me that you wont?"

"Shoz-Dijji promise you he no try to kill King. Mebbe so, in battle, Shoz-Dijji have to kill him. That he cannot help."

"Oh, Shoz-Dijji, why don't you come in and stop fighting us? It is so useless. You can never win; and you are such a good man, Shoz-Dijji, that it seems a shame that you should sacrifice your life uselessly."

"No, we can never win. We know that, but what else is there for us? The white-eyed men make war upon us even in peace. They treat us like enemies and prisoners. We are men, the same as they. Why do they not treat us like men? They say that we are bad men and that we torture our prisoners and that that is bad. Do they not torture us? We torture the bodies of our enemies, but the white men torture our hearts. Perhaps all the feelings of the white-eyed men are in their bodies, but that is not so with the Shis-Inday. Bad words and bad looks make wounds in our hearts that hurt us more than a knife thrust in the body. The body wounds may heal but the heart wounds never--they go on hurting forever. No, I shall not come in. I am a war chief among the Be-don-ko-he. Shall I come in to be a 'dirty Siwash' among the white-eyes?"

For a while the girl was silent after the Apache had ceased speaking. Their patient ponies stepped daintily along the rough trail. The descending sun

cast their shadows, grotesquely, far ahead. The stifling heat of midday was gradually giving place to the promise of the coming cool of evening.

"We are almost home," said the girl, presently. "I wish you would come and talk with my father. He is not a bad man. Perhaps he can find some way to help you."

"No," said Shoz-Dijji. "His people and my people are at war. His heart is not friendly toward Apaches. It is better that I do not come."

"But you want to get Nejeunee," insisted the girl.

"You have told me where Nejeunee is. I will get him."

She did not insist, and again they rode in silence until the warrior reined. in his pony just below the summit of a low hill. Beyond the hill, but hidden from their sight, stood the Billings ranch house.

"Good-bye," said Shoz-Dijji. "I think perhaps we never see each other again. When the soldiers come back from Mexico we go back there and do not come to this country any more."

"Oh, Shoz-Dijji," cried the girl, "I do not want you to go."

"Shoz-Dijji does not want to go," he replied. "Your people have driven Shoz-Dijji from his own country."

"I should think that you would hate me, Shoz-Dijji."

"No, I do not hate you. I love you," he said simply.

"You must not say that, Shoz-Dijji," she answered, sadly.

"If Shoz-Dijji was a white-eyed man, you would listen," he said.

She was silent.

"Tell me," he demanded, "is that not true?"

"Oh, God! I don't know, I don't know," she cried.

"Shoz-Dijji knows," said the Be-don-ko-he.
"Good-bye!"

He wheeled his pony and rode away.

The sun was setting as Wichita Billings dismounted wearily at the corral back of the ranch house. Luke Jensen came from the bunk house to take her pony.

"Where's Dad?" she asked.

"One of the boys found a beef killed this mornin'. He said it looked like Injuns hed done it. Yore Dad rid over to hev a look at it. He ought to be back right smart soon now." Luke glanced over across the back pasture toward the east.

Wichita knitted her brows. "Did he go that way?" she asked.

"Yep," assented Luke.

"Get one of the other boys to go with you, and ride out and meet him. If Apaches killed the beef there may be some of them around." Wichita turned toward the ranch house, hesitated, and then walked back to Luke.

"Luke," she said, "you don't hate all Indians do you?"

"You know I don't, Miss. I'd a bin dead now ef it hedn't a-bin fer one of'em. Why?"

"Well, if you ever meet an Apache, Luke! remember that, and don't shoot until you're plumb sure he's hostile."

Jensen scratcped his head. "Yes, Miss," he said, "but what's the idee?"

"There may be friendly Indians around, and if you should shoot one of them," she explained, "the rest might turn hostile."

As Wichita walked toward the house Luke stood looking after her.

"I don't reckon she's gone loco," he soliloquized, "but she shore better watch herself."

It was ten o'clock before Luke Jensen returned to the ranch. He went immediately to the house and knocked on the door, entering at Wichita's invitation.

"Your Dad back?" he demanded.

"No. Didn't you see anything of him?"

"Nary hide nor hair."

"Where do you suppose he can be?"

"I dunno. They's Indians around, though. I bumped plumb into one tother side of the willows in the draw outside the fer pasture gate, an' who do you reckon it was? Why none other than that Shoz-Dijji fellow what give me a lift that time. He must-a thought some o' the hosses in the pasture were comin' through them willows, fer he never tried to hide hisself at all. I jest rid plumb on top o' him. He knew me, too. I couldn't help but think o' wot you told me just before I left about bein' sure not to shoot up any friendly. Say, did you know he was around?"

"How could I know that?" demanded Wichita.

"I dunno," admitted Luke, scratching his head; "but it did seem dern funny to me."

"It's funny the man with you didn't take a shot at him," commented Wichita. "Most all of the boys believe in shooting an Apache first and inquiring

about his past later."

"There wasn't no one with me," explained Luke. "There wasn't no one around but me when I left, and I didn't want to waste time waiting fer someone to show up. Anyways, I kin see alone jest as fer as I kin with help."

"Well, I reckon he'll be coming along pretty soon, Luke," said Wichita. "Good night."

"Good night, Miss," replied Jensen.

Thirteen--BACK TO SONORA

DAWN broke and Wichita Billings still sat fully dressed waiting for her father. It was the first time that she had ever worried greatly over his absence, and she could not explain why she worried now. She had always thought of her father as absolutely able to take care of himself in any emergency. He was a masterful man, utterly fearless, and yet not prone to take unnecessary chances.

A dozen times she had been upon the point of going to the bunk house and sending the entire outfit out to search for him, but each time she had shrunk from the ridicule that she well knew would be slyly heaped upon both her father and herself if she did so without good warrant; but now with a new day come and no word from him, she determined to swallow her pride and carry out her plan, however

foolish it might appear.

Persistent knocking on the bunk house door finally elicited a profane request for information as to what was "eating" her.

"Dad's not back yet," she shouted.

"Oh, hell, is that you Miss? I didn't know it was you."

"Never mind. Rollout and get busy. We're goin' to find him if we have to ride to Boston," she cried.

Luke Jensen, being the youngest man in the outfit, both in years and point of service; was first from the bunk house, it being his duty to bring the saddle horses in from pasture. At the barn, he found that Wichita had already bridled the horse that was kept up for the purpose of bringing the others in and was on the point of swinging the heavy saddle to its back.

He greeted her cheerily, took the saddle from her, and completed its adjustment.

"You worried about your Paw, Miss?" he asked as he drew the latigo through the cinch ring.

"Something might have happened to him," she replied. "It wont hurt to look for him."

"No, it wont do no hurt, though I reckon he kin take keer o' hisself about as good as the next man. I

wouldn't worry none, Miss," he concluded, reassuringly, as he stepped into the stirrup and swung his leg over the horse's rump.

Wichita stood by the corral gate watching Luke riding down into the east pasture at an easy lope. She saw him disappear among the willows that grow along the draw a mile from the corrals and two thirds of the way across the pasture; and then "Smooth" Kreff, her father's foreman, joined her.

"Mornin', Miss," he greeted her. He looked at her sharply. "You-all been up all night, aint you?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Pshaw! Why didn't you rout us out? We'd a-gone lookin' fer him any time."

"There wouldn't have been much use looking for him at night."

"No, and there aint much use lookin' fer him now; but it would a-made you-all feel easier," replied the man.

"Why isn't there any now?" she demanded.

"Because the Boss kin take keer of himself. He aint a-goin' to thank us none, I'm figgerin'."

"No, if he's all right, he wont; but if he isn't all right we'll be glad we did."

"Them hosses must a-gone plumb to the ter end of the pasture," remarked Kreff.

"They always do, if we're in a particular hurry to get them up," said Wichita.

The other men had come from the bunk house by now and were standing around waiting.

"Thet dog-gone 'cavvy' must a-knowed we wanted 'em bad," said one.

"Like as not they seed Luke comin' an' hid out in the willows," suggested another.

"They shore are an ornery bunch," admitted a third.

"I could of ridden down there backwards on a bicycle an' rounded 'em up before this," boasted a fourth.

"Here they come now," exclaimed Wichita, as several horses broke from the willows and trotted toward the corrals.

In twos and threes they emerged from the dense foliage until some forty or fifty horses were strung out on the trail to the corrals, and then Luke Jensen rode into sight from out the willows.

"What's thet critter he's leadin'?" demanded one of the men.

"It's saddled " volunteered another

It's saddled, volunteered another.

"It's Scar Foot," said Kreff.

After that there was silence. Some of the men glanced at Wichita; but most of them stood looking away, embarrassed. Scar Foot was Billings' favorite horse--the animal he had ridden out on the previous day.

The men walked out of the corral into the pasture to head the horses through the bars that had been let down to receive them. No one said anything. Kreff walked forward toward Luke; and the latter reined in and, leaning down, spoke to the foreman in a low voice. Wichita approached them.

"Where did you find Scar Foot?" she asked. "Where is Dad?"

"Scar Foot was jest outside the east gate, Miss," explained Jensen. "The other hosses was all up there by him, jest inside the fence."

"Did you see anything of Dad?" she demanded again.

"We-all's goin' to ride right out an' look fer him, Miss," said Kreff.

Inside the corral two men were roping, and the others were busy saddling their horses as they were caught.

Wichita climbed to the top of the corral. "I'll ride

Two Spot," she called to one of the ropers.

Finally all the horses they needed had been caught and the others turned back into the pasture. One of the men who had been among the first to saddle was saddling Two Spot for Wichita. Luke Jensen, who had transferred his outfit to one of his own string, kept as far from Wichita as he could; but as she was about to mount, Kreff approached her, leading his own horse. "I wouldn't come along, Miss, ef I was you," he advised. "We may have some hard ridin'."

"When did I get so I couldn't ride with any of you?" she asked, quietly.

"There may be some fightin'," he insisted, "an' I wouldn't want you-all to. get hurted;"

The girl smiled, ever so slightly. "It's good of you, 'Smooth,'" she said; "but I understand, I think." She swung into the saddle, and Kreff said no more.

Luke Jensen leading, they rode at a run down through the pasture, scattering the "cavvy," and into the dense willows, emerging upon the opposite side, climbing the steep bank of the draw, and away again at top speed toward the east gate. In, silence they rode, with grim faces.

There, just beyond the fence; they found Billings-- where Luke Jensen had found him. Wichita knelt beside her father and felt of his hands and face. She did not cry. Dry-eyed she crossed and, for the first

did not cry. Dry eyed she arose and for the first time saw that one of the men who had brought up the rear had led Scar Foot back with them; but even had she known when they started she would not have been surprised, for almost from the moment that she had seen Luke Jensen leading the horse back toward the corrals and had seen him whisper to Kreff she had expected to find just what she had found.

Tenderly the rough men lifted all that was mortal of Jefferson Billings across the saddle in which he had ridden to his death, and many were the muttered curses that would have been vented vehemently and aloud had it not been for the presence of the girl, for Billings had been shot in the back and--scalped. On walking horses the cortege filed slowly toward the ranch house, the men deferentially falling behind the led horse that bore the body of the "Boss" directly in rear of the girl who could not cry.

"He never had a chanct," growled one of the men. "Plugged right in the back between the shoulders!"

"God damned dirty Siwashes!" muttered another.

"I seen an Injun here yestiddy evenin'," said Luke.

"Why the Hell didn't you say so before?" demanded Kreff.

"I told Miss Chita," replied the young man; "but, Lor', it warnt him did it."

"Wot makes you-all think it warnt?" asked Kreff.

"He's a friend of hern. He wouldn't have hurted her old man."

"What Injun was it?"

"Thet Shoz-Dijiji fellow what saved me thet time I was hurted an' lost. I know he wouldn't hev done it. They must hev been some others around, too."

Kreff snorted. "Fer a bloke wot's supposed to hail from Texas you-all shore are simple about Injuns. Thet Siwash is a Cheeracow Apache an' a Cheeracow Apache'd kill his grandmother fer a lead nickel."

"I don't believe thet Injun would. Why didn't he plug me when he had the chancet?" demanded Jensen.

"Say!" exclaimed Kreff. "Thet there pinto stallion thet thet there greaser brung up from Chihuahua fer King warnt with the 'cavvy' this mornin'. By gum! There's the answer. Thet there pony belonged to Shoz-Dijiji. He was a-gettin' it when the Boss rid up."

"They had words last time the Siwash was around here," volunteered another.

"Sure! The Boss said he'd plug him if he ever seen him hangin' around here again," recalled one of the men.

At the ranch house they laid Jefferson Billings on his bed and covered him with a sheet, and then "Smooth" Kreff went to Wichita and told her of his deductions and the premises upon which they were based.

"I don't believe it," said the girl. "Shoz-Dijji has always been friendly to us. I ran across him by accident in the hills yesterday, and he rode home with me because, he said, there were other renegades around and it might not be safe for me to ride alone. It must have been some other Indian who did it."

"But his cayuse is gone," insisted Kreff.

"He may have taken his pony," admitted the girl. "I don't say that he didn't do that. It was his; and he had a right to take it, but I don't believe that he killed Dad."

"Your Paw didn't have no use fer Injuns," Kreff reminded her. "He might have taken a shot at this Siwash,"

"No; his guns were both in their holsters, and his rifle was in its boot. He never saw the man that shot him."

Kreff scratched his head. "I reckon thet's right," he admitted. "It shore was a dirty trick. Thet's what makes me know it was a Siwash."

The girl turned away sadly.

"Don't you worry none, Miss," said Kreff; "I'll look after things fer you, jes' like your Paw was here."

"Thanks, 'Smooth,' "replied Wichita. "You boys have been wonderful."

After the man had left the room the girl sat staring fixedly at the opposite wall. A calendar hung there and a colored print in a cheap frame, but these she did not see. What she saw was the tall, straight figure of a bronzed man, an almost naked savage. He sat upon his war pony and looked into her eyes. "Shoz-Dijiji does not kill anyone that you love," he said to her.

The girl dropped her face into her hands, stifling a dry sob. "Oh, Shoz-Dijiji, How could you ?" she cried.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. Her lips were set in a straight, hard line; her eyes flashed in anger.

"Oh, God!" she cried. "You gave me love; and I threw it away upon an Indian, upon an enemy of my people; and now in your anger, you have punished me. I was blind, but you have made me to see again. Forgive me, God, and you will see that I have learned my lesson well."

Stepping through the doorway onto the porch, Wichita seized a short piece of iron pipe and struck a triangle of iron that hung suspended from a roof

joist. Three times she struck it, and in answer to the signal the men came from bunk house and corrals until all that had been within hearing of the summons were gathered before her.

Dry eyed, she faced them; and upon her countenance was an expression that none ever had seen there before. It awed them into silence as they waited for her to speak. They were rough, uncouth men, little able to put their inmost thoughts into words, and none of them ever had looked upon an avenging angel; otherwise they would have found a fitting description for the daughter of their dead Boss as she faced them now.

"I have something to say to you," she commenced in a level voice. "My father lies in here, murdered. He was shot in the back. He never had a chance. As far as we know no one saw him killed, but I guess we all know who did it. There doesn't seem to be any chance for a doubt--it was the Be-don-ko-he war chief, Shoz-Dijiji, Black Bear.

"If it takes all the rest of my life and every acre and every critter that I own, I'm going to get the man that killed my father; and I'm starting now by offering a thousand dollars to the man who brings in Shoz-Dijiji -- dead!"

When she had ceased speaking she turned and walked back into the house, closing the door after her.

The men moving slowly toward the bunk house

the men, moving slowly toward the main house, talked together in low tones, discussing the girl's offer.

Inside the house, Wichita Billings threw herself face down upon a sofa and burst into tears.

Shoz-Dijiji slid from the back of the pinto war pony, Nejeunee, in the camp of Geronimo and stood before the great war-chief of the Apaches.

"Seven times, my son," said the old chief, "have I cast hoddentin to the four winds at evening since you rode away; seven times have I cast hoddentin to the four winds at dawn; twice seven times have I prayed to the spirits whose especial duty it is to watch over you to bring you back in safety. My prayers have been answered. What word do you bring?"

"Shoz-Dijiji went to the reservatiop at San Carlos," replied the young man. "None of our friends or relatives who went out upon the war trail with us is there. I heard many stories, but I do not speak of anything that I did not see with my own eyes or hear with my own ears.

"There are many soldiers scouting everywhere. There are so many that I think all the soldiers that were sent to Mexico after us must have been called back to hunt for us here.

"The reservation Indians say that now that Miles is after us we shall all be killed. They advise us to lay

down our arms and surrender. I think that very soon the soldiers will find our camp here."

"You are a war chief, my son," said Geronimo. "Already you are very wise. At the councils even the old men listen to you with respect. What would you advise?"

"We are very few," replied Shoz-Dijiji, thoughtfully. "We cannot take the war trail successfully against the pindah-lickoyee in this country where we are. Sooner or later they will kill us or capture us. This is no longer a good country for the Apache. It is our country that Usen made for us, but we cannot be happy in it any longer because of the pindah-lickoyee. Shoz-Dijiji does not wish to live here any more. Let us go to Mexico. perhaps the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee will not again follow us into Mexico. There we may live as we would wish to live and not as the pindah-lickoyee want us to live."

"And we can punish the Mexicans for inviting the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee to come down to their country and kill us," added Geronimo. "I think you have spoken true words. I think we should go to Mexico. Perhaps there we shall find all of our friends and relatives from whom we became separated when the soldiers were hunting us in Sonora and Chihuahua. Perhaps we can even be happy again. Who knows?"

And so it was that when the troopers of "B" Troop rode into the camp of Geronimo a week later they

found nothing but cold ashes where the cooking fires had been and the debris of a deserted Indian village that the Apaches had not taken their usual precautions to hide, since they expected never again to return to their beloved mountains.

Far to the south, below the line, frightened peons burned many candles and said many prayers, for they had heard stories. A man had found the bodies of three vaqueros, and he had seen the print of an Apache moccasin in the camp where they had been killed. They had not been tortured nor mutilated.

"The Apache Devil again!" whispered the peons.

A terrified freighter, a bullet through his shoulder, galloped an exhausted mule into a little hamlet. The wagon train that he had been with had been attacked by Apaches and all had been slain save he, and with his own eyes he had recognized Geronimo.

"Holy Mother, preserve us! the Apache Devil, both!"

Leaving a trail of blood and ashes behind them the renegades headed for the mountains near Casa Grande. Having committed no depredations north of the line they felt confident that the United States soldiers would not follow them into Sonora. Why should they? There was nothing for the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee to avenge.

Then the Apache returned again in numbers.

Thus the Apaches reasoned, since, in common with white men, they possessed the very human trait of easily forgetting the wrongs that they committed against others, even though they might always harbor those that were committed against them. So now they either forgot or ignored what the whites still considered just causes for righteous anger--burnt ranches, stolen stock, tortured men, women, and children, mutilated corpses that had emblazoned their trail through Arizona from San Carlos to the border over a year before, but the whites had no intention of permitting these occurrences to go brown in their memories.

From one end of the country to the other Geronimo and his bloody deeds occupied more front page newspaper space than any other topic, and to the readers of the newspapers of all the civilized world his name was a household word. For over a year the armies of two nations had been futilely engaged in an attempt to capture or kill a handful of men, women, and children. Geronimo and his renegades had outwitted, outgeneraled, and outfought them, and now, after again outwitting the army of the United States, they had come back to Mexico and were meting out punishment to those, whom they mistakenly believed were responsible for bringing United States troops below the border to fight them, and in carrying out this policy, they attacked every Mexican they saw after they crossed the border, all the way to Casa Grande. Nor did they desist then.

South of Casa Grande, near a place which the

South of Casa Grande, near a place which the Apaches called Gosoda, a road wound out of the town through a mountain pass. Many were the freight trains that lumbered through the dust along this road; and near here hid Geronimo, the Apache Devil, and their followers.

Here the renegades remained for some time, killing freighters, taking what supplies they desired, and destroying the remainder; but the reputation that this road achieved was such as to discourage freighting for the nonce, though it attracted Mexican soldiers in embarrassing numbers. Geronimo then led his followers into the Sierra de Antunez Mountains where they found all that now remained of their depleted tribe and learned that the United States soldiers had not left the mountains of Mexico but, on the contrary, were becoming more active than ever.

Geronimo was disheartened when he learned of this, for he had banked wholly on the belief that he would be rid of the menace of United States troops if he returned to Mexico without committing more depredations in the United States.

"What are we to do?" he demanded at the council fire. "Every man's hand is against us. If we return to the reservation we shall be put in prison and killed; if we stay in Mexico they will continue to send more and more soldiers to fight us."

"There is but one thing to do," replied Shoz-Dijji when Geronimo had finished. "We must continue

fighting until we are all killed. Already we are reckless of our lives, let us be more so, let us give no quarter to anyone and ask no favors. It is better to die on the war trail than to be put in prison and choked to death with a rope about the neck. I, Shoz-Dijiji, shall continue to fight the enemies of my people until I am killed. I have spoken."

"You are a young man," said Geronimo. "Your words are the words of a young man. When I was young I wanted nothing better than to fight, but now that I am getting old I should like a little peace and quiet, although I should not object to fighting to obtain them if I thought that I might win them thus."

"But now," he continued, sadly, "I cannot see any hope of winning anything but death by fighting longer against the pindah-lickoyee. There are too many of them, and they will not let us rest. I would make a peace treaty with them, if I could."

"They do not want to make a peace treaty with us," said Shoz-Dijiji. "They want only to kill us all that there may be no more Apaches left to dispute the ownership of the land they have stolen from us. Let the old men and the women and the children make a peace treaty with the pindah-lickoyee. Shoz-Dijiji will never make peace if it means that he must return to San Carlos and be a reservation Indian."

"I think that we should make peace with them," said Na-chi- ta, "if they will promise that we Shall

not be killed."

"The promises of the pindah-lickoyee are valueless," growled a warrior.

Thus they spoke around their council fires at night, and though most of them wanted peace and none of them saw any other alternative than death, they clung doggedly to the war trail. During three months they had many skirmishes with the white soldiers; and five times their camps were surprised, yet in no instance were the troops of the pindah-lickoyee able either to capture or defeat them; never was there a decisive victory for the trained soldiers who so greatly outnumbered them.

In July 1886 Geronimo's force numbered some twenty-five fighting men, a few women, and a couple of boys. Outside of their weapons and the clothing that they wore they possessed a few hundred pounds of dried meat and nineteen ponies--the sole physical resources at their command to wage a campaign against a great nation that already had expended a million dollars during the preceding fourteen months in futile efforts to subjugate them and had enlisted as allies the armed forces of another civilized power.

Moving farther and farther into Old Mexico as the troops pressed them, the renegades were camped on the Yongi River, nearly three hundred miles south of the boundary, late in July. They believed that they had temporarily thrown their pursuers off the track and, war weary, were taking advantage of

the dark and, war weary, were taking advantage of the brief respite they had earned to rest. Peace and quiet lay upon the camp beside the Yongi. The braves squatted, smoking, or lay stretched in sleep. The squaws patched war worn moccasins. There was little conversation and no laughter. The remnant of a once powerful nation was making its last stand, bravely, without even the sustaining influence of hope.

A rifle cracked. War whoops burst upon their ears. Leaping to their feet, seizing the weapons that lay always ready at hand, the renegades fell back as the soldiers and scouts of Lawton's command charged their camp. The surprise had been complete, and in their swift retreat the Apaches lost three killed; whom they carried off with them, as they abandoned their supply of dried meat and their nineteen ponies to the enemy. Now they had nothing left but their weapons and their indomitable courage.

Clambering to inaccessible places among the rocks, where mounted men could not follow, they waited until the soldiers withdrew. Shoz-Dijiji arose and started down toward the camp.

"Where are you going?" demanded Geronimo.

"The white-eyes have taken Nejeunee," replied the war chief. "Shoz-Dijiji goes to take his war pony from them."

"Good!" exclaimed Geronimo. "I go with you." He

turned and looked inquiringly at the other warriors before he followed Shoz-Dijiji down the steep declivity. After the two came the balance of the grim warriors.

Keeping to the hills, unseen, they followed Lawton's command in the rear of which they saw their ponies being driven. As the hours passed, Geronimo saw that the distance between the main body of troopers and the pony herd was increasing.

A few miles ahead was a small meadow just beyond which the trail made a sharp turn around the shoulder of a hill. Geronimo whispered to Shoz-Dijiji who nodded understanding and assent. The word was passed among the other warriors; and at the same time Shoz-Dijiji turned to the left to make a detour through the hills, while a single warrior remained upon the trail of the troops.

At a smart trot the Be-don-ko-he war chief led his fellows through the rough mountains. For an hour they pushed rapidly on until Shoz-Dijiji dropped to his belly near the summit of a low hill and commenced to worm his way slowly upward. Behind him came twenty painted savages. In the rear of concealing shrubbery at the hill top the Apache Devil stopped, and behind him stopped the twenty.

Below Shoz-Dijiji was a little meadow. It lay very quiet and peaceful in the afternoon sun, deserted; but Shoz-Dijiji knew that it would not be deserted long. Already he could hear the approach of armed

long. Already he could hear the approach of armed men. Presently they came into sight. Captain Lawton rode in advance. At his side was Lieutenant Gatewood. Behind them were the scouts and the soldiers. The formation was careless, because they all knew that the renegades, surprised and defeated, were far behind them.

Shoz-Dijiji watched them pass. In the rear of the column he saw Lieutenant King who had been temporarily detached from his own troop to serve with this emergency command of Lawton's. The length of the meadow they rode. The head of the column disappeared where the trail turned the shoulder of a hill, and still Shoz-Dijiji and the twenty lay quietly waiting.

Now half the column was out of sight. Presently Shoz-Dijiji watched King disappear from view, and once again the little meadow was deserted, but not for long.

A little pinto stallion trotted into view, stopped, pricked dainty ears and looked about. Behind him came other ponies -- nineteen of them--and behind the ponies three sun parched troopers in dusty, faded blue.

Silently Shoz-Dijiji arose, and behind him arose twenty other painted warriors. They uttered no war whoops as they raced silently down into the meadow in front of the ponies. There would be noise enough in a moment; but they wished to delay the inevitable as long as possible lest the main body

of the command, warned by the sounds of combat, should return to the meadow before the mission of the Apaches was completed.

The first trooper to see them vented his surprise in lurid profanity and spurred forward in an attempt to stampede the ponies across the meadow before the renegades could turn them. His companions joined him in the effort.

Shoz-Dijji and six other warriors raced swiftly to intercept the ponies, while the other renegades moved down to the turn in the trail where they could hold up the troop should it return too soon.

The Apache Devil whistled sharply as he ran and the pinto stallion stopped, wheeled, and ran toward him. Three ponies, frightened by the shouts of the soldiers, raced swiftly ahead, passing Shoz-Dijji and his six, passing the balance of the twenty who had not yet reached their position, and disappeared around the turn.

Shoz-Dijji leaped to Nejeunee's back and headed the remaining ponies in a circle, back in the direction from which they had come and toward the six who had accompanied him.

It was then that one of the three soldiers opened fire, but the Apaches did not reply. They were too busy catching mounts from the frightened herd, and they had not come primarily to fight. When they had recaptured their ponies there would be time enough

for that, perhaps, but it was certain that there was no time for it now. They had their hands full for a few seconds, but eventually seven warriors were mounted; and Geronimo and the remainder of the renegades were coming down the meadow at a run as Shoz- Dijiji and his six drove the herd along the back trail. Hopelessly outnumbered, cut off from their fellows, the three troopers looked for some avenue of escape and fell back in front of the herd, firing. It was then that the Apaches opened fire; and at the first volley one of the soldiers fell; and the other two turned and raced for safety, rounding the side of the herd, they spurred their mounts along the flank of the renegades. A few hasty shots were sent after them; but the Apaches wasted no time upon them, and they won through in safety while Shoz- Dijiji and the six urged the ponies at a run along the back trail toward camp, as those on foot took to the hills and disappeared just as Lawton's command came charging to the rescue, too late.

Lawton followed the Apaches; but, being fearful of ambush, he moved cautiously, and long before he could overtake them the renegades had made good their escape.

Fourteen--SKELETON CANYON

THE weeks dragged on--lean and hungry weeks of slinking through the mountains with an implacable enemy close on their back. The renegades had

enemy always on their heels. The renegades had little food and little rest. Their cause seemed hopeless even to the most war-like and the most sanguine of their number. Only Shoz-Dijiji held out for war. That was because he had nothing to live for. He courted death, but no bullet found him.

At last the others determined to give up; and Geronimo sent a messenger to the commander of a body of Mexican troops that was camped near them, asking for a parley.

All that the Mexicans asked was that Geronimo should take his band out of Mexico; and this the old chieftain promised to do, both sides agreeing not to fight any more against the other.

Moving northward toward the border, Geronimo made no effort to elude the American troops, as he was really anxious to arrange for a parley with them; but by chance they did not come into contact with any, and at last the renegades went into camp near the big bend of the Bivaspe River in Sonora.

"How can you remain here?" demanded Shoz-Dijiji. "You have promised the Mexicans that you will leave their country, and you cannot go into Arizona or New Mexico because the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee will not let you. Where are you going? You should not have promised the Mexicans that you would leave. Now they will attack you, when they find that you have not left, for they know that you have had time enough to get out of Mexico."

"We cannot remain here," replied Geronimo, "and we cannot go elsewhere--as long as we are at war with the pindah-lickoyee. We are too few to fight them. There remains nothing but to make the best peace with them that we can."

"It is right that you should do so," said Shoz-Dijji, "for that is to the best interests of the Be-don-ko-he for the welfare of the tribe; but for Shoz-Dijji there can be no peace. I shall not go back to the reservation with you."

"That is the right of every Apache, to choose for himself," said Na-chi-ta; "but for the tribe it is better that we make peace and go back to the reservation. Na-chi-ta will vote for peace if the pindah-lickoyee will promise not to kill any of us."

"I shall send White Horse, my brother, to arrange for a parley with the white-eyed chiefs," said Geronimo. The day after White Horse left upon his mission the renegades sent two squaws into Fronteras to purchase food and mescal, and as they returned to camp they were followed to the last, hiding place of the great war chief of all the Apaches.

Scarcely had the squaws laid aside their burdens when one of Geronimo's scouts hurried into the camp and reported to the war chief that two government scouts had come, bringing a message to Geronimo.

"I will talk with them," said the old chief, and a few minutes later Ka-yi-tah, the Cho-kon-en, and Marteen, the Ned-ni, stood before him, the red head-bands of their service alone differentiating them from the warriors who crowded about them.

"You bring a message from the white-eyed chiefs to Geronimo?" demanded the war chief.

"With Lieutenant Gatewood we have brought a message from General Miles, the new chief of the white-eyed soldiers," replied Ka-yi-tah.

"Speak!" commanded Geronimo.

"The message is that if you will surrender you will not be killed, but will be taken some place to the East, you and your families--all of you who are now upon the war trail and who will surrender."

"How many soldiers has Gatewood with him?" demanded Geronimo.

"There are no soldiers with Gatewood," replied Ka-yi-tah, "but Lawton's soldiers are not far away."

"Geronimo will talk with Gatewood," announced the old chief, "but with no one else. Gatewood does not tell lies to the Apache. Tell them not to let any soldiers come near my camp, and I shall talk with Gatewood. Go!"

And so it was that through the confidence that Geronimo felt in Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood

GERONIMO left in Lieutenant Charles D. Gatewood, Sixth United States Cavalry, arrangements were made for a parley with General Miles; and on September 4th 1886 Geronimo and Na-chi-ta surrendered at Skeleton Canyon, Arizona.

Shoz-Dijiji did not accompany the other chiefs to the parley. With only his own sad thoughts as company he remained in camp, and there Geronimo found him when the parley was over. Shoz-Dijiji arose and faced the old chieftain.

"I do not need to ask Geronimo what has happened," said the young chief. "I see sorrow in his eyes. It is the end of the Apaches."

"Yes," replied Geronimo, "it is the end."

"What talk passed between Geronimo and the white-eyed war chief?" asked Shoz-Dijiji.

"We shook hands; and then we sat down, and the white-eyed war chief said to Geronimo: 'The President of the United States has sent me to speak to you. He has heard of your trouble with the white men, and says that if you will agree to a few words of treaty we need have no more trouble. Geronimo, if you will agree to a few words of treaty all will be satisfactorily arranged.'

"He told me how we could be brothers to each other. We raised our hands to heaven and said that the treaty was not to be broken. We took an oath not to do any wrong to each other or to scheme

against each other."

"And you believed the pindah-lickoyee?" demanded Shoz- Dijiji. "Each time that we go upon the war trail they promise us many things to induce us to lay down our arms -- and do they keep their promises? No! Nor will they keep this promise."

"I do not know. All that I can do is hope, for no longer can we fight against them," answered Geronimo, wearily.

"What else said the pindah-lickoyee ?" asked the Apache Devil.

"He talked with me for a long time and told me what he would do for me in the future if I would agree to the treaty. I did not greatly believe him, but because the President of the United States had sent me word I agreed to make the treaty and to keep it.

"He said to me: 'I will take you under government protection; I will build you a house; I will fence you much land; I will give you cattle, horses, mules, and farming implements. You will be furnished with men to work the farm, for you yourself will not have to work. In the fall I will send you blankets and clothing so that you will not suffer from cold in the winter time.'"

"There is plenty of timber, water, and grass in the land to which I shall send you," he told me. He said that I should live with my tribe and with my family and that if I agreed to the treaty I should be with my

family within five days.

"Then I said to General Miles: 'All the officers that have been in charge of the Indians have talked that way, and it sounds like a story to me; I hardly believe you.'

"This time,' he said, 'it is the truth,' and he swept a spot of ground clear with his hand and said: 'Your past deeds shall be wiped out like this, and you will start a new life.'

"All this talk was translated from English into Spanish and from Spanish into Apache. It took a long time. Perhaps the interpreters did not make any mistakes. I do not know."

"Are you going to live on the reservation at San Carlos?" asked Shoz-Dijji.

"No. They are going to send us out of Arizona because they say that the white men whose families and friends we have killed would always be making a lot of trouble for us, that they would try to kill us."

"Where are they going to send you?"

"To Fort Marion in a country called Florida." The old man bowed his head. Could it be that there were tears in those cold blue eyes? Shoz-Dijji placed a hand on his father's shoulder.

"I know now that I shall never see you again," he said. "The pindah-lickoyee, who have never kept a

promise that they have made to the Shis-Inday, will not keep this one. When you have laid down your arms they will kill you; as they killed Mangas Colorado.

"It is not too late even now to turn back," continued the young man. "We have ponies, we I have arms, we have ammunition; and there are places in the mountains of Sonora where a few men could elude the pindah-lickoyee forever. Do not let, them take you to a strange country where they will either kill you or make a slave of you."

Geronimo shook his head. "No, my son," he said, "that cannot be. The war chief of the pindah-lickoyee and the war chief of all the Apaches stood between his troopers and my warriors. We placed a large stone on the blanket before us. Our treaty was made by this stone, and it was to last until the stone should crumble to dust. So we made the treaty and bound each other with an oath. Geronimo will keep that treaty."

Slowly Shoz-Dijji turned and walked away. Far up among the rocks above the rocky camp site he went; and there he remained all night praying to Usen, praying to Intchi- Dijin, the black wind, asking for guidance, asking for wisdom; for Shoz-Dijji, the Black Bear, did not know what to do.

When morning came he returned to the camp of the renegades; and there he found his people, sullen and morose, preparing to lay down their weapons

and give themselves up as prisoners of war to the enemy that they feared, hated, and mistrusted.

He went to the pony herd and caught Nejeunee and brought him back to camp. Then he squatted beside a rock, and with a bronze forefinger laid the war paint of the Apache Devil across his face. Upon his head he placed his war bonnet of buckskin with its crest of feathers; about his neck he hung a single strand of turquoise and silver beads; in his ears were small silver rings, and covering his feet and legs were stout Apache war moccasins.

A belt of ammunition encircled his slim waist, and from it hung two pistols and a great butcher knife. He carried a rifle and bow and arrows.

The others saw his preparations, but they made no comment. When he was done he mounted Nejeunee--an Apache war chief tricked out in all the panoply of the war trail.

He rode to where Geronimo sat stolidly upon a pony waiting for the preparations for departure to be completed. The old war chief looked up as the younger man approached, but the expression upon his inscrutable face did not change as he saw the war paint and the weapons.

"My father," said Shoz-Dijiji, "all night I have prayed. in high places, prayed to Usen and to Intchi-Dijin, asking them to give me some sign if they wished me to give myself up to the enemy and

go into bondage with Geronimo and our people. But they gave me no sign, and so I know that they do not wish me to do these things; and I am satisfied.

"Therefore I ride out alone, the last of the Apaches, upon the war trail against the enemies of my people. While I live I shall devote my life to killing the pindah-lickoyee. I, Shoz-Dijiji, war chief of the Be-don-ko-he, have spoken."

"Wait," said Geronimo. "Wait until you have heard the words of Geronimo before you bind yourself to such an oath.

"We go into bondage. We shall never take the war trail again. Had it been otherwise I should never have told you what I am going to tell you now.

"All your life you have been as a son to me. I have loved you. I have been proud of you. It is because I love you, Shoz-Dijiji, that I am going to tell you this thing now. When I have told you you will know that you need not throw away your life fighting the pindah-lickoyee, fighting the battles of the Apaches.

"Shoz-Dijiji, you are not an Apache. You are not a Shis- Inday. You are a pindah-lickoyee."

The eyes of the Apache Devil narrowed. "You are my father," he said, "but not even you may call Shoz-Dijiji a pindah- lickoyee and live. That, Juh learned."

Geronimo shook his head sadly. "Juh knew," he said. "He was with me when we killed your father and mother in a pass in the Stein's Peak Range. It was Juh who dragged you from the wagon and would have killed you but for Geronimo."

"It is a lie!" growled Shoz-Dijji.

"Has Geronimo ever lied to you?" asked the old war chief.

"Cochise swore before the council fire that I was as much an Apache as he," cried the young man.

"Cochise did not lie," said Geronimo. "You are as much an Apache as any of us in heart and spirit, but in your veins flows the blood of your white-eyed father.

"Twenty three times have the rains come since the day that I killed him; and I have kept my lips sealed because I loved you and because you were as much my son to me as though you were flesh of my own flesh; but now the time has come that you should know, for as an Apache every man's hand will be turned against you, but as a pindah-lickoyee you will have a chance that no Apache ever may have."

For a few moments Shoz-Dijji sat in brooding silence. Presently he spoke.

"Pindah-lickoyee! White-eyed man!" he cried contemptuously, almost spitting the words from his

contentiously, almost spilling the words from his mouth. "Had you told me that I am a coyote I could have carried my shame and faced the world, but to be a white man!" He shuddered.

"My son," said Geronimo, "it is not the color of our skin or the blood that runs in our veins that makes us good men or bad men. There are bad Apaches and there are good white men. It is good to be a good Apache. It is not bad to be a good white man. Now, perhaps, it is better to be a good white man than even a good Apache. Times have changed. Usen does not look with favor upon the Shis-Inday. Time will heal your wound. Go and live among your own people, and some day you will thank Geronimo because he told you."

"Never!" cried the Black Bear. "Good-bye, Geronimo. You have been a good father to Shoz-Dijji. Now Shoz-Dijji has no father. Shoz-Dijji has no mother. Shoz-Dijji has no people, for he is not an Apache; and he will not be a pindah-lickoyee. But he is still a war chief of the Apaches. He is the only war chief that goes upon the war trail. Now, I think, he is the only Apache left in the world. All the rest of you are pindah-lickoyee, for do you not go to live with the pindah-lickoyee? Only Shoz-Dijji lives like an Apache."

He wheeled Nejeunee about, and then turned on his blanket and faced Geronimo again.

"Good-bye, Shoz-Dijji, last of the Apaches, war chief of all the Apaches, rides out upon the last war

trail."

Down the rocky hill side toward the south the pinto war pony bore his gorgeous master, while an old man, seeing dimly through blue eyes that were clouded by unaccustomed tears, watched the last martial gesture of his once powerful people until pinto stallion and painted war chief disappeared into the blue haze that lay upon the early morning trail that wound southward toward Sonora.

Fifteen--THE LAST OF THE RENEGADES

GERONIMO had surrendered! For the first time in three hundred years the white invaders of Apacheland slept in peace. All of the renegades were prisoners of war in Florida. Right, at last, had prevailed. Once more a Christian nation had exterminated a primitive people who had dared defend their homeland against a greedy and ruthless invader.

Imprisoned with the renegades, and equally prisoners of war, were Apaches who had long been loyal and faithful servants to the government; but what of that! Who was there to defend a friendless people?--friendless and voteless.

Transported from the hot, dry uplands of their native country to the low, damp, malarial surroundings of their prison, the Apaches sickened and died; others, unable to endure confinement, suffering the pangs of homesickness, took their own lives.

And down in Sonora, in the inaccessible depths of the Mother of Mountains, Shoz-Dijji and Nejeunee shared the hunting and the pasture with the cougar and the mountain sheep. They trod in the footsteps of God, where man and horse had never walked before. No man saw them and, for months on end, they saw no man.

Long" since had Shoz-Dijiji washed the war paint from his face. He was a hunter now, and upon the rare occasions that he saw other human beings he experienced no urge to kill them.

He had thought it all out during the long, lonely days and nights. Geronimo had made treaties with the Mexicans and with the pindah-lickoyee. He had promised that the Apaches would fight no more against them. That treaty, Shoz-Dijiji felt, bound him, for there were no other Apaches than he. He could not, as yet, think of himself as a pindah-lickoyee. He was an Apache--the last of the Apaches.

He promised himself that he would not kill again except in self-defense. He would show them that it was not the Apaches who broke treaties, but experience warned him that the only way to keep peace was to keep hidden from the eyes of man. He knew that the first one who saw him would shoot at him, if he dared, and that thereafter he would be hunted like the coyote and the cougar.

"Only we shall know that we are keeping the treaty, Nejeunee," he said, and the pinto stallion, nuzzled his shoulder in complete accord with this or any other view that his beloved master might hold.

Accustomed to being much alone though he was, yet the man often longed for the companionship of his kind. He conjured pictures of camps beneath the

pinces and cedars of his beloved Arizona hills, of little fires before rude hogans of boughs and skins. He saw Geronimo and Sons-ee-ah-ray squatting there; and with them was Shoz-Dijiji, son of the war chief. These three were always laughing and happy. Gian-nah-tah came to the fire, and Ish-kay-nay. Sometimes these were little children and again they were grown to young man- and woman-hood. He saw many others. Squat, grim warriors, slender youths, lovely maidens whose great, dark eyes looked coquettishly at Shoz-Dijiji.

Most of these were dead. The others, bitter, sullen, had marched away into captivity.

Another figure came, but not to the camp fires of the Shis-Inday. This one came, always, riding a pony over sun scorched hills. Shoz-Dijiji took her in his arms; but she drew away, striking at him. He saw in her eyes, then, a look that he called the snake look. It made him sad and yet this picture came most often to his mind.

He wondered if the snake look would come if she knew that he was a pindah-lickoyee like herself. Perhaps she would not believe it. It was difficult for him to believe it himself. Had any other than Geronimo told him he would not have believed it, but he knew that Geronimo would not lie to him.

Well, she would never know it. It was a shame and a disgrace that he would hide from the knowledge of all men as long as he lived. A white-

eyes! Usen! What had Shoz- Dijji done to deserve this?

But, after all, he was white, he mused. From that fact he could never escape, and it was very lonely living in the mountains forever with only Nejeunee. Perhaps the white girl would believe him; and if she did would it not be better to go and live among the white-eyes as one of them?

He recalled how he used to pity any who had been born white. It would not have been quite so bad had he been born a Mexican, for he knew that there was Indian blood in many of the Mexicans he had known. It would have comforted him had he known that the grandfather of his mother had been a full blooded Cherokee, but he did not know that. He was never to know it, for he was never to know even the names of his father and mother.

He tried to argue with himself that it was no disgrace to be white. Wichita Billings was white, and he thought none the less of her; Lieutenant King was white, and he knew that he was a fine, brave warrior; and there had been Captain Crawford, and there was Lieutenant Gatewood. These men he admired and respected.

Yes, it was all right for them to be white; but still the thought that Shoz-Dijji, war chief of the Bedon-ko-he, was white seemed all wrong.

He could not forget the pride that had always filled his heart because of the fact that he was an Apache.

He had been a great Apache warrior. As a white man he would be nothing. If he went to live among them he would have to wear their hideous clothing and live in their stuffy houses; and he would have to live like the poorest of them, for he would have no money. No, he could not do it.

He thought about the matter a great deal. The lonelier he became the more he thought about it. Wichita Billings was constantly the center of his thoughts. His mind also dwelled upon memories of happy camping places of the past, and it seemed that the sweetest memories hung about the home camps of Arizona.

His lonely heart yearned not only for human companionship but for the grim country that was home to him. Something was happening to Shoz-Dijji. He thought that he was sick and that he was going to die. He was homesick.

"I could go back and die in my own mountains," he thought. The idea made him almost happy. He stroked Nejeunee's soft muzzle and his sleek, arched neck. "How would you like to go home, Nejeunee?" asked Shoz-Dijji. Nejeunee, after the manner of stallions, nipped the bronze shoulder of his master; but whether it was to signify approbation of the suggestion or was merely in the nature of a caress, only Nejeunee knew.

Lieutenant Samuel Adams King sat beneath one of the cotton wood trees that stands in front of the

ranch house of the Crazy B Ranch, his chair tilted back against the bole of the tree. Near him sat Wichita Billings, her fingers busily engaged in the work that was commanding their attention. She might have been embroidering her initials upon a pillow slip or fashioning some dainty bit of lingerie, but she was not. She was cleaning a six-shooter.

"It sure seems tame around these parts now," she remarked. "Do you know I almost miss being scared out of seven years' growth every once in a while since the 'bronchos' were rounded up and shipped to Florida."

"I suppose you are cleaning that pistol, then, just as a sentimental reminder of the happy days that are gone," laughed King.

"Not entirely," she replied. "There are still plenty of bad hombres left- all the bad ones weren't Indians, not by a jug full."

"I suppose not," agreed King. "As a matter of fact I doubt if the Apaches were responsible for half the killings that have been laid at their door; and, do you know, Chita, I can't bring myself to believe even yet that it was an Apache that killed your father. We got it pretty straight from some of the renegades themselves that at the time they were all with Geronimo in the mountains near Hot Springs, except those that were still in Sonora, and Shoz-Dijji."

"Well. that narrows it down pretty close to one

man, doesn't it?" demanded the girl, bitterly.

"Yes, Chita," replied King, "but I can't believe that he did it. He spared my life twice merely because I was your friend. If he could do that, how could he have killed your father?"

"I know, Ad. I've argued it out a hundred times," said the girl, wearily, "but that thousand dollars reward still stands."

"The chances are that it will stand forever, then," said King. "Shoz-Dijiji didn't come in with the other renegades; and, of course, you can't get anything out of them; but it is better than an even bet that he was killed in Sonora during one of the last engagements. I know several bucks were killed; but they usually got them away and buried them, and they never like to talk about their dead."

"I hope to God that he is dead," said the girl.

King shook his head. He knew how bitterly she must feel -- more bitterly, perhaps, because the man she suspected was one to whom she had given her friendship and her aid when he was bearing arms against her country.

He had not told her of his conviction that Shoz-Dijiji and the dread Apache Devil were one and the same; and he did not tell her, for he knew that it would but tend to further assure her of the guilt of the Apache. There were two reasons why he did not tell her. One was his loyalty to the cause

not tell her. One was his loyalty to the savage enemy who had befriended him and who might still be living. The other was his belief that Wichita Billings had harbored a warmer feeling than friendship for the war chief of the Be-don-ko-he, and King was not the type of man who takes an unfair advantage of a rival.

Perhaps it galled this scion of an aristocratic Boston family to admit, even to himself, that an untutored savage might have been his rival in seeking the hand of a girl; but he did not permit the suspicion to lessen his sense of gratitude to Shoz-Dijji or dim the genuine respect he felt for the courage and honor of that savage warrior.

For a time the two sat in silence, Wichita busy with her revolver, King feasting his eyes upon her regular profile.

"Everything on the ranch running smoothly?" he asked, presently.

Wichita shook her head. "Not like they did when Dad was here," she admitted. "The boys are good to me, but it's not like having a man at the head of things. Some of them don't like 'Smooth' and I've lost several of my best men on that account. A couple of them quit, and 'Smooth' fired some. I can't interfere. As long as he's foreman he's got to be foreman. The minute the boys think I've lost confidence in him he won't have any more authority over them than a jack rabbit."

"Are you satisfied with him?" asked King.

"Well--he sure knows his business," she replied; "you'd have to hunt a month of Sundays before you found a better cow man; but he can't get the work out of his men. They don't feel any loyalty for him. They used to cuss Dad; and I've seen more than one of them pull a gun on him, but they'd work their fool heads off for him. They'd get sore as pups and quit; but they always came back--if he'd take them--and when he died, Ad, I saw men crying that I bet hadn't cried before since they were babies."

"That is like the old man," said King, thinking of his troop commander. Gosh! How I have hated that fellow--and while I'm hating him I can't help but love him. There are men like that, you know."

"They are the real men, I guess," mused Wichita; "they don't grow on every sage brush, not by a long shot."

"Why don't you sell out, Chita?" King asked her. "This is no job for a girl--it's a man's job, and you haven't the man for it."

"Lord, I wouldn't know what to do, Ad," she cried. "I'd be plumb lost. Why, this is my life--I don't know anything else. I belong here on a cow ranch in Arizona, and here I'm going to stay."

"But you don't belong here, Chita," he insisted. "You belong on a throne, with a retinue of slaves and retainers waiting on you."

and remains waiting on you.

She leaned back and laughed merrily. "And the first thing I'd know the king would catch me eating peas with my knife and pull the throne out from under me."

"I'm serious, Chita," urged King. "Come with me; let me take you away from this. The only throne I can offer you is in my heart, but it will be all yours--forever."

"I'd like to, Ad," she replied. "You don't know how great the temptation is, but --"

"Then why not?" he exclaimed, rising and coming toward her. "We could be married at the post; and I could get a short leave, I'm sure, even though I haven't been in the service two years. All your worries about the ranch would be over. You wouldn't have anything to do, Chita, but be happy."

"It wouldn't be fair, Ad," she said.

"Fair? What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It wouldn't be fair to you."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know whether I love you enough or not."

"I'll take the chance," he told her. "I'll make you love me."

She shook her head. "If I was going to marry a man and face a life that I was sure was going to be worse than the one I was leaving, I'd know that I loved him, and I wouldn't hesitate a minute; but if I marry you it might just be because what you have to offer me looks like heaven compared to the life I've been leading since Dad died. I think too much of you and my self respect to take the chance of waking up to the fact some day that I don't love you. That would be Hell for us both, Ad; and you don't deserve it--you're too white."

"I tell you that I'm perfectly willing to take the chance, Chita."

"Yes, but I won't let you. Wait a while. If I really love you I'll find it out somehow, and you'll know it--if you don't I'll tell you--but I'm not sure now."

"Is there someone else, Chita?"

"No!" she cried, and her vehemence startled him.

"I'll wait, then, because I have to wait," he said, "and in the meantime if there is any way in which I can help you, let me do it."

"Well," she said, laughing, "you might teach the cows how to drill. I can't think of anything else around a cow outfit, right off-hand, that you could do. Sometimes it seems to me like they didn't have any cows back where you came from."

King laughed. "They used to. All the streets in Boston were laid out by cows, they say."

"Out here," said Chita, "we drive our cows--we don't follow them."

"Perhaps that's the difference between the East and the West," said King. "Out here you blaze your own trails. I guess that's where you get your self-confidence and initiative."

"And it may account for some of our shortcomings, too," she replied. "Where you're just following cows you have lots of time to think of other things and improve yourself, but when you're driving them you haven't time to think of anything except just cows. That's the fix I'm in now."

"When you have discovered that you might learn to love me you will have time for other things," he reminded her.

"Time to improve myself?" she teased.

"Nothing could improve you in my eyes, Chita," he said, honestly. "To me you are perfect."

"If Margaret Cullis hadn't taught me that it was vulgar I should say 'Rats' to that."

"Please--don't."

"I won't," she promised. "And now you must run along. You know your orders never said anything

about spending two hours at the Billings ranch this afternoon. What will your detachment think?"

"They'll think I'm a fool if I don't stay all afternoon and ride back to the post in the cool of the night."

"And get court martialled when you get there. Boots and saddles for you, Lieutenant Samuel Adams King!"

"Yes, sir!" he cried, clicking his heels together and saluting. Then he seized her hand and kissed it.

"Don't!" she whispered, snatching it away. "Here comes Luke."

"I don't care if the World's coming."

"That's because you don't know what it is to be joshed by a bunch of cow punchers," she told him. "Say, why when it comes to torture, Victorio and Geronimo and old Whoa could have gone to school to some of these red necks from the Pan Handle."

"All right, I won't embarrass you. Good-bye and good luck, and don't forget the message I brought from Mrs. Cullis. She wants you to come and spend a week or so with her."

"Tell her I thank her heaps and that I'll come the first chance I get. Good-bye!"

She watched him walk away, tall, erect, soldierly; trim in his blue blouse, his yellow striped breeches,

his cavalry boots, and campaign hat--a soldier, every inch of him and, though still a boy, a veteran already.

And she sighed--sighed because she did not love him, sighed because she was afraid that she would never love him. Lines of bitterness touched the corners of her mouth and her eyes as she thought of the beautiful and priceless thing that she had thrown away--wasted upon a murdering savage--and a flush of shame tinged her cheeks.

Her painful reveries were interrupted by the voice of Luke Jensen.

"I jest been ridin' the east range, Miss," he said.

"Yes? Everything all right?"

"I wouldn't say thet it was an' I wouldn't say thet it wasn't," he replied.

"What's wrong?"

"You recollect thet bunch thet always hung out near the head o' the coulee where them cedars grows out o' the rocks?"

"Yes, what about them?"

"They's about half o' em gone. If they was all gone I'd think they might have drifted to some other part o' the range; but they was calves, yearlin's, and some two an' three year olds still follerin' their mothers in that bunch, and a bunch like that don't

hundreds in that bunch, an' a bunch like that don't scatter fer no good reason."

"No. What do you make of it, Luke?"

"If the renegades warn't all c'ralled I'd say Apaches."

"Kansas' reported another bunch broken up that ranges around the Little Mesa," said Wichita, thoughtfully. "Do you reckon it's rustlers, Luke?"

"I wouldn't say it was an' I wouldn't say it wasn't."

"What does 'Smooth' say?"

"He allows they just natch'rally drifted."

"Are you riding the east range every day, Luke?"

"Most days. Course it takes me nigh onto a week to cover it, an' oncet in a while 'Smooth' sends me somers else. Yistiddy, he sent me plumb down to the south ranch- me an' 'Kansas'."

"Well, keep your eyes open for that bunch, Luke-- they might have drifted."

"Well, I wouldn't say they would of and I ,wouldn't say they wouldn't of."

LUIS MARIEL, profiting by the example of the Americanos, stood up to "Dirty" Cheetim's bar and drank cheap whiskey.

'Wot you doin', Kid?' asked Cheetim. "Nothing," replied Luis.

"Want a job, or hev you still got some dinero left?"

"I want a job," replied Luis. "I am broke."

"You got a hoss, ain't you?"

"Si, Senior."

"Come 'ere," he motioned Luis to follow him into the back room.

There Luis saw a tall man with sandy hair sitting at a table, drinking.

"Here's a good kid fer us," said Cheetim to the sandy haired man. "He aint been up here long; an' nobody don't know him, an' he don't know nobody."

"Does he savvy U. S.?" demanded the man. "Si, Senior," spoke up Luis. "I understand pretty good. I speak it pretty good, too."

"Can you keep your mouth shut?"

"Si, Senior."

"If you don't, somebody'll shut it for you," said the man, drawing his forefinger across his throat meaningly. "You savvy?"

"What is this job?" demanded Luis.

"You aint got nothin' to do but herd a little bunch o' cattle an' keep your trap closed. If anyone asks you any questions in United States you don't savvy, and if they talk Greaser to you, why you don't know nothin' about the cattle except that a kind old gentleman hired you to ride herd on 'em."

"Si, Senor."

"You get thirty five a month an' your grub--twenty five fer ridin' herd an' the rest fer not knowin' nothin'. How about it?"

"Sure, Senor, I do it."

"All right, you come along with me. We'll ride out, an' I'll show you where the bunch is," and the sandy haired man gulped down another drink and arose.

He led Luis north into the reservation, and at last they came to a bunch of about fifty head grazing contentedly on rather good pasture.

"They aint so hard to hold," said the sandy haired man, "but they got a hell of a itch to drift east sometimes. They's a c'ral up thet draw a ways. You puts 'em in there nights and lets 'em graze durin' the day. You wont hev to hold 'em long." He took a

day. You won't hev to herd 'em long. He took a playing card from his pocket -- the jack of spades -- and tore it in two. One half he handed to Luis. "When a feller comes with tother half o' this card, Kid, you let him hev the cattle. Savvy?"

"Si, Senor."

"Oncet in a while they may a couple fellers come up with some more critters fer you. You jest let 'em drive 'em in with your bunch. You don't hev to say nothin' nor ask no questions. Savvy?"

"Si, Senor."

"All right. Let 'em graze til sundown; then c'ral 'em and come down to the Hog Ranch fer the night. You kin make down your bed back o' the barn. The Chink'll feed you. So long, Kid."

"Adios, Senor." Luis Mariel, watching the tall, sandy haired man ride away, tucked his half of the jack of spades into the breast pocket of his shirt, rolled a cigarette, and then rode leisurely among the grazing cattle, inspecting his charges.

He noted the marks and brands, and discovering that several were represented, concluded that Cheetim and the sandy haired man were collecting a bunch for sale or shipment. Impressed by the injunction to silence laid upon him, and being no fool, Luis opined that the cattle had come into their possession through no lawful processes.

But that they had been stolen was no affair of his.

But that they had been stolen was no affair of his. He had not stolen them. He was merely employed to herd them. It interested him to note that fully ninety percent of the animals bore the Crazy B brand on the left hip, a slit in the right ear, and a half crop off the left, the remainder being marked by various other brands, some of which he recognized and some of which he did not.

The Crazy B brand he knew quite well as it was one of the foremost brands in that section of Arizona. He had tried to get work with that outfit when he had brought the pinto stallion up from the border for El Teniente King. At that time he had talked with Senor Billings, who had since been killed by Apaches; but he had been unable to secure employment with him. Later he had learned that the Billings ranch never employed Mexicans, and while knowledge of this fact aroused no animosity within him neither did it impose upon him any sentiment of obligation to apprise the owners of the brand of his suspicion that someone was stealing their cattle.

Luis Mariel was far from being either a criminal or vicious young man. He would not have stolen cattle himself, but it was none of his business how his employers obtained the cattle that he was hired to herd for them. Since he had come up from Mexico he had found means of livelihood through many and various odd employments, sometimes as laborer, sometimes as chore boy, occasionally in riding for some small cow outfit, which was the thing of all others that he liked best to do. It was the thing that

others that he liked best to do. It was the thing that Luis Mariel loved best and did best.

More recently he had been reduced to the expedience of performing the duties of porter around the bar of "Dirty" Cheetim's Hog Ranch in order that he might eat to live and live to eat. Here, his estimate of the Gringos had not been materially raised.

Pedro Mariel, the woodchopper of Casa Grande, was a poor man in worldly goods; but in qualities of heart and conscience he had been rich, and he had raised his children to fear God and do right.

Luis often thought of his father as he watched the Gringos around "Dirty" Cheetim's place, and at night he would kneel down and thank God that he was a Mexican.

Many of the Gringos that he saw were not bad, only fools; but there were many others who were very bad indeed. El Teniente King was the best Americano he had ever seen. Luis was sorry that El Teniente had no riding job for him. These were some of the thoughts that passed through the mind of the Mexican youth as he rode herd on the stolen cattle

Up from the south rode Shoz-Dijiji. From the moment that he crossed the border into Arizona his spirits rose. The sight of familiar and beloved scenes, the scent of the cedars and the pines, the sunlight and the moonlight were like wine in his

veins. The Black Bear was almost happy again.

Where there were no trails he went unseen. No longer were the old water holes guarded by the soldiers of the pindah-lickoyee. Peace lay upon the battle ground of three hundred years. He saw prospectors and cowboys occasionally, but they did not see Shoz-Dijji. The war chief of the Bedon-ko-he knew that the safety of peace was for the white-eyed men only--he was still a renegade, an outlaw, a hunted beast, fair target for the rifle of the first white man who saw him.

He moved slowly, and often by night, drinking to the full the joys of homeland; but he moved toward a definite goal and with a well defined purpose. It had taken days and weeks and months of meditation and introspection to lay the foundation for the decision he had finally reached; it had necessitated trampling under foot a lifetime of race consciousness and pride in caste; it had required the sacrifice of every cherished ideal, but the incentive was more powerful than any of these things, perhaps the greatest single moral force for good or evil that exists to govern and shape the destinies of man--love.

Love was driving this Apache war chief to the object of his devotion and to the public avowal that he was no Apache but, in reality, a member of the race that he had always looked upon with the arrogant contempt of a savage chieftain.

in his return through Arizona he found his loved friend, Nejeunee, an obstacle to safe or rapid progress. A pinto pony, while perhaps camouflaged by Nature, is not, at best, an easy thing to conceal, nor can it follow the trackless steep of rugged mountains as can a lone Apache warrior; but, none the less, Shoz-Dijji would not abandon this, his last remaining friend, the sole and final tie that bound him to the beloved past; and so the two came at last to an upland country, hallowed by sacred memories--memories that were sweet and memories that were bitter.

Luke Jensen was riding the east range. What does a lone cowboy think about? There is usually an old bull that younger bulls have run out of the herd. He is always wandering off, and if he be of any value it is necessary to hunt him up and explain to him the error of his ways in profane and uncomplimentary language while endeavoring to persuade him to return. He occupies the thoughts of the lone cowboy to some extent.

Then there is the question of the expenditure of accumulated wages, if any have accumulated. There are roulette and faro and stud at the Hog Ranch, but if one has recently emerged from any of these one is virtuous and has renounced them all for life, along with wine and women.

A hand-made, silver mounted bit would look as well and arouse envy, as would sheep skin chaps, and a heavy, silver hat band. A new and more brilliant bandana is also in order. Then there are the

perennial plans for breaking into the cattle business on one's own hook, based on starting modestly with a few feeders to which second thought may add a maverick or two that nobody would miss and from these all the way up to rustling an entire herd.

Thoughts of Apaches had formerly impinged persistently upon the minds of lone cowboys. Luke Jensen was mighty glad, as he rode the east range, that he didn't have to bother his head any more about renegades.

He was riding up a coulee flanked by low hills. Below the brow of one that lay ahead of him an Apache war chief watched his approach. Below and behind the warrior a pinto stallion lay stretched upon its side, obedient to the command of its master.

Shoz-Dijiji, endowed by Nature with keen eyes and a retentive memory, both of which had been elevated by constant lifelong exercise to approximate perfection, recognized Luke long before the cowboy came opposite his position--knew him even before he could discern his features.

"Hey, you!" called Shoz-Dijiji without exposing himself to the view of the youth.

Luke reined in and looked about. Mechanically his hand went to the butt of his six-shooter.

"No shoot!" said Shoz-Dijiji. "I am friend."

"How the hell do I know that?" demanded Jensen.
"I can't see you, an' I aint takin' no chances."

"I got you covered with rifle," announced Shoz-Dijji. "You better be friend and put away gun. I no shoot. I am Shoz- Dijji."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jensen. The one thousand dollars reward instantly dominated his thoughts.

"You no shoot?" demanded the Indian. Luke returned his revolver to its holster. "Come on down," he said. "I remember you."

Shoz-Dijji spoke to Nejeunee, who scrambled to his feet; and a moment later the pinto stallion and its rider were coming down the hillside.

"We thought you was dead," said Luke.

"No. Shoz-Dijji been long time in Sonora."

"Still on the war path?" asked the cowboy.

"Geronimo make treaty with the Mexicans and with your General Miles," explained the Apache. "He promise we never fight again against the Mexicans or the Americans. Shoz- Dijji keep the treaty Geronimo made. Shoz-Dijji will not fight unless they make him. Even the coyote will fight for his life."

"What you come back here fer, Shoz-Dijji?"
asked Luke

"I come to see Wichita Billings. Mebby so I get job here. What you think?"

Many thoughts crowded themselves rapidly through the mind of Luke Jensen in the instant before he replied and foremost among them was the conviction that this man could not be the murderer of Jefferson Billings. Had he been he would have known that suspicion would instantly attach to him from the fact that Wichita had seen him near the ranch the day her father was killed and that on that same day the pony he now rode had been stolen from the east pasture.

"Well, what do you think about it, Shoz-Dijiji?" parried Luke.

"I think mebby so she give me' job, but Shoz-Dijiji not so damn sure about her father. He no like Shoz-Dijiji."

"Don't you know that her ol' man's dead?" demanded Luke.

"Dead? No, Shoz-Dijiji not know that. Shoz-Dijiji been down in Sonora long time. How he die?"

"He was murdered jest outside the east pasture and -- scalped," said Luke.

"You mean by Apaches?"

"No one knows. but it looks damn suspicious."

"When thls happen?" demanded Shoz-Dijji.

"We found him the mornin' after you took that there pony out of the east pasture."

Shoz-Dijji sat in silence for a moment, his inscrutable face masking whatever emotions were stirring within his breast.

"You mean they think Shoz-Dijji kill Billings? Does Chita think that, too?"

"Look here, Shoz-Dijji," said Jensen, kindly, "you done me a good turn oncet that I aint a-never goin' to forget. I don't mind tellin' you I aint never thought you killed the ol' man, but everyone else thinks so."

"Even Chita?" asked Shoz-Dijji.

"I wouldn't say she does and I wouldn't say she doesn't, but she aint never took off the thousand dollar reward she offered to any hombre what would bring you in dead."

Not by the quiver of an eyelid did Shoz-Dijji reveal the anguish of his tortured heart as he listened to the words that blasted forever the sole hope of happiness that had buoyed him through the long days and nights of his journey up through hostile Sonora and even more hostile Arizona.

"You get one thousand dollars, you kill me?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Why you no kill me, then?"

Jensen shrugged. "I reckon it must be for the same reason you didn't kill me when you had the chancet, Shoz-Dijji," he replied. "There must be a streak of white in both of us."

"Good-bye," said!Shoz-Dijji, abruptly. "I go now."

"Say, before you go would you mind tellin' me fer sure thet it wasn't you killed the ol' man?" asked Luke.

Shoz-Dijji looked the other squarely in the eyes. "If Wichita Billings offer one thousand dollar reward to have Shoz-Dijji killed she must know Shoz-Dijji kill her father. Good-bye. Shoz-Dijji ride straight up coulee, slowly. Mebby so you want one thousand dollars, now you get it. Sabe?" He wheeled Nejeunee and walked the pony slowly away while Luke Jensen, slouching in his saddle, watched him until he had disappeared beyond a low ridge.

Not once did Jensen experience any urge to reach for the six-shooter at his hip or the rifle in its boot beneath his right leg.

"I could shore use a thousand dollars," he mused as he turned his pony's head back toward the Crazy

B Ranch, "but I don't want it that bad."

As he rode into the ranch yard later in the afternoon he saw Wichita Billings standing near the bunk house talking with "Kansas." Luke was of a mind to avoid her, feeling, as he did, that he should report his meeting with Shoz-Dijiji and dreadIng to do so because of the fear that a posse would be organized to go out and hunt the Apache down the moment that it was learned that he was in the vicinity.

But when Wichita saw him she called to him, and there was nothing less that he could do than go to her. She had finished her conversation with "Kansas," and the latter had gone into the bunk house when Luke reached her side.

"Walk up to the office with me, Luke," said the girl. "I want to talk with you," and he fell in beside her as she walked along. "I have just been talking with 'Kansas,'" she continued, "and he tells me that a few head are missing off the north range. Did you miss any today or see anything unusual?"

Had he seen anything unusual! There was a poser. Luke scratched his head.

"I wouldn't say that they was any more critters missin';" he replied, "an' I wouldn't say as they wasn't."

He looked down at the ground in evident embarrassment Wichita Billings who knew these

CHIEF. "These boys better than they knew themselves, eyed him suspiciously. They walked on in silence for a few moments.

"Look here, Luke," said the girl, presently. "Someone is stealing my cattle. I don't know who to trust. I've always looked to 'Smooth' and you and 'Kansas' and Matt as being the ones I sure could tie to. If you boys don't shoot straight with me no one will."

"Who said I warn't shootin' straight with you, Miss?" demanded Luke.

"I say so," replied Wichita. "You're holding something out on me. Say, I can read you just like a mail order catalogue. If you don't come clean you're through your pay check's waiting for you right now."

"I kin always git another job," parried Luk~, lamely.

"Sure you can; but that isn't the question, Luke," replied the girl, sadly.

"I know it ain't, Miss," and Luke dug a toe into the loose earth beneath the cottonwood tree. "I did see somethin' onusual today," he blurted suddenly.

"I thought so. What was it?"

"An Apache--Shoz-Dijiji."

Wichita Billings' eyes went wide. Involuntarily her hand went to her breast, and she caught her breath in a little gasp before she spoke.

"You shot him?" The words were a barely audible whisper. "You shot him for the reward?"

"I shore did not," snapped Luke. "Look here, Miss, you kin have my job any time you want it, but you nor no one else kin make me double cross a hombre what saved my life--I don't give a damn who he killed--I beg yore pardon, Miss -- and anyway I haint never belieyed he did kill your paw."

In his righteous indignation Luke Jensen had failed to note what appeared to be the relaxation of vast relief that claimed Wichita Billings the instant that he announced that he had not shot Shoz-Dijiji. Could it be that Wichita, too, had her doubts?

"Did you ask him about the killing? Demanded the girl.

"Yep."

"What did he say? Did he deny it?"

"Well, I wouldn't say he did and I wouldn't say he didn't."

"Just what did he say?"

"He said that ef you was offerin' a thousand dollars fer him dead you must be plumb shore he done it."

"How did he know about the reward?"

"I told him."

"You told him?"

"Shore I did. I don't think he done it. Ef I hadn't told him he was a comin' here an' some of the fellers would have plugged him shore. You ain't mad, are you?"

"You are very sure he didn't kill Dad, aren't you, Luke?"

"Yep, plumb certain."

"But he didn't deny it, did he?"

"No, an' he didn't admit it, neither."

"There may be some doubt, Luke. I'm going to draw down that offer, because I can't take the chance of being mistaken; but as long as I live I shall believe in my heart that Shoz-Dijiji killed my father. If you ever see him again, tell him that the reward has been called off, and tell him, too, that if ever I see him I'll kill him, just like I think he killed my Dad; but I can't ask anyone else to. Send 'Smooth' here when you go back to the bunk house."

As Luke was walking away the girl called to him.

"You'd better tell him there's something else."

"Wait a minute, Luke, there is something else," she said. "I have just been thinking," she continued, when the youth was near her again, "that the Indian you saw today might have had something to do with the cattle stealing. Had you thought of that?"

Luke scratched his head. "No, ma'am, I hedn't thought of that; but now that you mention it I reckon as how it ain't at all unlikely. I never seen one yet that wouldn't steal."

"I guess we're on the right trail now, Luke," said the girl. "Don't say anything to anyone about seeing him. Just keep your eyes open, and let me know the minute you see anything out of the way."

"All right, Miss, I'll keep a right smart look out," and Jensen turned and walked toward the bunk house.

As Wichita waited for her foreman her thoughts were overcast by clouds of sorrow and regret. The animosities that were directed upon Shoz-Dijji were colored by the shame she felt for having permitted her heart to surrender itself to an Indian. That she had never openly admitted the love that she had once harbored for a savage did not reconcile her, nor did the fact that she had definitely and permanently uprooted the last vestige of this love and nurtured hatred in its stead completely clear her conscience.

It angered her that even while she vehemently voiced her belief that Shoz-Dijji had killed her

father she still had doubts that refused to die. She was bitter in the knowledge that though she had suggested that he was stealing her cattle, deep in her heart she could not bring herself to believe it of him.

Her somber reveries were interrupted by the approach of Kreff.

"There are a couple of things I wanted to speak to you about, 'Smooth,'" said the girl.

"Fire away, Chita," said the man, with easy familiarity.

"In the first place I want you to pass the word around that the reward for bringing in that Apache is off."

"Why?" demanded the man.

"That's my business," replied the girl, shortly. The words and her tone reminded Kreff of the dead Boss--she was her father all over--and he said no more.

"The other thing is this report about cattle stealing," she continued.

"Who said there was any cattle stealin' goin' on?" he asked.

"Luke has missed a few head off the east range."

"Oh, that kid's loco," said Kreff. "They've drifted, an' he's too plumb lazy to hunt 'em up."

"Kansas' has missed some, too, from up around the Little Mesa on the north range," she insisted. "I don't know so much about Luke, he hasn't been with us so long; but 'Kansas' is an old hand--he's not the kind to do much guessing."

"I'll look into it, Chita," said Kreff, "an' don't you worry your little head no more about it." There was something in his tone that made her glance up quickly, knitting her brows. His voice was low and soothing and protective. It didn't sound like "Smooth" Kreff in spite of his nickname, which, she happened to know, was indicative of the frictionless technique with which he separated other men from their belongings in the application of the art of draw and stud.

"You hadn't ought to hev nothin' to worry you," he continued. "This here business is a man's job. It ain't right an' fittin' thet a girl should hev to bother with sech things."

"Well, that's what I've got you and the other boys for, 'Smooth.'"

"Yes, but hired hands ain't the same. You ought to be married--to a good cow man," he added.

"Meaning?" she inquired.

"Me."

"Are you proposing to me, 'Smooth'?"

"I shore am. What do you say? You an' me could run this outfit together fine, an' you wouldn't never hev to worry no more about nothin'."

"But I don't love you, 'Smooth.'"

"Oh, shucks, that aint nothin'. They's a heap o' women marry men they don't love. They git to lovin' 'em afterwards, though."

"But you don't love me."

"I shore do, Chita. I've allus loved you."

"Well, you've managed to hide it first rate," she observed.

"They didn't never seem no chance, 'til now," he explained; "but you got a lot o' horse sense, an' I reckon you kin see as well as me thet it would be the sensible thing to do. You cain't marry nothin' but a cow man, an' they ain't no other cow man thet I knows of thet would be much of a improvement over me. You'll larn to love me, all right. I aint so plumb ugly, an' I won't never beat you up."

Wichita laughed. "You're sure tootin', 'Smooth,'" she said. "There isn't a man on earth that's ever going to try to beat me up, more than once."

Kreff grinned. "You don't hev to tell me that, Chita," he said. "I know that's one of the reasons

Chita, he said. "I reckon that's one o' the reasons I'm so strong fer you--you shore would make one grand woman fer a man in this country."

"Well, 'Smooth,' as a business proposition there is something in what you say that it won't do any harm to think about, but as a proposal of marriage it hasn't got any more bite to it than a white pine dog with a poplar tail."

"But you'll think it over, Chita?" he asked, drawing a sack of Durham and a package of brown papers from his shirt pocket.

"You dropped something, 'Smooth,'" she said; gesturing toward the ground at his feet. "You pulled it out of your pocket with the makings."

He looked down at a bit of paste board, at one half of a playing card that had been torn in two--one half of the jack of spades.

Seventeen--CHEETIM STRIKES!

IT WAS night. The oil lamps were burning brightly in the barroom of the Hog Ranch. The games were being well patronized. The 1 girls were circulating among the customers, registering thirst. It looked like a large night.

In the back room two men, seated at opposite

sides of a table, were conversing in low tones. A bottle, two glasses, and a mutilated jack of spades lay between them. One of the men was Cheetim, the other was Kreff.

"How much longer does that feller think we kin hold them critters without hevin' every galoot in the Territory ridin' onto 'em an' blowin' the whole business?" demanded Kreff.

"I been tellin' him to see you," said Cheetim. Kreff pushed the jack of spades across the table to the other man. "You take this," he said. "You see him oftener than I do. Don't turn this over to him 'til you git the money, but tell him that ef he don't get a hump on hisself we'll drive the bunch north an' sell 'em up there. They can't stay around here much longer--the girl's wise now that somethin's wrong. Two of the hands has told her they been missin' stock lately!"

Cheetim sat in silence, thinking. Slowly he filled Kreff's glass, and poured another drink for himself.

"Here's how!" he said and drank.

"How!" replied Kreff.

"I been thinkin'," said Cheetim.

"Don't strain yourself, 'Dirty,' " Kreff admonished him.

"It's this-a-way," continued the other, ignoring

Kreff's pleasantries. "Ef it warn't for the girl we could clean up big on thet herd. This here Agent'll buy anything an' not ask no questions."

"What do you want me to do," inquired Kreff, "kill her?"

"I want you to help me get her. Ef I kin get her fer a few days she'll be glad enough to marry me. Then I'll give you half what I get out of the cattle."

"Ride your own range, 'Dirty,'" rising, "and keep off o' mine."

"What do you mean?"

"Ef either one of us gets her it's me, that's what I mean." There was an ugly edge to his voice that Cheetim did not fail to note.

"Oh, hell," he said, "I didn't know you was sweet on her."

"You know it now--keep off the grass."

* * *

A pinto stallion, tied to a stunted cedar, dozed in the mid-day heat. His master, sprawled at the summit of a rocky knoll, looked down upon the other side at a bunch of cattle resting until it should be cooler, the while they pensively chewed their cuds. A youth lay upon his back beneath the shade of a tree. A saddled pony, with drooping head and

ears, stood near by lazily switching its tail in mute remonstrance against the flies. Bridle reins, dragging on the ground, suggested to the pony that it was tethered and were all-sufficient. Somnolence, silence, heat--Arizona at high noon. Shoz-Dijiji surveyed the scene. With a reward of a thousand dollars on his head it behooved him to survey all scenes in advance. The reward, however, was but a secondary stimulus. Training and environment had long since fixed upon him the habit of reconnaissance. Immediately he had recognized Luis Mariel. If he were surprised he gave no evidence of it, for his expression did not change. His eyes wandered over the herd. They noted the various brands, ear-marks, wattles, jug-handles, and though Shoz-Dijiji could not have been termed a cattle man he read them all and knew the ranch and range of every animal in the bunch, for there was no slightest thing from one end of Apache-land to the other that an Apache let pass as of too slight importance to concern him. He saw that most of the cattle belonged to Wichita Billings, but he knew that it was not a Crazy B cowboy that was herding them, for the Crazy B outfit employed no Mexicans.

Long before Luis Mariel was aware of the fact Shoz-Dijiji knew that several horsemen were approaching; but he did not change his position since, if they continued in the direction they were going, they would pass without seeing him.

Presently four men rode into view. He recognized them all. Two of them were Navajoes, one a half-

breed and the fourth a white man--the Indian Agent.

Shoz-Dijiji did not like any of them, especially the Indian Agent. He fingered his rifle and wished that Geronimo had not made that treaty with General Miles in Skeleton Canyon. Presently Luis heard the footfalls of the approaching horses and sat up. Seeing the men, he arose. They rode up to him, and the Agent spoke. Shoz-Dijiji saw him take a bit of paper from his pocket and show it to Luis. Luis took another similar bit of paper from his own pocket and compared it with the one that the Agent now handed him. Shoz-Dijiji could not quite make out what the bits of paper were--from a distance they looked like two halves of a playing card.

Luis mounted his pony and helped the men round up the cattle, but after they had started them in the direction of the Agency Luis waved his adios and reined his pony southward toward the Hog Ranch.

Shoz-Dijiji remained motionless until all were well out of sight, then he wormed his way below the brow of the hill, rose and walked down to Nejeunee. He had spent the preceding night in the hogan of friends on the reservation. They had talked of many things, among them being the fact that the Agent was still buying stolen cattle at a low price and collecting a high price for them from the Government.

Shoz-Dijiji knew that he had seen stolen cattle delivered to the Agent. which would not, of itself,

have given him any concern; but the fact that most of these cattle had evidently been stolen from Wichita Billings put an entirely different aspect on the matter.

The fact that she hated him, that she had offered a reward for him, dead, could not alter the fact that he loved her; and, loving her, he must find a way to inform her of what he had discovered. Naturally, the first means to that end which occurred to him was Luke Jensen. He would ride back to where Luke Jensen rode and find him.

It is a long way from where Cheetim and Kreff had hidden the stolen herd to the Billings east range, and when one is a fair target for every rifle and six-shooter in the world it behooves one to move warily; so Shoz-Dijiji lay up until night and then rode slowly toward the east.

* * *

Luis Mariel had ridden directly to the Hog Ranch and reported to Cheetim, handing him both halves of the jack of spades as evidence that the herd had been turned over to the proper party in accordance with Luis' instructions.

"That's jest what I been waitin' fer," said Cheetim. "Now I got some more work fer you, if you're game. They's fifty dollars extra in it fer you."

"What is it?" asked Luis.

"It aint none o' your business what it is," replied Cheetim. "All you got to know is that they may be some shootin' in it, an' all you got to do is do what I tell you. If you're skeered I don't want you."

"I am not afraid, Senor," replied Luis. The fifty dollars appeared a fortune.

"All right. You savvy the Crazy B Ranch?"

"Si, Senor."

"I want you to take a note to 'Smooth' Kreff, the foreman o' thet outfit."

"Is that all?"

"No. After you deliver the note you hang around and see what happens. They's a girl there. When I come I'll want to know where she is and how many men there are left at the ranch. There'll be four or five fellers with me. After that I'll tell you what to do."

"When does the shooting happen?" asked Luis.

"Oh, maybe they won't be no shootin'," replied Cheetim. "I was jest warnin' you in case they was. I'll write the letter now an' then you hit the trail. Ef you ride hard you'll make it before sun up. I want you there before the hands start out fer the day. Savvy?"

Laboriously with the stub of a pencil that he

constantly wet with his tongue, "Dirty" Cheetim wrote. It appeared to Luis that Senor Cheetim was not accustomed to writing--he seemed to be suffering from mental constipation--but at last the agony was over and Cheetim handed Luis a sheet of soiled paper folded many times into a small wad.

"If Kreff asks you about the cattle you say that when you went up this mornin' the bars o' the c'rral was down an' the cattle gone, an' don't you tell him nothin' different. If you do you won't get no fifty dollars 'cause you won't need 'em where I'll send you." Cheetim slapped the six-shooter at his hip.

"I understand," said Luis. He did not like Senor Cheetim, but fifty dollars are fifty dollars.

The sun was but a few minutes high when Luis Mariel reined into the Billings ranch yard. From a slight eminence a mile or two away, beyond the east pasture fence, Shoz-Dijiji saw him come and wondered.

The Apache had taken his position just before dawn and at the first flush of the new day had fixed his field glasses upon the ranch yard. He wished to get in touch with Jensen as quickly as possible and saw in this plan the surest method of determining when and in what direction Luke rode that morning.

Luis went at once to the bunk house, where the men were already astir, and delivered the letter to Kreff, whom he at once recognized as the tall,

sandy haired man who had taken him to the herd and given him the torn playing card and his instructions. Kreff recognized Luis, too, but he only frowned.

Almost as laboriously as Cheetim had written it, Kreff deciphered the note.

"Frend Kref : " he read. "Sum fellers stole the herd bring al yore hands & help Me round them up they will think the fellers stol them & That will let us out doan fetch the greser i think he wus in on it dirty yours truly."

"Hell!" ejaculated Kreff. "What's eatin' you?" inquired "Kansas."

"'Dirty' Cheetim says a bunch of rustlers is runnin' off some of our stock. He seen 'em headin' past his place. Luke! Rustle up that 'cavvy,' pronto. You fellers feed while Luke's gone. We're all hittin' the trail after them lousy thieves."

"I reckon 'Dirty' is jest sore 'cause he didn't git to the bunch ahead o' them other fellers," drawled "Kansas." Luke tucked his shirt tails into his trousers, grabbed his Stetson, and bolted for the corral. When Kreff had finished dressing he went to the cook house and told the Chinese cook to hurry breakfast. Then he walked over to the ranch house and stopping under Wichita's window called her name aloud.

A moment later, a Navajo blanket about her

shoulders, the girl appeared at the window. "What is it, 'Smooth?'" she asked.

"You was right about the rustling," he said. "Cheetim jest sent a Greaser with a note sayin' he'd seen some fellers runnin' off a bunch of our stock. I'm takin' all the men an' ridin' after 'em. They can't git away."

"Good!" cried the girl. "I'll go with you."

"No, you better not. They's almost sure to be shootin'."

"I can shoot," she replied.

"I know that; but please don't do it, Chita. We'd all be lookin' after you an' couldn't do like we would if they wasn't a woman along."

"Perhaps you are right," she admitted. "Gosh! Why wasn't I born a boy?"

"I'm shore glad you wasn't."

Shoz-Dijiji, seeing Luke riding early and alone straight in his direction, felt that once again, after long forgetfulness, Usen had remembered him. He knew that the youth would come only as far as the horses pastured in the east pasture, and so he rode down and came through the gate to meet the cowboy. The willows in the draw screened them from each other's sight until Luke spurred up the steep bank of the wash and came face to face with

the Apache.

"Hello, there!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What you doin' here?"

"I want you take word to Wichita," said Shoz-Dijji. "The Indian Agent is buying cattle that are stolen from her. I saw it yesterday, on the reservation. You tell her?"

"We jest got word of the same bunch, I reckon," replied Luke. "We're all ridin' out after 'em now. Which way was they headin' when you saw them?"

"Toward the Agency."

"Thanks a lot, Shoz-Dijji," said Luke. "I'll tell her anyway when I see her about your sendin' the word to her."

"No," said the Apache. "Do not tell her who sent the word."

"All right. I got to be movin'. The boys is waitin' fer these broncs. So long, Shoz-Dijji!"

"Adios!" replied the Apache, and as Jensen herded the horses toward the corrals Shoz-Dijji rode away, out through the pasture gate, onto the east range.

Something was troubling Shoz-Dijji's mind. He had seen Luis Mariel guarding the stolen herd and yet it was he who brought word to the ranch

concerning these same cattle. What did it mean?

Through his glasses the Apache watched the departure of the Crazy B cow hands. Apparently all had left the ranch with the exception of Luis Mariel. Why was Luis remaining? He had seen Wichita come into the yard and talk with some of the men as they were mounting, and he had seen her wave them godspeed. She had spoken to Luis, too, and then gone into the house. Luis was hanging around the corrals. Shoz- Dijiji shook his head. Luis was a good boy. He would not harm anyone. There was it something else to think about and that was breakfast. Shoz-Dijiji rode a short distance to the east, dismounted and with bow and arrows set forth in search of his breakfast. In half an hour he had a cottontail and a quail. Returning to Nejeunee he sought a secluded spot and cooked his breakfast.

Ten minutes after Luis Mariel had departed from the Hog Ranch the previous evening Cheetim with four others had ridden out along the same trail; and when Kreff and the other men of the Crazy B rode away in the morning in search of the rustlers, from the hills south of the ranch these five had watched them depart.

"We got lots of time," said Cheetim, "an' we'll wait until they are plenty far away before we ride down. You four'll hev to git the girl. Ef she seen me comin' she'd start shootin' before we was inside the gate, but she don't know none of you. I was damn sure to pick fellers she didn't know. You ride in an' ask

ter grub an' a job. The greaser'll be there to tell you ef they is any men left around an' where the girl is. You won't have no trouble. Jes' grab her an' don't give her no chance to draw thet gun o' hers, fer I'm here to state thet ol' man Billings' girl wouldn't think no more o' perforatin' your ornery hides then she would of spittin'."

The ride ahead of Kreff and his men was, the foreman knew, a long and hard one. There was some slight chance of borrowing a change of horses at a ranch near Cheetim's place; but it was only a chance, and so Kreff conserved his horse flesh and did not push on too rapidly.

As he rode he had time to think things out a little more clearly than he had in the excitement and rush of preparation, and he wondered why it had been that Cheetim had not organized a party to go after the rustlers and save the cattle for themselves. He could easily have done it, as there were always several tough gun-men hanging around his place who would commit murder for a pint of whiskey. Yes, that did seem peculiar. And if he had mistrusted the Mexican, why had he intrusted the message to him? Kreff did not trust Cheetim to any greater extent than a cottontail would trust a rattler, and now that he had an opportunity to consider the whole matter carefully he grew suspicious.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he had left Wichita alone on the ranch with only the Chinese cook, and that the Mexican had remained behind after they had left. The more he thought about it the

after they had left. The more he thought about it the more it worried him. He called Luke to his side.

"Kid," he said, "we left that Greaser there on the ranch. I don't guess we should have. You ride back an' look after things--an' don't let no grass grow under you while you're doin' it."

Luke, though disappointed at the thought of missing the excitement of a brush with the rustlers, reined in, wheeled his pony, and spurred back toward the ranch.

Wichita, coming from the office door after breakfast, saw four strange men ride into the ranch yard. She saw the Mexican youth who had brought word of the stolen cattle ride up to them, but she could not hear what they said, nor was it apparent that the Mexican was acquainted with the newcomers.

The four rode toward her presently, and as they neared her one of them removed his hat and asked if he could see the boss.

"I'm the boss," she replied.

"We're lookin' fer work," said the man; and as he spoke he dismounted and walked close to her, the others reining near as though to hear what her answer would be.

When the man was quite close he suddenly seized her, whirled her about and held her hands behind

her. At the same instant another of his fellows dismounted and stepped quickly to her. She struggled and fought to free herself, but she was helpless, and in another moment they had bound her wrists behind her.

As they were lifting her to one of the horses the Chinese ran from the cook house, calling to them to stop; but one of the men drew his six-shooter, and a single, menacing shot was enough to send the unarmed domestic back into his kitchen.

Cheetim, watching from the hills south of the ranch, saw all that transpired within the yard and was highly elated at the ease with which his nefarious plan was being carried out; but, alas, things were running far too smoothly.

What was that? He bent an attentive ear toward the west and recognized the cadenced pounding of the hoofs of a rapidly galloping horse--the little rift within the lute.

In the ranch yard the men had stopped to argue. Cheetim could see them but he could not understand the delay. He could only curse silently, dividing his attention between them and the road to the west, along which he could hear the approaching hoof beats.

"What's the use of packin' this girl double?!", the man who had been assigned to carry Wichita demanded. "We got plenty time an' they's a hoss standin' right down there in the c'ral."

"Dirty' said not to waste no time," demurred another.

The mention of Cheetim's descriptive nick-name was the first intimation Wichita had received of the origin and purpose of the plan to abduct her. Now she understood--it was all clear, horribly clear. For years the man had hounded and annoyed her. Twice before he had tried to take her forcibly. It looked now as though he might succeed. Who was there to succor her? Her father dead and every man in her employ gone, for how long she could not guess. There was no one. She wondered why it was that at that moment the figure of an almost naked, bronze savage filled her thoughts to the exclusion of every other source of salvation, and that while she nursed her hatred of him she involuntarily almost prayed that some miracle might bring him to her.

The man who had suggested a separate horse for Wichita insisted. "It wont take two minutes," he said, "an' if we are follered we kin make better time than if one of the hosses is packin' double."

"Hell, then," exclaimed one of his fellows, "instead of chawin' the fat let's git a hoss. Here, you!" he addressed Luis. "Fetch that hoss. Throw a saddle onto him an' a lead rope."

As Luis hastened to obey, Cheetim, seeing the further delay, became frantic. The horseman was

approaching rapidly along the road from the west, and the men in the ranch yard were wasting valuable time.

Out on the east range Shoz-Dijiji, having finished his breakfast, mounted Nejeunee and turned the pony's head toward the east, toward the distant mountains where the Gila rises, toward the ancient stamping grounds of the Be- don-ko-he.

He had no plans for the future. He wanted only to get away. He had seen Wichita Billings through his field glasses, and the sight of her had but aggravated the old hurt. Sad and lonely, the war chief rode toward the deserted camp grounds of his vanished people, where now were only brooding memories.

Luke Jensen galloped into sight of the ranch. Cheetim, lying behind a boulder at the top of a hill, covered him with his rifle sights and fired. Luke heard the bullet scream past his ear. Forewarned of some danger, he knew not what, he was prepared. He took two flying shots at the puff of smoke at the hill top where his unknown assailant lay, dug the rowels into his pony's sides, and raced for the ranch gate that he saw was standing open.

Cheetim fired once more; but again he missed, and then Luke was inside the yard. Coming toward him from the corrals he saw five men and Wichita, and he knew that something was radically wrong even before one of the men drew his gun and opened fire on him. Unable to return the man's fire without endangering Wichita. Jensen spurred in the direction

of an out-building that would give him shelter until he could get his rifle into action.

The five men spurred toward the gate, quiring Wichita's horse to equal speed. Three of them were firing at Luke; and just as he reached the out-building, just when he was within a second of safety, Wichita saw him lunge from his saddle, hit.

Then her captors raced through the gate and into the hills south of the ranch, whirling Wichita Billings away with them.

Eighteen--"THE APACHE DEVIL!"

OUT on the east range a horseman reined in his mount and listened as the rapid reports of rifle and pistol came faintly to his ears. There was something amiss at the Crazy B Ranch and Wichita was there, practically alone! Shoz- Dijji wheeled Nejeunee so suddeniy that the little pinto reared almost straight in air and then, at a touch of his master's heels and a word in his pointed ears, leaped off in the new direction at a swift run.

After sending Luke back to the ranch, Kreff's suspicions, now thoroughly aroused, continued to increase. He began to realize that if they were well founded one man might not be sufficient. He wished that he had sent more. Presently he wished that he

had gone himself; and soon he reined in, halting his companions.

"Fellers," he said, "the more I think about it the more I think that mebbly Cheetim's givin' us a dirty deal. He may have jest wanted to git us all away from the ranch. He's tried to get Chita twicet before, I'm a-goin' back an' I'm a-goin' to take Jake an' Sam with me. 'Kansas,' you take Charlie an' Matt an' ride after them rustlers.

Ef you kin pick up some fellers along the way, all right; ef you can't, do the best you kin alone. So long! Come on, fellers!"

* * *

As the five men entered the hills with Chita, Cheetim joined them. It was evident that he was much elated.

"Good work, boys!" he cried. "I reckon I didn't pull the woolover 'Smooth's' eyes nor nothin', eh?" He rode to Chita's side and grinned into her face. "Say, dearie," he exclaimed, "you don't hev to worry none. I've decided to do the right thing by you. We'll spend our honeymoon up in the hills 'til things blows over a bit an' then we'll mosey down to the Hog Ranch an' git married."

Wichita looked the man straight in the eyes for a moment and then turned away in disgust, but she did not speak. Luis Mariel, sober eyed, serious, looked on. He had not bargained on a part in any

such affair as this.

"Well, fellers," said Cheetim, "let's pull up a second an' licker. I reckon we've earned a drink."

They stopped their ponies and from five hip pockets came five pint bottles.

"Here's to the bride!" cried Cheetim, and they all laughed and drank, all except Luis, who had no bottle.

"Here, kid," said Cheetim, "hev a drink!" He proffered his flask to Luis.

"Thank you, Senor, I do not care to drink," replied the Mexican.

Deep into the hills they rode--five miles, ten miles. Wichita guessed where they were taking her--to an old two room shack that prospectors had built years before beside a little spring far back in the mountains. Apaches had gotten the prospectors, and the shack had stood deserted and tenantless ever since.

She felt quite hopeless, for there seemed not the slightest foundation for belief that there could be any help for her. Luke, if he were not badly hurt, or possibly Chung, the cook, could get word to their nearest neighbor; but he lived miles and miles away; and any help to be effective must reach her within a few hours, for after that it would be too late. And even if men were found to come after her it might

Even then, it would be a long time before they could locate Cheetim's hiding place.

Cheetim and his men had finished a flask apiece as they rode, but this was not the extent of their supply--each had another flask in his shirt--so that by the time they reached the shack they were more than content with themselves and all the world.

Once Luis had ridden close beside Wichita and spoken to her. "I am sorry, Senorita," he whispered. "I did not know what they were going to do. If I can help you, I will. Maybe, when they are drunk, I can help you get away."

"Thanks," replied the girl. As she spoke she turned and looked at the youth, noticing him more than casually for the first time, and realized that his face seemed familiar. "Where have I seen you before ?" she asked.

"I brought the pinto pony from El Teniente King to your rancho a year ago," replied Luis.

"Oh, yes, I remember you now. You brought Shoz-Dijji's pony up from Mexico."

"Shoz-Dijji's pony? Was that Shoz-Dijji's pony? You know Shoz-Dijji, Senorita?"

"I know him," said the girl; "do you?"

"Yes, very well. He saved my father's life; and twice when he could have killed me he did not."

Their conversation was interrupted by Cheetim who rode back to Wichita's side.

"Well, here we are, dearie," he said, "but we aint goin' to stay here long. Tomorrow morning we hit the trail fer a place I know where God himself couldn't find us."

The shack, before which the party had stopped and were dismounting, was a rough affair built of stone and mud and such timber as grew sparsely on the slopes of the canyon in the bottom of which it nestled. A tiny spring, now choked with dirt, made a mud hole a few yards to one side of the building. The men led their horses to the rear of the building where there were a few trees to which they could fasten them. Two of the men started to clean out the spring, and Cheetim escorted Wichita into the shack.

"We brung along some grub," he said. "It wont be much of a weddin' breakfast to brag on, but you wait 'til we git back to the Hog Ranch! We'll have a reg'lar spread then an' invite every son-of-a-gun in the territory. I'm goin' to treat you right, kid, even if you haven't been any too damn nice to me."

Wichita did not speak.

"Say, you can jest start right now cuttin' out thet high toned stuff with me," said Cheetim. "I'll be good to you ef you treat me right, but by God I aint a mind to stand much more from business. You kin

a-goin' to stand much more lunny business. You kin start now by givin' me a little kiss."

"Cheetim," said the girl, "listen to me. You're half drunk now, but maybe you've got sense enough left to understand what I am going to say to you. I'd a heap rather kiss a Gila monster than you. You may be able to kiss me because you're stronger than I am, and I guess even kissing a Gila monster wouldn't kill me, but I'm warning you that ef you ever do kiss me you'd better kill me quick, for I'm going to kill myself if anything happens to me --"

"Ef you want to be a damn fool that's your own look out," interrupted Cheetim, with a snarl, "but it wont keep me from doin' what I'm goin' to do. Ef you're fool enough to kill yourself afterward, you can."

"You didn't let me finish," said Wichita. "I'll kill myself, all right, but I'll kill you first."

The men were entering the room; and Cheetim stood, hesitating, knowing the girl meant what she said. He was a coward, and he had not had quite enough whiskey to bolster up his courage to the point of his desires.

"Oh, well," he said, "we won't quarrel this a-way on our honeymoon. You jest go in the other room there, dearie", and make yourself to home; an' we'll talk things over later. Git me a piece of rope, one o' you fellers. I ain't goin' to take no chances of my bride vamoosin'."

In the small back room of the shack they tied Wichita's wrists and ankles securely and left her seated on an old bench, the only furniture that the room boasted.

Out in the front room the men were making preparations to cook some of the food they had brought with them, but most of their time was devoted to drinking and boasting. Cheetim drank with a purpose. He wanted to arrive, as quickly as possible, at a state of synthetic courage that would permit him to ignore the moral supremacy of the girl in the back room. He knew that he was physically more powerful, and so he could not understand why he feared her. Cheetim had never heard of such a thing as an inferiority complex, and so he did not know that that was what he suffered from in an aggravated form whenever he faced the level gaze and caustic tongue of Wichita Billings.

The more Cheetim drank the louder and more boastful he became. Wichita could hear him narrating the revolting details of numerous crimes that he had committed.

"Yo shua ah some bad hombre, 'Dirty'," eulogized one of his party.

"Oh, I don't claim to be no bad man," replied Cheetim, modestly. "What I says is that I has brains, an' I use 'em. Look how I fooled 'Smooth'-- sent him off on a wild goose chase an' then swipes his girl while he's gone." They all laughed

his girl while he's gone. They all laughed uproariously.

"An' he better not get funny about it neither, even ef he don't like it. I kin use my brains fer other things besides gettin' me my women. Ol' man Billings larnt thet. He kicked me out oncet; an' I suppose he thought I was afraid of him, but I was jest waitin'. I waited a long time, but I got him."

"You got him? You did not. He was kilt by Injuns," contradicted one.

"Injuns, Hell!" ejaculated Cheetim. "Thar's where I used my brains. I killed Billings, but I was cute enough to scalp him. I --"

Drunk as he was, he realized that he had gone too far, had admitted too much. He looked wickedly about the room. "What I've told you is among friends," he said. "Ef any of you fellers ever feels like you'd like to join Billings all you got to do is blab what I jest told you. Savvy?" In the other room Wichita Billings, listening, heard every word that Cheetim spoke, and her soul was seared by shame and vain regret for the wrong she had done the friendless red man. She reproached herself for not listening to the counsel and the urging of her heart, for she knew--she had always known--that she had battled against her love for Shoz-Dijiji, had trampled it beneath her feet, that she might encourage her belief in his perfidy.

If she could only see him once more, if she could

only tell him that she knew and ask his forgiveness; but now it was too late.

She heard Cheetim speaking again. "You fellers finish rustlin' the grub," he said. "I'm goin' in an' visit my wife." This sally was applauded with much laughter. "An' I don't want to be disturbed," he concluded, "Savvy?"

* * *

A pinto stallion, racing like the wind, bore its rider toward the Crazy B ranch house following the shots that had attracted the attention of the Apache. Fences intervened, but though there were gates in them Shoz-Dijiji had no time to waste on gates. Straight for them he rode Nejeunee; and the pinto took them in his stride, soaring over them like a bird on the wing.

Chung, kneeling beside Luke in the ranch yard, voiced a startled cry as he saw a pinto stallion, bearing a feared Apache warrior, rise over the bars of the corral; but Chung did not flee. He stood his post, though scarce knowing what to do.

Luke's six-shooter was close beside his hand; but Chung was too surprised to think of it, and a second later the warrior had reined in beside them, his pony sliding upon its haunches for a dozen feet.

Throwing himself to the ground Shoz-Dijiji knelt beside Luke.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "Where is Chita?"

Luke looked up. "Oh, it's you, Shoz-Dijiji? Thank God for that. A bunch of skunks jest rid off into the south hills with her. I ain't hurted bad, but I can't ride. You go!"

"Sure I go!" As he arose Shoz-Dijiji stripped his clothing from him in an instant, and when he leaped to Nejeunee's back again he wore only moccasins, his G-string, and a head band.

"I get help" he cried, reassuringly, waving his rifle above his head, and an instant later he was racing for the gate.

Down the road from the west thundered Kreff and Jake and Sam just as Shoz-Dijiji swept through the gate. "There's the Siwash killed the Boss!" shouted Sam, who was in the lead, and the words were scarce out of his mouth before he had drawn his gun and opened fire on the Indian. Jake joined in the fusillade of shots; and Shoz-Dijiji, turning upon the back of his war pony, sent a half dozen bullets among them before he vanished into the hills. It was only the rapidity with which their mounts had been moving that prevented any casualties.

"Even a coyote will fight for his life," soliloquized the Apache Devil; but he did not feel like a coyote. Once more he was an Apache war chief riding naked upon the war trail against the hated pindah-

lickoyee; and just as he rode from the sight of the white men he could not restrain a single, exultant Apache war whoop.

Into the ranch yard thundered Kreff and his companions. They saw Luke trying to drag himself to his feet and stagger toward him.

"You lop-eared idiots!" he yelled. "Wot in Hell you shootin' at him fer? He's ridin' after the fellers that stole Chita."

"Stole Chita?" cried Kreff. "I was right! Cheetim!"

"I didn't see Cheetim," said Luke. "Whoever it was rid south into the hills. Git the hell out of here and git after them, an' ef you see that Apache leave him be--he's the best friend Wichita Billings's got."

"Chung, you git Luke into the bunk house an' take keer o' him 'til we gets back," Kreff called over his shoulder as the three spurred away again, this time following the trail taken by Shoz-Dijiji.

Plain before the trained eyes of Shoz-Dijiji lay the spoor of his quarry. Swiftly he rode. The errand, the speed of his fleet pony, his own nakedness stirred every savage instinct within him. He had never expected to live again; but this, O, Usen, was life! He dipped into the pouch at his side and drew out a little silver box that he had never expected to use again, and dipping into it with a fore finger he banded his face with the blue and white war paint of the Apache Devil. He could not lay the colors on

carefully at the speed Nejeunee was carrying him; but he wore them, as a ship of war runs up its battle flag as it goes into action.

* * *

As Cheetim left them and entered the rear room of the shack, the men in the front room nudged one another, chuckled, and took a drink. They were wiping their mouths with the backs of their hands when the outer door swung open, and a painted warrior stepped into the room.

Luis Mariel, who was standing in a corner, looked wide eyed at the newcomer. The other men reached for their six- shooters. "The Apache Devil!" cried Luis. Shoz-Dijji looked quickly at him. "Lie down!" he said to him in Spanish. Already he had commenced to shoot. He asked no questions. A man fell.

In the back room Cheetim and Wichita heard the dread name as Luis cried it aloud. Cheetim had just entered and closed the door behind him. He was approaching Wichita as Luis spoke the name of the scourge of three states. At the first shot Cheetim crossed the room at a bound and leaped from the window. A half dozen shots followed in quick succession. Four men lay dead in the outer room when Shoz- Dijji sprang to the door of the smaller room and swung it open, just in time to see Cheetim mounting a horse in the rear of the building. He recognized him instantly; then he turned toward the

girl.

"You hurt?" he demanded.

"No. Oh, Shoz-Dijji, thank God, you came!" The Apache called to Luis who came running to the door. "You," he said, pointing at the youth. "You know the Apache Devil. You know what he do to his enemies. You take this girl home. If she don't get home safe the Apache Devil settle with you. Sabe?"

He crossed the room to the window.

"Where are you going?" cried Wichita.

"To kill my last pindah-lickoyee," replied Shoz-Dijji, as he vaulted across the sill.

"Wait! Wait, Shoz-Dijji," the girl called after him; but Shoz-Dijji, war chief of the Be-don-ko-he, war chief of all the Apaches, had gone.

The little pinto stallion was scrambling up the steep canyon side as Luis Mariel cut the bonds that held Wichita Billings. The girl ran to the window.

Far above she saw war pony and warrior silhouetted against the darkening sky; and then Shoz-Dijji, last of the war chiefs, and Nejeunee, last of his wild friends, dropped below the crest and disappeared.

For several minutes the girl stood at the window gazing out into the gathering night; then she turned back into the room where Luis stood just within the

back into the room where Luis stood just within the doorway.

"The Apache Devil!" There was a shudder in Wichita's voice. Her eyes discovered Luis. "Oh," she said, as though she had forgotten his presence, "you are here?"

"Si, Senorita."

Again there was a long silence.

"The Apache Devil!" Wichita squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. "I do not care," she cried, defiantly.

"No, Senorita."

The girl looked fixedly at the Mexican youth for a moment as though his presence suggested a new thought that was formulating in her mind.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Luis, Senorita," he replied; "Luis Mariel."

"You said that you would help me, Luis, if you could. Do you remember?"

"I remember, Senorita."

"You can, Luis. Ride after the--the Apache Devil and tell him that I want him to come back."

"Gladly, Senorita."

"Go," she urged. "Hurry! Go now!"

Luis glanced behind him through the doorway into the other room and then back at Wichita.

"And leave you alone, at night, with all these dead men?" he exclaimed. "Santa Maria, Senorita! No, I cannot do that."

"I am not afraid, Luis," she said.

"S-s-st!" exclaimed Luis in a hoarse whisper. "What is that?"

They both listened.

"Someone is coming," said the girl. "Perhaps--perhaps it is he."

"There is more than one," said the youth. "I hear them talking now." He stepped quickly into the adjoining room and, stooping, took a six-shooter from the floor where it lay beside one of the dead men. Returning, he handed it to Wichita Billings. "Perhaps these are more of Senor Cheetin's friends," he suggested.

Together they stood waiting. The sounds of approaching horses ceased, and all was quiet. Wichita knew that whoever it was that came had reached a point where the shack was visible for the first time and were doubtless reconnoitering. Finally a voice broke the silence.-

"Chita!" it called aloud, ringing and echoing through the canyon.

"They are my friends," she said to Luis and ran through the outer room to the front doorway.

"Here, 'Smooth'!" she called. "It is all right. I am in the shack." Luis came and stood just behind her shoulder. It was not yet so dark but that features might be recognized at short distances. The two saw Kreff riding forward with Sam and Jake. Luis layed a hand on Wichita's arm. "They are Cheetin's friends," he said. "I know that first one well." He brushed by her, his revolver in his hand.

"No!" she cried, seizing his arm. "They are my own men. The first one is my foreman."

"Here's one of 'em, boys!" cried Kreff as he recognized Luis. "Here's the damned Greaser that brought me thet lyin' letter from 'Dirty.' Git out o' the way, Chita!" and leaping from his horse he ran forward.

"Stop!" cried Luis. His weapon was levelled at Kreff's stomach.

"This boy is all right!" exclaimed Wichita. "Put your guns away, all of you."

Slowly and with no great alacrity Kreff and Mariel returned their revolvers to their holsters. The other two men followed their example.

"What's happened here?" demanded Kreff. "Has anyone hurted you, Chita?"

"No, I'm all right," she replied. "I'll tell you all about it later. Get your horse, Luis, and take the message that I gave you. I'll be starting back for the ranch now. I'll be waiting there. Tell him that I shall be waiting there for him."

Kreff looked on, puzzled, as Wichita gave her instructions to Luis. He saw the youth mount and ride up the canyon side. Then he turned to the girl. "Where's he goin'?" he demanded. "Who you goin' to wait fer?"

"For Shoz-Dijji," she replied. "He did not kill Dad--it was Cheetim. Come along, now; I want to go home."

Nineteen--THE LAST WAR TRAIL

THROUGH the descending dark an Apache rode along the war trail, following the tracks of an enemy. He saw that the man ahead of him had been urging his mount at perilous speed down the rocky gorge, but the Apache did not hurry. He was a young man. Before him stretched a life time in which to bring the quarry, to bay. To follow recklessly would be to put himself at a disadvantage, to court disaster, defeat, death. Such

was not the way of an Apache. Doggedly, stealthily he would stalk the foe. If it took a life time, if he must follow, him across a world, what matter? In the end he would get him.

What was that, just ahead? In the trail, looming strange through the dusk, lay something that did not harmonize with the surroundings. At first he could not be quite certain what it was, but that it did not belong there was apparent to his trained senses.

Cautiously he approached. It was a horse lying in the trail. It was alive. It tried to rise as he came nearer, but it stumbled and fell again--and it groaned. He saw that it was saddled and bridled. He waited in concealment, listening. There was no other sound. Creeping nearer he saw that the horse could not rise because one of its legs was broken. It suffered. Shoz-Dijiji drew his butcher knife and cut its throat, putting it out of its misery. Cheetim had ridden too fast down this rocky gorge. On foot now, leading Nejeunee, Shoz-Dijiji followed the faint spoor of the dismounted man. He found the place where it turned up the precipitous side of the gorge where no horse could go, and here Shoz-Dijiji abandoned Nejeunee and followed on alone.

All night he followed. At dawn he knew that he was close upon the man he sought. Small particles of earth were still crumbling back into the depression of a footprint where Cheetim had stepped but a few moments before. Did Shoz-Dijiji hasten forward? No. On the contrary he followed

more cautiously, more slowly than before, for he gave the enemy credit for doing precisely what Shoz-Dijiji would have done had their positions been reversed--except that Shoz- Dijiji would have done it hours earlier. With infinite patience and care he crept up each slope and from the summit surveyed the terrain ahead before he proceeded. He knew that Cheetim was just ahead of him and that he would soon stop to rest, for the spoor told him that the man was almost exhausted. For a long time Shoz-Dijiji had guessed that the other knew he was being followed--before that he had only feared it. The end must be near.

Shoz-Dijiji crept slowly up a hillside. Just below the summit he stopped and took a red bandanna from his pouch. This he wrapped loosely about the stock of his rifle; and then, holding the piece by the muzzle, raised it slowly just above the hill top. Instantly there came the report of a rifle from beyond the hill; and Shoz-Dijiji, almost smiling, jerked the bandanna from sight.

Quickly he hastened to the right, keeping well below the line of vision of his adversary; and when he crept upward again it was behind a low bush, through the branches of which he could see without being seen.

A hundred yards away Cheetim lay behind a boulder upon another hill top. He was peering out from behind his shelter. Shoz-Dijiji took careful aim--not at the head of his enemy, which was in

plain sight, but at his shoulder. Shoz-Dijji had plans.

He pressed his trigger, and with the report Cheetim jumped convulsively and slumped forward. Slowly the Apache arose and keeping his man covered with his rifle walked toward him. He found the white man, just as he had expected, stunned by the shock of the wound but not dead.

Shoz-Dijji removed Cheetim's weapons from his reach and sat down and waited. With the patience that is an Apache's he waited. Presently Cheetim opened his eyes and looked into the painted face of the Apache Devil. He shuddered and closed them again, but Shoz-Dijji knew that the man was conscious.

The Indian spoke no word as he bent and seized Cheetim by the hair. Again the man opened his eyes. He saw the butcher knife in the hand of the Indian and screamed.

"Fer God's sake don't!" he cried. "I'll give you whiskey, money--anything you want ef you'll let me go."

Shoz-Dijji did not answer him. The keen blade sank into the flesh of the white man. Cheetim screamed and struggled. There was a quick, deft, circular motion of Shoz-Dijji's hand, and a bloody scalp-lock dangled from the fingers of the war chief. It was then that Cheetim fainted.

Shoz-Dijji sat down and waited. Five, ten, fifteen minutes he waited before Cheetim gave signs of returning consciousness. Still Shoz-Dijji waited. At last the white man was fully cognizant of his surroundings. He began to weep tears of self pity. Shoz-Dijji arose and bent over him.

"What are you going to do?" shrieked his victim, but the Apache did not answer him--in words. Instead he took some buckskin thongs from his pouch and making a running noose in one end of each he slipped one upon each wrist and ankle of the prostrate man. Then with his butcher knife he cut some stakes from stout shrubs that grew about them. Returning to Cheetim he turned the man upon his back and, stretching each arm and leg to its full extent, out spread, he staked the screaming coward to the ground.

Rising, he stood looking down at Cheetim for a long minute. Then, in silence, he turned and walked away, back along the trail he had come.

"Don't leave me!" screamed Cheetim. "Fer God's sake come back! Come back and kill me. Don't leave me here to die alone--like this!"

Shoz-Dijji, war chief of the Be-don-ko-he1 walked on in silence. Not once did he turn to look back in the direction of the first enemy he had ever tortured. Had he, he would have seen a vulture circling high against the blue on stationary wings above the last victim of the Apache Devil.

Where he had left Nejeunee Shoz-Dijji found Luis Mariel waiting for him.

"I knew that you would come back to your pony," said Luis.

"Why did you follow me?" demanded the Apache.

"The Senorita sent me after you."

"Why?"

"She wished me to say to you that you are to come back to her."

* * *

It was dark when Luis Mariel and Shoz-Dijji rode into the ranch yard of the Crazy B. Wichita Billings was standing beneath the cottonwood trees that grew in front of the ranch house as they rode up to her and dismounted.

"Luis," she said, "take his horse and yours and turn them into the east pasture; then go to the cook house. Chung will give you supper."

Shoz-Dijji said nothing. He watched Luis leading Nejeunee away. He waited. Wichita came close to him and laid her hands upon his breast as she had once before, long ago. Again came the terrible urge to take her in his arms, but this time he did not surrender to it.

"You sent for me?" he asked.

"To ask you to forgive me."

"For what?"

"For everything," she replied.

"There is nothing to forgive. You did not understand -- that is all."

"I understand now."

"I am glad," he said simply. "Is that all?"

"No. Kreff has left. I do not know why. He wouldn't even stop for supper. Just got his stuff and his check and rode away. I need another foreman. Will you take the job?"

"Do you want me?"

"Yes."

"Then I will take it. Now I go to the bunk house."

"Wait."

"Is there something more?"

"Yes. You know there is. Oh! Shoz-Dijji, are you a man or a stone?" she cried.

"I am an Apache, Senorita," he said. "Do not forget that. I am an Apache, and you are a white

girl."

"I do not care. I love you!" She came very close to him again.

"Are you very sure, Chita,?" he asked. "You must make no mistake this time."

"I am very sure, Shoz-Dijiji."

"We shall see," he said, "for we must both be sure. Shoz- Dijiji will be very happy if he finds that you can love him even though he is an Indian--then he will tell you something that you will be glad to know, but not now."

"There is something that you could tell me now that I should like to hear, Shoz-Dijiji," she whispered.

"What is that?"

"You have not told me that you love me."

The war chief took his mate into his arms and looked down into her tear filled eyes.

"Shoz-Dijiji no sabe," he said, smiling. Then he bent and covered her lips with his.

In the east pasture a filly nickered, and a pinto stallion arched his neck and answered her.

THE END

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The Bandit of Hell's Bend

Edgar Rice Burroughs

Chapter I--TOUGH LUCK

A HALF-dozen men sprawled comfortably in back-tilted chairs against the side of the Bar Y bunk-house at the home ranch. They were young men, lithe of limb, tanned of face and clear of eye. Their skins shone from recent ablutions and their slicked hair was still damp, for they had but just come from the evening meal, and meals at the home ranch required a toilet.

One of them was singing.

"In the shade of a tree we two sat, him an' me,
Where the Haegler Hills slope to the Raft While our
ponies browsed 'round, reins a-draggin' the ground;
Then he looks at me funny an' laft."

"Most anyone would," interrupted a listener.

"Shut up," admonished another, "I ain't only heered this three hundred an' sixty-five times in the las' year. Do you think I want to miss anything?"

Unabashed, the sweet singer continued.

"Do you see that there town?" he inquires, nintin'

down To some shacks sprawlin' 'round in the heat. I opined that I did an' he shifted his quid After drowndin' a tumble-bug neat. Then he looks at me square. 'There's a guy waitin' there Thet the sheep-men have hired to git me. Are you game to come down to thet jerk-water town Jest to see what in Hell you will see?'"

One of the group rose and stretched, yawning. He was a tall, dark man. Perhaps in his expression there was something a bit sinister. He seldom smiled and, when not in liquor, rarely spoke.

He was foreman-had been foreman for over a year, and, except for a couple of sprees, during which he had playfully and harmlessly shot up the adjoining town, he had been a good foreman, for he was a thorough horseman, knew the range, understood cattle, was a hard worker and knew how to get work out of others.

It had been six months since he had been drunk, though he had taken a drink now and then if one of the boys chanced to bring a flask back from town. His abstinence might have been accounted for by the fact that Elias Henders, his boss, had threatened to break him the next time he fell from grace.

"You see, Bull," the old man had said, "we're the biggest outfit in this part of the country an' it don't look good to see the foreman of the Bar Y shootin' up the town like some kid tenderfoot that's been slapped in the face with a bar-rag. You gotta quit it,

Bull; I ain't a-goin' to tell you again."

And Bull knew the old man wouldn't tell him again, so he had stayed good for six long months. Perhaps it was not entirely a desire to cling to the foreman's job that kept him in the straight and narrow path. Perhaps Diana Henders' opinion had had more weight with him than that of her father.

"I'm ashamed of you, Bull," she had said, and she refused to ride with him for more than a week. That had been bad enough, but as if to make it worse she had ridden several times with a new hand who had drifted in from the north a short time before and been taken on by Bull to fill a vacancy.

At first Bull had not liked the new man. "He's too damned pretty to be a puncher," one of the older hands had remarked, and it is possible that the newcomer's rather extreme good looks had antagonized them all a little at first, but he had proven a good man and so the others had come to accept Hal Colby in spite of his wealth of waving black hair, his perfect profile, gleaming teeth and laughing eyes.

"So I told him I'd go, fer I liked thet there bo, And I'd see thet the shootin' was fair; But says he: 'It is just to see who starts it fust Thet I wants anyone to be there.'" "I'm going to turn in," remarked Bull.

Hal Colby rose. "Same here," he said, and followed the foreman into the bunk-house. A moment later he turned where he stood beside his

moment later he turned where he stood beside his bunk and looked at Bull who was sitting on the edge of his, removing his spurs. The handsome lips were curved in a pleasant smile. "Lookee here, Bull!" he whispered, and as the other turned toward him he reached a hand beneath the bag of clothes that constituted his pillow and drew forth a pint flask. "Wet your whistle?" he inquired.

"Don't care if I do," replied the foreman, crossing the room to Colby's bunk.

Through the open window floated the drawling notes of Texas Pete's perennial rhapsody.

"When the judge says: 'Who drew his gun fust, him or you?' Then I wants a straight guy on my side, Fer thet poor puddin' head, why, he's already dead With a forty-five hole in his hide."

"Here's lookin' at you!" said Bull.

"Drink hearty," replied Colby.

"Taint so bad at that," remarked the foreman, wiping his lips on the cuff of his shirt and handing the flask back to the other.

"Not so worse for rot-gut," agreed Colby. "Have another!"

The foreman shook his head.

"T won't hurt you any," Colby assured him. "It's pretty good stuff"

Sang Texas Pete:

"And thet wasn't jest jaw-when it come to a draw
This here guy was like lightnin' turned loose. Then
we rolls us a smoke an' not neither one spoke 'Til
he said: 'Climb aboard your cayuse.' Then we
reined down the hill each a-puffin' his pill To the
town 'neath its shimmer o' heat An' heads up to the
shack that's a-leanin' its back 'Gainst the side o' The
Cowboys' Retreat."

Bull took another drink-a longer one this time, and,
rolling a cigarette, sat down on the edge of Colby's
bunk and commenced to talk-whiskey always
broke the bonds of his taciturnity. His voice was
low and not unpleasant.

He spoke of the day's work and the plans for
tomorrow and Hal Colby encouraged him. Perhaps
he liked him; perhaps, like others, he felt that it paid
to be on friendly terms with the foreman.

While from outside:

"It is Slewfoot's Good Luck where they hand you
out chuck Thet is mostly sow-belly an' beans. Says
he: 'Bub, let's us feed-I'm a-feelin' the need O' more
substance than air in my jeans.' So of Slewfoot was
there, all red freckles an' hair, An' we lined our
insides with his grub. Says Bill, then: 'Show your
gait-let's be pullin' our freight, Fer I'm rarin' to go,'
says he, 'Bub.'"

Inside the bunk-house Bull rose to his feet. "That's damn good stuff, Hal," he said. The two had emptied the flask.

"Wait a minute," said the other, "I got another flask," and reached again beneath his bag.

"No," demurred the foreman, "I guess I got enough."

"Oh, hell, you ain't had none yet," insisted Colby.

The song of Texas Pete suffered many interruptions due to various arguments in which he felt compelled to take sides, but whenever there was a lull in the conversation he resumed his efforts to which no one paid any attention further than as they elicited an occasional word of banter.

The sweet singer never stopped except at the end of a stanza, and no matter how long the interruption, even though days might elapse, he always began again with the succeeding stanza, without the slightest hesitation or repetition. And so now, as Bull and Colby drank, he sang on.

"Now we'll sashay next door to thet hard-Ticker store Where his nibs is most likely to be An' then you goes in first an' starts drowdin' your thirst; But a-keepin' your eyes peeled fer me."

Bull, the foreman, rose to his feet. He stood as steady as a rock, but Colby saw that he was drunk.

After six months' of almost total abstinence he had just consumed considerably more than a pint of cheap and fiery whiskey in less than a half hour.

"Goin' to bed?" asked Colby.

"Bed, hell," replied the other. "I'm goin' to town-it's my night to howl. Comin'?"

"No," said Colby. "I think I'll turn in. Have a good time."

"I sure will." The foreman walked to his bunk and strapped his guns about his hips, resumed the single spur he had removed, tied a fresh black silk handkerchief about his neck, clapped his sombrero over his shock of straight black hair and strode out of the bunk-house.

"Fer I wants you to see thet it's him draws on me So the jedge he cain't make me the goat.' So I heads fer that dump an' a queer little lump Starts a-wrigglin' aroun' in my throat."

"Say, where in hell's Bull goin' this time o' night?" Pete interrupted himself.

"He's headin' fer the horse c'rel," stated another.

"Acts like he was full," said a third. "Didje hear him hummin' a tune as he went out? That's always a sign with him. The stuff sort o' addles up his brains, like Pete's always is, an' makes him sing."

"Fer I wants you to know that I likes that there ho

Pet I wants you to know that I likes that there do
An' I'd seen more than one good one kilt, Fer you
cain't never tell, leastways this side o' Hell, When
there's shootin' whose blood will be spilt."

"There he goes now," said one of the men as the
figure of a rider shown dimly in the starlight loped
easily away toward the south, "an' he's goin' toward
town."

"I wonder," said Texas Pete, "if he knows the old
man is in town tonight."

"Jest inside o' the door with one foot on the floor
An' the other hist up on the rail Stands a big, raw-
boned guy with the orn'riest eye Thet I ever seen
outen a jail."

"By gollies, I'm goin' after Bull. I doan b'lieve he-all
knows that the of man's in town," and leaping to his
feet he walked off toward the horse corral, still
singing:

"An' beside him a girl, thet sure looked like a pearl
Thet the Bible guy cast before swine, Was a-
pleadin' with him, her eyes teary an' dim, As I high-
sign the bar-keep fer mine."

He caught up one of the loose horses in the corral,
rammed a great, silver-mounted spade bit between
its jaws, threw a heavy, carved saddle upon the
animal's back, stepped one foot into a trailing,
tapaderaed stirrup and was off in a swirl of dust.
Texas Pete never rode other than in a swirl of dust,

unless it happened to be raining, then he rode in a shower of mud.

His speed tonight was, therefore, not necessarily an indication of haste. He would have ridden at the same pace to either a funeral or a wedding, or home from either.

But any who knew Texas Pete could have guessed that he was in considerate haste, for he rode without his woolly, sheepskin chaps---one of the prides of his existence. If he had been in too much of a hurry to don them he must have been in a great hurry, indeed.

Texas Pete might be without a job, with not more than two-bits between himself and starvation, but he was never without a fine pair of sheepskin chaps, a silver-encrusted bit, a heavy bridle garnished with the same precious metal, an ornate saddle of hand carved leather and silver conchas, a Stetson, two good six-guns with their belt and holsters and a vivid silk neckerchief.

Possibly his pony cost no more than ten dollars, his boots were worn and his trousers blue denim overalls, greasy and frayed, yet Texas Pete otherwise was a thing of beauty and a joy forever. The rowels of his silver-inlaid Mexican spurs dragged the ground when he walked and the dumb-bells depending from their hubs tinkled merrily a gay accompaniment to his boyish heart beating beneath ragged underclothing.

Texas Pete galloped along the dusty road toward the small cattle-town that served the simple needs of that frontier community with its general store, its restaurant, its Chinese laundry, blacksmith shop, hotel, newspaper office and five saloons, and as he galloped he sang:

"Then the door swings agin an' my pal he steps in
An' the light in his eye it was bad, An' the raw-
boned guy wheels an' the girl there she squeals: 'O,
fer gawd's sake don't shoot, Bill, it's dad!'"

A mile ahead of Pete another pony tore through the dust toward town-a blazed-face chestnut with two white hind feet--Blazes, the pride of the foreman's heart.

In the deep saddle, centaurlike, sat the horseman.

Hendersville tinkled softly in the quiet of early evening. Later, gaining momentum, it would speed up a bit under his own power. At present it reposed in the partial lethargy of digestive functionings--it was barely first drink time after supper. Its tinkling was the tinkling of spurs, chips and only very occasional glassware.

Suddenly its repose was shattered by a wild whoop from without, the clatter of swift hoofs and the rapid crack, crack, crack of a six-gun. Gum Smith, sheriff, rose from behind the faro layout and cocked an attentive ear.

Over his head the dust of the great frontier

Gum guided the destinies of the most lucrative thirst emporium in Hendersville. Being sheriff flattered his vanity and attracted business, but it had its drawbacks; the noises from without sounded like one of them and Gum was pained.

It was at times such as this that he almost wished that someone else was sheriff, but a quick glance at the shiny badge pinned to the left hand pocket of his vest reassured him quickly on that point and he glanced swiftly about the room at its other occupants and sighed in relief-there were at least a dozen husky young punchers there.

Across the street, in the office of the Hendersville Tribune, Elias Henders sat visiting with Ye Editor. As the shouting and the shots broke the quiet of the evening the two men looked up and outward toward the street.

"Boys will be boys," remarked the editor.

A bullet crashed through the glass at the top of the window. With a single movement the editor extinguished the lamp that burned on the desk before them, and both men, with a celerity that spoke habit, crouched quickly behind that piece of furniture.

"Sometimes they're damn careless, though," replied Elias Henders.

Down the road Texas Pete galloped and sang:

"For the thing she had saw was Bill reach for to draw When the guy she called dad drawed on Bill. In the door was my pal with his eyes on the gal An' his hand on his gun-standin' still."

From the distance ahead came, thinly, the sound of shots.

"By gollies!" exclaimed Texas Pete, "the darned son-of-a-gun !"

The men lolling about the barroom of Gum's Place-Liquors and Cigars-looked up at the sound of the shots and grinned. An instant later a horse's unshod hoofs pounded on the rough boards of the covered "porch" in front of Gum's Place, the swinging doors burst in and Blazes was brought to his haunches in the center of the floor with a wild whoop from his rider, who waved a smoking gun above his head.

Bull, the Bar Y foreman, let his gaze run quickly about the room. When his steel-grey eyes alighted upon the sheriff they remained there. Gum Smith appeared to wilt behind the faro table. He shook a wavering finger at the Bar Y foreman.

"Yo' all's undah arrest," he piped in a high, thin voice, and turning toward the men seated about the neighboring tables he pointed first at one and then at another. "Ah depatize yo! Ah depatize yo! Ah depatize yo!" he announced to each as he covered them in turn with his swiftly moving index finger. "Seize him men!" No one moved. Gum Smith

waxed excited. "Seize him, yo'-all! Ah'm sheriff o' this yere county. Ef Ah depatize yo'-all yo'-all's got to be depatized."

"My mother was a wild cat, My father was a bear," announced Bull,

"I picks my teeth with barb-wire. With cactus combs my hair." and I craves drink-pronto!"

"Yo'-all's undah arrest! Seize him, men!" shrilled Gum

Bull fired into the floor at the foot of the faro table and Gum Smith disappeared behind it. The men all laughed. Bull turned his attention toward the barkeep and fired into the back bar. The bar-keep grinned.

"Be keerful, Bull," he admonished, "I got a bad heart. My doctor tells me as how I should avoid excitement."

The front doors swung in again and Bull wheeled with ready six-gun to cover the newcomer, but at sight of the man who entered the room the muzzle of his gun dropped and he was sobered in the instant.

"Oh!" said Elias Henders, "so it's you agin, Bull, eh?"

The two men stood looking at one another in silence for a moment. What was passing in their

minds no one might have guessed. It was the older man who spoke again first.

"I reckon I'll not be needin' you any more, Bull," he said, and then, after a moment's- reflection, "unless you want a job as a hand-after you sober up."

He turned and left the building and as he stepped down into the dust of the road Texas Pete swung from his pony and brushed past him.

Inside, Bull sat his horse at one side of the large room, near the bar. Behind him Gum Smith was slowly emerging from the concealment of the faro table. When he saw the man he feared sitting with his back toward him, a crafty look came into the eyes of the sheriff. He glanced quickly about the room. The men were all looking at Bull. No one seemed to be noticing Gum.

He drew his gun and levelled it at the back of the ex-foreman of the Bar Y. Instantly there was a flash from the doorway, the crack of a shot, and the sheriff's gun dropped from his hand. All eyes turned in the direction of the entrance. There stood Texas Pete, his shooting iron smoking in his hand.

"You damn pole-cat!" he exclaimed, his eyes on Gum. "Come on, Bull; this ain't no place for quiet young fellers like us."

Bull wheeled Blazes and rode slowly through the doorway, with never a glance toward the sheriff; nor could he better have shown his utter contempt

not could he better have shown his utter contempt for the man. There had always been bad blood between them. Smith had been elected by the lawless element of the community and at the time of the campaign Bull had worked diligently for the opposing candidate who had been backed by the better element, consisting largely of the cattle owners, headed by Elias Henders.

What Bull's position would have been had he not been foreman for Henders at the time was rather an open question among the voters of Hendersville, but the fact remained that he had been foreman and that he had worked to such good purpose for the candidate of the reform element that he had not only almost succeeded in electing him, but had so exposed the rottenness of the gang back of Smith's candidacy that their power was generally considered to be on the wane.

"It'll be Bull for sheriff next election," was considered a safe prophecy and even a foregone conclusion, by some.

Gum Smith picked up his gun and examined it. Texas Pete's shot had struck the barrel just in front of the cylinder. The man looked angrily around at the other occupants of the room.

"Ah wants yo'-all to remember that Ah'm sheriff here," he cried, "an' when Ah depatizes yo'-all it's plum legal, an' yo'all gotta do what Ah tell yo' to."

"Oh, shut up, Gum," admonished one of the men.

Outside, Texas Pete had mounted his pony and was moving along slowly stirrup to stirrup with Bull, who was now apparently as sober as though he had never had a drink in his life.

"It's a good thing fer us he didn't have his gang there tonight," remarked Pete.

Bull shrugged, but said nothing in reply. Texas Pete resigned himself to song.

"Then thet damned raw-boned guy with the ornery eye Up an' shoots my pal dead in the door; But I'm here to opine with this bazoo o' mine That he won't shoot no hombres no more."

"What was you doin' up to town, Texas'?" inquired Bull.

"Oh, I jest thought as how I'd ride up an' see what was doin'-maybe you didn't know the old man was there tonight-reckon I was a bit late, eh?"

"Yes. Thanks, just the same-I won't ferget it."

"Tough luck."

"How'd you know the old man was goin' to be in town tonight?"

"Why, I reckon as how everybody exceptin' you knew it, Bull."

"Did Calhoun know it?"

DID COLBY KNOW IT?

"Why, I reckon as how he must of."

They rode on for some time in silence, which Texas finally broke.

"Jest a moment, an' where they'd been five o' us there, We hed suddenly dwindled to three. The bar-keep, he was one-the darned son-of-a-gun- An' the others, a orphan an' me."

When Bull and Texas entered the bunk-house most of the men were asleep, but Hal Colby rolled over on his bunk and smiled at Bull as the latter lighted a lamp.

"Have a good time, Bull?" he inquired.

"The old man was there," said Bull, "an' I ain't foreman no more."

"Touch luck," sympathized Colby.

Chapter II--THE HOLDUP

AFTER breakfast the following morning the men were saddling-up listlessly for the day's work. There was no foreman now and they were hanging about waiting for the boss. Bull sat on the top rail of the corral, idle. He was out of a job. His fellows paid little or no attention to him, but whether from motives of consideration for his feelings, or because they were not interested in him or his troubles a casual observer could not have deduced from their manner.

Unquestionably he had friends among them, but he was a taciturn man and, like all such, did not make friends quickly. Undemonstrative himself, he aroused no show of demonstration in others. His straight black hair, and rather high cheek bones, coupled with a tanned skin, gave him something the appearance of an Indian, a similarity that was further heightened by his natural reserve, while a long, red scar across his jaw accentuated a suggestion of grimness that his countenance possessed in repose.

Texas Pete, saddling his pony directly below him in the corral, was starting the day with a new song.

"I stood at the bar, at The Spread Eagle Bar, A-drinkin' a drink whilst I smoked a seegar

"Quittin', Bull?" he inquired, looking up at the ex-

foreman.

"Reckon so," came the reply.

"When in walks a gent that I ain't never see An' he lets out a beller an' then says, says he:"

Texas Pete swung easily into his saddle.

"Reckon as how I'll be pullin' my freight, too," he announced. "I been aimin' to do that for quite a spell. Where'll we head fer?"

Bull's eyes wandered to the front of the ranch house, and as they did so they beheld "the old man" emerging from the office. Behind him came his daughter Diana and Hal Colby. The latter were laughing and talking gaily. Bull could not but notice how close the man leaned toward the girl's face. What an easy way Colby had with people-especially women.

"Well," demanded Texas Pete, "if you're comin' why don't you saddle up?"

"Reckon I've changed my mind."

Texas Pete glanced toward the ranch house, following the direction of the other's eyes, and shrugged his shoulders.

"O, well," he said, "this ain't a bad place. Reckon as how I'll stay on, too, fer a spell."

Elias Henders and Hal Colby were walking slowly in the direction of the horse corral. The girl had turned and reentered the house. The two men entered the corral and as they did so Bull descended from the fence and approached Henders.

"You don't happen to need no hands, do you?" he asked the older man.

"I can use you, Bull," replied Henders with a faint smile. "Thirty-five a month and found."

The former foreman nodded in acceptance of the terms and, walking toward the bunch of horses huddled at one side of the corral, whistled. Instantly Blazes' head came up above those of the other animals. With up-pricked ears he regarded his owner for a moment, and then, shouldering his way through the bunch, he walked directly to him.

Elias Henders stopped in the center of the corral and attracted the attention of the men. "Colby here," he announced, "is the new foreman."

That was all. There was a moment's embarrassed silence and then the men resumed their preparations for the work of the day, or, if they were ready, lolled in their saddles rolling cigarettes. Colby went among them assigning the various duties for the day-pretty much routine work with which all were familiar.

"And you, Bull," he said when he reached the ex-

foreman, "I wish you'd ride up to the head of Cottonwood Canyon and see if you can see anything of that bunch of Crazy J cows-I ain't seen nothin' of 'em for a week or more."

It was the longest, hardest assignment of the day, but if Bull was dissatisfied with it he gave no indication. As a matter of fact he probably was content, for he was a hard rider and he liked to be off alone. A trait that had always been a matter for comment and some conjecture.

More than one had asked himself or a neighbor what Bull found to do that took him off by himself so often. There are those who cannot conceive that a man can find pleasure in his own company, or in that of a good horse and the open.

The mouth of Cottonwood Canyon lay a good twenty miles from the ranch and the head of it five miles of rough going farther. It was ten o'clock when Bull suddenly drew rein beside the lone cottonwood that marked the entrance to the canyon and gave it its name.

He sat motionless, listening intently. Faintly, from far up the canyon, came the staccato of rifle shots. How far it was difficult to judge, for the walls of a winding canyon quickly absorb sound. Once convinced-of the direction of their origin, however, the man urged his pony into a gallop, turning his head up the canyon.

As the last of the cow hands leaped away from the

AS the last of the cow hands loped away from the ranch upon the business of the day Elias Henders turned back toward the office, while Hal Colby caught up two ponies which he saddled and bridled, humming meanwhile a gay little tune. Mounting one, he rode toward the ranch house, leading the other, just as Diana Henders emerged from the interior, making it apparent for whom the led horse was intended.

Taking the reins from Colby, the girl swung into the saddle like a man, and she sat her horse like a man, too, and yet, though she could ride with the best of them, and shoot with the best of them, there was nothing coarse or common about her. Some of the older hands had known her since childhood, yet even that fact, coupled with the proverbial freedom of the eighties in Arizona, never permitted them the same freedom with Diana Henders that most of the few girls in that wild country either overlooked or accepted as a matter of course.

Men did not curse in Diana's presence, nor did they throw an arm across her slim shoulders, or slap her upon the back in good fellowship, and yet they all worshipped her, and most of them had been violently in love with her. Something within her, inherently fine and noble, kept them at a distance, or rather in their places, for only those men who were hopelessly bashful ever remained at a distance from Diana where there was the slightest chance to be near her.

The men often spoke of her as a thoroughbred

The men often spoke of her as a thoroughbred, sensing, perhaps, the fine breeding that made her what she was. Elias Henders was one of the Henders of Kentucky, and, like all the males of his line for generations, held a degree from Oxford, which he had entered after graduation from the beloved alma mater of his native state, for the very excellent reason that old Sir John Henders, who had established the American branch of the family, had been an Oxford man and had seen his son and his grandson follow his footsteps.

Twenty-five years before Elias Henders had come west with John Manill, a class-mate and neighbor of Kentucky, and the two young men had entered the cattle business. Their combined capital managed to keep them from the embarrassments and annoyances of a sheriff's sale for some three years, but what with raiding Apaches, poor rail facilities and a distant market, coupled with inexperience, they were at last upon the very brink of bankruptcy when Henders discovered gold on their property. Two years later they were rich men.

Henders returned to Kentucky and married Manill's sister, and shortly afterwards moved to New York, as it was decided that the best interests of the partnership required an eastern representative. Manill remained in Arizona.

Diana Henders was born in New York City, and when she was about five years old her mother contracted tuberculosis of the lungs. Physicians advising a dry climate, Henders and Manill changed

places, Henders taking his family to Arizona and Manill removing to New York with his wife and little daughter. He had married beneath him and unhappily with the result that being both a proud and rather reserved man he had confided nothing to his sister, the wife of his partner and best friend.

When Diana was fifteen her mother had died, and the girl, refusing to leave her father, had abandoned the idea of finishing her education in an eastern college, and Elias Henders, loath to give her up, had acquiesced in her decision. Qualified by education as he was to instruct her, Diana's training had been carried on under the tutorage of her father, so that at nineteen, though essentially a frontier girl unversed in many of the finer artificialities of social usage, she was yet a young woman of culture and refinement. Her music, which was the delight of her father, she owed to the careful training of her mother as well as to the possession of a grand piano that had come over Raton Pass behind an ox team in the seventies.

Her father, her books, her music and her horses constituted the life of this young girl; her social companions the young vaqueros who rode for her father, and without at least one of whom she was not permitted to ride abroad, since the Apaches were still a menace in the Arizona of that day.

And so it was that this morning she rode out with the new foreman. They walked their horses in silence for a few minutes, the man's stirrup just

behind that of the girl, where he might let his eyes rest upon her profile without detection. The heavy-lashed eye, the short, straight nose, the patrician mouth and chin held the adoring gaze of the young foreman in mute worship; but it was he who, at length, broke the silence.

"You ain't congratulated me yet, Di, " he said, "or maybe you didn't know?"

"Yes, I knew," she replied, "and I do congratulate you; but I cannot forget that your fortune means another man's sorrow."

"It's his own fault. A man that can't keep sober can't be trusted with a job like this."

"He was a good foreman."

"Maybe so-I ain't sayin' nothin' about a man that's down. It seems to me you set a lot of store by him, though; and what do you know about him? You can't be too careful, Di. There's lots of bad 'uns in these parts and when a feller never talks none, like him, it's probably because he's got something on his mind he don't want to talk about."

"I thought he was your friend," said the girl.

Colby flushed. "He is my friend. I set a lot of store by Bull; but it's you I'm thinkin' of-not him or me. I wouldn't want nothin' to happen that you'd have to be sorry about.' . '

"I don't understand you, Hal."

He flicked the leg of his chaps with the lash of his quirt. "Oh, pshaw, Di," he parried, "I don't want to say nothin' about a friend. I only want to put you on your guard, that's all. You know there ain't nothin' I wouldn't do for you-no, not even if it cost me all the friends I got."

He passed his reins to his right hand and reaching across laid his left across one of hers, which she quickly withdrew.

"Please don't," she begged.

"I love you, Di," he blurted suddenly.

The girl laughed gaily, though not in derision. "All the men think they do. It's because I'm the only girl within miles and miles."

"You're the only girl in the world-for me."

She turned and looked at him quizzically. He was very handsome. That and his boyish, laughing manner had attracted her to him from the first. There had seemed a frankness and openness about him that appealed to her, and of all the men she knew, only excepting her father, he alone possessed anything approximating poise and selfconfidence in his intercourse with women. The others were either shy and blundering, or loud and coarse, or taciturn sticks like Bull, who seemed to be the only man on the ranch who was not desperately in love with her.

"We'll talk about something else," she announced.

"Isn't there any hope for me?" he asked.

"Why yes," she assured him. "I hope you will keep on loving me. I love to have people love me."

"But I don't want to do all the loving," he insisted.

"Don't worry-you're not. Even the cook is writing poems about me. Of all the foolish men I ever heard of Dad has certainly succeeded in corralling the prize bunch."

"I don't care a hang about that red-headed old fool of a cook," he snapped. "What I want is for you to love me."

"Oh, well, that's a horse of another color. Now we will have to change the subject."

"Please, Di, I'm in earnest," he pleaded; "won't you give me a little to hope for?"

"You never can tell about a girl, Hal," she said.

Her voice was tender and her eyes suddenly soft, and that was as near a promise as he could get.

As Bull urged Blazes up the rough trail of Cottonwood Canyon the continued crack of rifles kept the man apprised of the direction of the origin of the sounds and approximately of their ever increasing distance ahead. Beneath the heavy rain

lessening distance ahead. Presently he drew rein and, pulling his rifle from its boot, dismounted, dropping the reins upon the ground.

"Stand!" he whispered to Blazes and crept forward stealthily.

The shooting was close ahead now just around the brush-covered shoulder of a rocky hill. The detonations were less frequent. Bull guessed that by now both hunters and hunted were under cover and thus able to take only occasional pot shots at one another's refuse.

To come upon them directly up the trail in the bottom of the canyon would have been to expose himself to the fire of one side, and possibly of both, for in this untamed country it was easily conceivable that both sides of the controversy might represent interests inimical to those of his employer. With this idea in mind the ex-foreman of the Bar Y Ranch clambered cautiously up the steep side of the hill that hid from his view that part of the canyon lying just beyond.

From the varying qualities of the detonations the man had deduced that five and possibly six rifles were participating in the affair. How they were divided he could not even guess. He would have a look over the crest of the hog-back and if the affair was none of his business he would let the participants fight it out by themselves. Bull, sober, was not a man to seek trouble.

Climbing as noiselessly as possible and keeping the muzzle of his rifle ahead of him he came presently to the crest of the narrow ridge where he pushed his way cautiously through the brush toward the opposite side, passing around an occasional huge outcropping of rock that barred his progress. Presently the brush grew thinner. He could see the opposite wall of the canyon.

A sharp report sounded close below him, just over the brow of the ridge. In front of him a huge outcropping reared its weather-worn surface twenty feet above the brush.

Toward this he crept until he lay concealed behind it. Then, warily, he peered around the up-canyon edge discovering that his hiding place rested upon the very edge of a steep declivity that dropped perpendicularly into the bottom of the canyon. Almost below him five Apaches were hiding among the rocks and boulders that filled the bottom of the canyon. Upon the opposite side a single man lay sprawled upon his belly behind another.

Bull could not see his face, hidden as it was beneath a huge sombrero, but he saw that he was garbed after the fashion of a vaquero—he might be either an American or a Mexican. That made no difference now, however, for there were five against him, and the five were Indians. Bull watched for a moment. He saw that the Indians were doing all the firing, and he wondered if the man lying across the canyon was already dead. He did not move.

Cautiously one of the Indians crept from cover as the other four fired rapidly at their victim's position, then another followed him and the three remaining continued firing, covering the advance of their fellows.

Bull smiled, that grim, saturnine smile of his. There were some red-skins in the vicinity that were dike for the surprise of their lives.

The two were working their way across the cangora, taking advantage of every particle of cover. They were quite close to the hiding place of the prone ran now-in another moment the three upon Bull's side of the canyon would cease firing and the two would rush their unconscious quarry and finish him.

Bull raised his rifle to his shoulder. There followed two reports, so close together that it was almost inconceivable that they had come from the same weapon, and the two, who had already risen for the final attack, crumpled among the rocks beneath the blazing sun.

Instantly apprehending their danger, the other three Apaches leaped to their feet and scurried up the canyon, searching new cover as they ran; but it was difficult to find cover from a rifle holding the commanding position that Bull's held.

It spoke again, and the foremost Indian threw his hands above his head, spun completely around and

lunged forward upon his face. The other two dropped behind large boulders.

Bull glanced across the canyon. He saw that the man had raised his head and was attempting to look around the edge of his cover, having evidently become aware that a new voice had entered the grim chorus of the rifles.

"Hit?" shouted Bull.

The man looked in the direction of the voice. "No," he replied.

"Then why in hell don't you shoot? There's only two of them left-they're up canyon on this side."

"Out of ammunition," replied the other.

"Well, you were in a hell of a fix," mused Bull as he watched the concealment of the two Indians.

"Any more of 'em than this bunch?" he called across to the man.

"No."

For a long time there was silence-the quiet and peace that had lain upon this age-old canyon since the Creation-and that would lie upon it forever except as man, the disturber, came occasionally to shatter it.

"I can't lie here all day," mused Bull. He crawled

forward and looked over the edge of the cliff. There was a sheer drop of forty feet. He shook his head. There was a sharp report and a bullet tore up the dirt beneath him. It was followed instantly by another report from across the canyon.

Bull kept his eyes on the cover of the Indians. Not a sign of them showed. One of them had caught him napping-that was all-and ducked back out of sight after firing, but how was the man across the canyon firing without ammunition?

"I got one then," came the man's voice, as though in answer, "but you better lie low-he come near getting you."

"Thought you didn't have no ammunition," Bull called across.

"I crawled out and got the rifle of one of these you potted."

Bull had worked his way back to his cover and to the brush behind it and now he started up along the ridge in an attempt to get behind the remaining Indian.

A minute or two later he crawled again to the edge of the ridge and there below him and in plain sight the last of the red-skins crouched behind a great boulder. Bull fired and missed, and then the Apache was up and gone, racing for his pony tethered further up the canyon. The white man shrugged, rose to his feet and sought an easy way down into

the bed of the canyon.

The other man had seen his action, which betokened that the fight was over,-and as Bull reached the bottom of the cliff he was walking forward to meet him. A peculiar light entered the eyes of each other as they came face to face.

"Ah!" exclaimed the one, "it is Senor Bull." He spoke now in Spanish.

"Gregorio!" said Bull. "How'd they git you in this fix?"

"I camped just above here last night," replied the other, "and this morning I walked down with my rifle on the chance of getting an antelope for breakfast. They come on me from above and there you are. They been shootin' at me since early this morning." He spoke English with scarce the slightest accent. "You have saved my life, Senor Bull, and Gregorio will not forget that."

"You haven't happened to see a bunch of Crazy J cows hereabouts, have you?" inquired Bull, ignoring the other's expression of gratitude.

"No, Senor, I have not," replied Gregorio.

"Well, I'll go get my horse and have a look up toward the head of the canyon, anyway," and Bull turned and walked down to get Blazes.

Fifteen minutes later, riding up again, he passed

Gregorio coming down, the latter having found his pony and his belongings intact at his camp.

"A Dios, Senor," called Gregorio in passing.

"So long," returned the American.

At the head of the canyon, where it narrowed to the proportions of a gorge, Bull examined the ground carefully and saw that no cattle had passed that way in many days;-then he turned back and rode down the canyon.

Meanwhile, entering Cottonwood from below, Jim Weller, looking for lost horses, passed Gregorio coming out and, recognizing him, loosened his gun in its holster and kept one eye on the Mexican until he had passed out of sight around the shoulder of the hill that flanked the east side of the entrance to the canyon, for Gregorio bore an unsavory reputation in that part of the country. He was an outlaw with a price upon his head.

"Howsumever," mused Weller, "I ain't lost no outlaws-it's hosses I'm lookin' for," and he rode on with a sigh of relief that there was a solid hill between him and Gregorio's deadly aim. Ten minutes later he met Bull coming down from the head of Cottonwood. The two men drew rein with a nod.

Weller asked about horses, learning from Bull that there was no stock above them in Cottonwood, but he did not mention having met Gregorio. It was

he did not mention having met Gregorio. It was obvious to him that the two men could not have been in Cottonwood together without having met and if Bull did not want to mention it it was evident that he had some good reason for not doing so. It was not the custom of the country to pry into the affairs of others. Bull did not mention Gregorio nor did he speak of their brush with the Apaches; but that was because he was an uncommunicative man.

"I think I'll have a look up Sinkhole Canyon for them hosses," remarked Weller. Sinkhole was the next canyon west.

"Keep your eyes peeled for them Crazy J cows," said Bull, "and I'll ride up Belter's and if I see your horses I'll run 'em down onto the flat."

They separated at the mouth of Cottonwood, Weller riding toward the west, while Bull made his way eastwardly toward Belter's Canyon which lay in the direction of the home ranch.

Three hours later the semiweekly stage, careening down the North Pass trail, drew up in a cloud of dust at the junction of the Hender's Mine road at a signal from one of two men sitting in a buckboard. As the stage slowed down one of the men leaped to the ground, and as it came to a stop clambered to the top and took a seat beside the driver who had greeted him with a gruff jest.

The new passenger carried a heavy sack which he

deposited between his feet. He also carried a sawed-off shot gun across his knees.

"The Saints be praised!" exclaimed a fat lady with a rich brogue, who occupied a seat inside the coach. "Sure an' I thought we were after bein' held up."

An old gentleman with white whiskers down which a trickle of tobacco juice had cascaded its sienna-hued way reassured her.

"No mum," he said, "thet's the messinger from the mine with a bag o' bullion. This here stage ain't been held up fer three weeks. No mum, times ain't what they uset to be with all these newfangled ideas about reform what are spilin' the country."

The fat lady looked at him sideways, disdainfully, and gathered her skirts closer about her. The stage lurched on, the horses at a brisk gallop, and as it swung around the next curve the fat lady skidded into the old gentleman's lap, her bonnet tilting over one eye, rakishly.

"Be off wid ye" she exclaimed, glaring at the little old gentleman, as though the fault were all his. She had scarcely regained her own side of the seat when another, and opposite, turn in the road precipitated the old gentleman into her lap.

"Ye spalpeen!" she shrieked, as, placing two fat hands against him, she thrust him violently from her. "Sure. an' it's a disgrace. it is. that a noor widdv-

lady can't travel in pace without the loikes o' ye takin' advantage o' her weak an' unprotected state."

The little old gentleman, though he had two huge guns strapped at his hips, appeared thoroughly cowed and terrified-so much so, in fact, that he dared not venture even a word of protest at the injustice of her insinuations. From the corners of his weak and watery blue eyes he surveyed her surreptitiously, wiped the back of his perspiring neck with a flamboyant bandana, and shrank farther into the corner of his seat.

A half-hour later the stage swung through the gap at the foot of the pass. Before it lay the rolling uplands through which the road wound down past the Bar Y ranch house and the town of Hendersville on the flat below. The gap was narrow and winding and the road excruciatingly vile, necessitating a much slower pace than the driver had been maintaining since passing the summit.

The horses were walking, the coach lurching from one chuck-hole to another, while clouds of acrid dust arose in almost vapor lightness, enveloping beasts, vehicle and passengers. Through the nebulous curtain rising above the leaders the driver saw suddenly materialize the figures of two men.

"Halt! Stick 'em up!"

The words snapped grimly from the taller of the two. The messenger on the seat beside the driver

made a single move to raise his sawed-off shot gun. A six-gun barked and the messenger toppled forward, falling upon the rump of the near wheel-horse. The horse, startled, leaped forward into his collar. The driver attempted to quiet him. The two men moved up beside the stage, one covering the driver and a passenger on top, the other threatening the two inside. The fat lady sat with her arms folded glaring at the bandit. The little old gentleman's hands touched the top of the stage.

"Stick 'em up!" said the bandit to the fat lady.

She did not move.

"Sure an' I'll not stick 'em up an inch fer the loikes o' yese," she shrilled; "an' lucky it is for ye, ye dhirty spalpeen, that Mary Donovan hasn't the bit ov a gun with her-or that there ain't a man along to protect a poor, helpless widdy lady," and she cast a withering glance of scorn in the direction of the little old gentleman, who grew visibly red through the tan of his weather-worn countenance.

The other bandit stepped to the hub of the front wheel, seized the messenger's bag and stepped down again.

"Don't move, or look back, for five minutes," he admonished them, "then pull yer freight."

The two then backed away up the road behind the stage, keeping it covered with their guns. The messenger lay in the road moaning.

The fat lady unfolded her arms, opened the door and stepped out. "Get back there, you!" called one of the bandits.

"Go to the devil!" retorted Mary Donovan, as she stooped beside the wounded messenger.

The man opened his eyes and looked about, then he essayed to rise and with Mary Donovan's help came to his feet. "Jest a scratch, me b'y," she said in a motherly tone as she helped him to the stage. "Ye'll be all right the mornin'. Git a move on ye inside there, ye ould woman with the artillery," she yelled at the little old gentleman, "an' give this b'y a hand in."

Together they helped the wounded man to a seat.

The bandits were still in sight, but they had not molested her-doubtless because she was a woman and unarmed; but no more had she deposited the messenger upon the seat than she turned upon the old man and wrenched one of his guns from its holster.

"Drive like the devil, Bill," she cried to the driver, sticking her head out of the window, and as he whipped up his team she turned back toward the two bandits and opened fire on them. They returned the fire, and the fusillade continued until the stage disappeared in a cloud of dust around a curve below the gap, the old gentleman and the passenger on top now taking part in the shooting.

Chapter III--SUSPICIONS

AS THE stage swirled through the dusty street of Hendersville an hour later and drew up before The Donovan House the loiterers about the hotel and the saloons gathered about it for the news and the gossip from the outer world. Gum Smith, sheriff, was among them.

"Stuck up again, Gum, at the gap," the driver called to him. "They bored Mack."

Mary Donovan and the little old gentleman were assisting the messenger from the stage, though he protested that he was all right and required no assistance. As the woman's eyes alighted upon the sheriff, she turned upon him, her arms akimbo.

"Sure, yese a fine spicimin uv a sheriff, Gum Smith, that ye are-not!" she yelled in a voice that could be heard the length of the single street. "Three holdups in the two months right under yer nose, and all ye do is 'depatize' an' 'depatize' an' 'depatize.' Why don't ye git out an' git 'em-ye ould woman," she concluded scornfully, and then turned to the wounded man, her voice instantly as soft as a lullaby.

"Get inside wid ye, ye poor b'y, an' Mary Donovan'll be after makin' ye comfortable 'til we get hould uv the ould saw-bones, if he's sober, which he aint, or I'm no lady, which I am. Come on now,

he ain't, or I think so, when I am gone on now, aisy like, there's a good b'y," and she put a motherly arm about the lad and helped him to the porch of the hotel, just as Diana Henders appeared from the interior, attracted by the sounds from without.

"Oh, Mrs. Donovan!" she exclaimed. "What has happened? Why, it's Mack! The Black Coyote again?" she guessed quickly.

"Shure an' it was none other. I seen him wid me own eyes-the black silk handkerchief about the neck uv him an' another over his ugly face. An' his pardner-sure now I couldn't be mishtaken wid the rollin' walk uv him-if it wasn't that dhirty greaser, Gregorio, me name's not Mary Donovan, which it is."

Together the two women helped the messenger into a bedroom where Mary Donovan, despite the embarrassed protests of her patient, undressed him and put him to bed while Diana Henders went to the kitchen for hot water and cloths.

Mack had an ugly flesh wound in his side, and this they had cleansed as best they could by the time the doctor arrived-a drink-broken old man who had drifted in from the East. His knowledge and skill were of the first rank and Hendersville boasted that it owned the best doctor in the Territory-when he was sober.

In Gun's Place-Liquors and Cigars-the male population was listening to the account of the

holdup as expounded by the little old gentleman and the other passenger, the latter being a stranger in the community.

It was he who had the floor at the moment.

"I never laughed so much in my life," he averred, "as when the old woman calls the old man here the 'ould woman with the artillery.'"

The little old gentleman was standing at the bar with a glass of whiskey in his hand. Apparently with a single movement, so swift was he, he dashed the glass and its contents in the face of the stranger, whipped out both guns and commenced shooting.

A stream of lurid profanity accompanied his act, yet through the flood of incoherent obscenity the nub of an idea occasionally appeared, which was to the effect that "no blankety, blank tin-horn could git gay with Wildcat Bob." Almost instantly, as if a magician had waved his wand, the room, that had been comfortably filled with men, became deserted, as far as human eye could discern, except for the little old gentleman with the tobacco-dewed whiskers.

The front door had accommodated some, while heavy pieces of furniture and the bar accounted for the rest—all but the stranger with the ill-directed sense of humor. He had gone through the back window and taken the sash with him.

The shooting over, the company reappeared.

grinning. Most of them knew Wildcat Bob. It had been the stranger's misfortune that he had not.

"I'd orter 'a' bored him, the dinged pole-cat," growled the little old gentleman, filling a fresh glass; "but I guess I larnt him his lesson. The idear of him a-speakin' of Mrs. Donovan disrespectful-like like that-callin' her the 'old woman'! Why, she's the finest lady ever drew breath.

"An' says she to me, says she, Mister Bob, says she, 'It's such a relief to have a man like you along when there's danger,' says she, but she can't stand bloodshed, bein' that timid and shrinkin' and she begged me not to start shootin' at the varmints, otherwise than which I shore would of messed them up somethin' awful," interspersed with which were quite two oaths or obscenities to each word.

The shooting over and quiet restored, Gum Smith made his belated appearance. At sight of the little old gentleman he smiled affably.

"Dog-gone my hide if it ain't Bob," he exclaimed, crossing the room with extended hand. "Have a drink on the house, Bob."

Wildcat Bob ignored the proffered hand. "I got the dust to cover my own drinks, Mister Sheriff," he replied, "an instid of loafin' around here buyin' drinks why ain't you-all out scoutin' after that there Black Coyote hombre? You're shore a hell of a sheriff, you are, Gum Smith."

"Don't git excited, Bob," urged the sheriff, flushing. "Give a man time. Ah got to git me a posse, ain't Ah? Thet's jest what Ah was allowin' to do right now, an' Ah'll start by depatizin' yo."

"You'll deputize me-hell, you will, Gum Smith," returned the old man with a snort of disgust. "I ben out with you-all before. When you thinks danger's north you heads south. I had all the travelin' I wants today."

The sheriff mumbled something beneath his breath and turned away. Some half-hour later he rode out of town with a posse consisting of half a dozen of his cronies and leisurely took his way toward the gap.

In Mrs. Donovan's sitting room Mary Donovan sat rocking comfortably and chatting with Diana Renders. Mack had been made as comfortable as circumstances permitted. The doctor had assured them that he was in no danger and had gone his way-back to Gum's Place-Liquors and Cigars.

"And what are you doin' in town this day, Diana?" inquired Mrs. Donovan.

"I rode in with Hal Colby, he's foreman now," replied the girl. "I wanted to buy a few things while Hal rode on over to the West Ranch. We have some horses over there. He ought to be back any minute now."

"So Colby's foreman. What's become of Bull-quit?"

"He got drunk again and Dad broke him. I'm so sorry for him."

"Don't be after wastin' your pity on the loikes ov him," advised Mary Donovan. "There's not the wan ov thim's fit to black your boots, darlin'."

"I don't understand Bull," continued the girl, ignoring the interruption. "Sometimes I think he's all right and then again I'm afraid of him. He's so quiet and reserved that I feel as though no one could ever know him, and when a man's like that, as Hal says, you can't help but think that maybe he's done something that makes him afraid to talk, for fear he'll give himself away."

"So Hal Colby was after sayin' that? Well, maybe he's right an' maybe he's wrong. It's not Mary Donovan that'll be sayin' as don't know. But this I do be after knowin'-they're both ov thim in love with ye, and"

"Hush, Mrs. Donovan! The boys all think they're in love with me, but I hate to hear anyone else say it seriously. It's perfectly silly. They'd be just as much in love with any other girl, if she chanced to be the only girl on the ranch, as I am, and pretty nearly the only girl in the county, too. There's Hal now. I must be going. Good-bye, Mrs. Donovan."

"Good-bye darlin', an' be after comin' over again

soon. It's that lonesome here, you never could imagine! An' what wid that ould scoundrel back in town again, to say nothin' ov Gum Smith!"

"What old scoundrel?" inquired the girl.

"Sure, no one else but Wildcat Bob, the spalpeen!"

Diana Henders laughed. "He's a very persistent suitor, isn't he, Mrs. Donovan?"

"Sure he's a very pestiferous shooter, that's what he is-the ould fool. Actin' like a wild broth ov a b'y, an' him sivinty if he's a day. He ought to be ashamed of himself, I'm sayin'; but at that he's better than Gum Smith-say, that man's so crooked ye could pull corks wid him."

The girl was still laughing as she emerged from the hotel and mounted her pony. Hal Colby sat his horse a few yards away, talking with half a dozen men. At sight of Diana Henders he reined about and joined her.

"The boys were just telling me about the latest holdup in Hell's Bend," he said, as they cantered, stirrup to stirrup, out of town. "How's Mack?"

"The doctor says he'll be all right," replied Diana. "Just a bad flesh wound. I don't see why something isn't done to put a stop to these holdups. Gum Smith doesn't seem to care whether he gets The Black Coyote or not."

"Oh, Gum's doin' the best he can," Colby assured her good-naturedly.

"You're too easy, Hal. You never like to say anything against a man, and of course that is right, too; but the lives and property of all of us are under Gum Smith's protection, to a greater or less extent, and if he was the right sort he'd realize his responsibility and make a determined effort to run down this fellow."

"He went out after him with a posse-the boys just told me so. What more can he do?"

"It was half an hour or more after the stage pulled in before Gum started," she retorted. "Does he or anyone else imagine that those two scoundrels are going to wait around the gap until Gum gets there? And he'll be back with his posse right after dark. He'll say he lost the trail, and that'll be the end of it until next time."

The man made no reply and the two rode on in silence for a few minutes.

It was the girl who spoke again first.

"I wonder," she said, who this Black Coyote really is."

"Everybody seems pretty sure it was The Black Coyote," remarked Colby. "How did they know?"

"The black silk handkerchief he uses for a mask.

and the other ode about his neck," she explained. "It must be the same man. Everyone has noticed these handkerchiefs on one of the men in every holdup in Hell's Bend Pass during the last six months. There is scarce any one that isn't positive that the second man is the Mexican, Gregorio; but no one seems to have recognized the principal."

"I got my own opinion," said Colby.

"What do you mean? Do you know who The Black Coyote really is?"

"I wouldn't want to say that I know, exactly; but I got my own opinion."

"Well!" she urged.

"I wouldn't want to mention no names-until I was shore. But," after a pause, "I'd like to see his cayuse. No one ever sees either his or his pardner's. They keep 'em hid out in the brush alongside the trail; but I got a guess that if anyone ever seed The Black Coyote's pony we'd all know for shore who The Black Coyote is."

She did not insist further when she saw that he was apparently shielding the name of some man whom they both knew, and whom he suspicioned. It was only right that he do this, she thought, and she admired him the more for it. So they talked of other things as they jogged along the dusty road toward home, the man riding a stiff up's width behind that he might feast his eyes upon the profile of his

he might least his eyes upon the promise of his companion. As they neared the ranch they saw the figure of a solitary horseman approaching from the north.

"Looks like Blazes," remarked the girl.

"It is," said the man. "I sent Bull up to Cottonwood this morning. I don't see what he's doin' comin' in from the north. The Cottonwood trail's almost clue west."

"He might have come back along the foothill trail," suggested Diana.

"He might, but it's farther, an' I never seed a puncher yet that'd ride any farther than you told him to.

"Bull's different," she replied, simply. "If you sent him out for any purpose he'd accomplish it no matter how far he had to ride. He's always been a good hand."

A moment later the ex-foreman joined them where the two trails met. He accorded the girl the customary, "Howdy, Miss," of the times, and nodded to Colby. His mount was streaked with sweat and dust. It was evident that he had been ridden hard.

"Did you find them cows?" asked the foreman,

Bull nodded.

"In Cottonwood?"

"No. Belter's."

Diana Henders glanced at the foreman as much as to say, "I told you so!" Then, glancing back at Bull, she noticed a reddish brown stain on the side of his shirt, and gave a little exclamation of concern.

"Oh, Bull!" she cried, "you've been hurt-that's blood; isn't it? How did it happen?"

"Oh, that ain't nothin', Miss, just a little scratch," and he closed up, like a clam, spurring ahead of them.

Neither Colby nor the girl spoke, but both were thinking of the same things-that Bull wore a black silk handkerchief about his neck and that Mary Donovan had fired back upon The Black Coyote and his confederate following the holdup in Hell's Bend earlier in the afternoon.

Mrs. Donovan, her hands on her hips, stood just inside the dining room door as her guests filed in for supper that evening and seated themselves at the long deal table covered with its clean red and white cloth. She had a good-natured word for each of them, until her eyes alighted upon Wildcat Bob, attempting to sneak in unnoticed behind the broad figure of Jim Weller.

"So-o!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Ye ould fool -
-er drunk again. To sike off them cuns an' give them

yer drink again. Ta-ake on thim guns an' give umm to me."

"I haven't had a drink, Mary," expostulated the old man.

"Don't 'Mary' me, ye ould reprobate, an' be after givin' me thim guns, quick!"

Meekly he unbuckled his belt and passed it over to her. "I was just bringin' 'em in to you, Ma-Mrs. Donovan," he assured her.

"Y'ed better be. Now go an' sit down. I'll feed you this night, but don't you iver step foot into Mary Donovan's dining room again in liquor."

"I tell you I ain't had a drink," he insisted.

"Pha-at?" The word reeked with disbelief.

"Only just a drop to settle the dust after we pulled in," he qualified his original statement.

"Ye must uv been that dusty then!" she exclaimed scornfully.

"I was."

"Don't talk back. And did ye find yer horses, Jim Weller?" she inquired of the big man behind whom Wildcat Bob had made his unimpressive entrance.

Weller shook his head, negatively, his mouth being full of baked beans.

"Patches probably run 'em off," suggested Bill Gatlin, the stage driver.

"What with renegades and holdups this country ain't safe to live in no more," remarked Mrs. Donovan. "If some of these here would-be bad-men would git out an' shoot up the bandits and the Injuns instid of shootin' up saloons," she stated meaningly, casting a baneful look at Wildcat Bob.

"Hadn't orter be hard to find 'em, least wise one of 'em," stated Weller, "when every son-of-a-gun in the county knows who he is."

"Meanin'?" inquired the stage driver.

"-'Gregorio, in course," said Weller. "I seen him comin' out o' Cottonwood not three hours before the stage was stuck up, an' he was headin' towards Hell's Bend-him an' that Bar Y Bull feller."

"You mean them two was together?" asked Gatlin.

"Well, they warn't exactly together. Gregorio comes out fust an' about five minutes later I meets Bull acomin' down the canyon; but they couldn't have both been up there without t'other knowin' it."

"I don't believe Bull would be doin' it," said Mary Donovan.

"You can't never tell nothin' about them quiet fellers," remarked Gatlin, sententiously.

There was a pounding of hoofs without, the creaking of leather as men dismounted and a moment later the sheriff and some of his posse entered the dining room.

"I suppose ye got 'em, Gum Smith," said Mrs. Donovan, with sarcasm, "or ye wouldn't be back this soon."

"Ah ain't no cat, Mrs. Donovan," said the sheriff, on the defensive, "to see in the dark."

"Yese ain't no sheriff nayther," she shot back.

Wildcat Bob succeeded in calling attention to derisive laughter by pretending to hide it. Gum Smith looked at his rival angrily, immediately discovering that he was unarmed.

"What's the matter with the old woman with the artillery-is she chokin'?" he inquired sweetly.

Wildcat Bob went red to the verge of apoplexy, seized a heavy cup half-filled with coffee and started to rise.

"Sit down wid ye!" roared the stentorian voice of Mary Donovan.

"I-" started Wildcat Bob.

"Shut up an' sit down!"

The Wildcat did both simultaneously

' It's a sha-ame, that it is, that a respectable widdy lady should be redjuced to fadin' the likes o' yese fer a livin'," wailed Mrs. Donovan, sniffing, as she dabbed at her eyes with the corner of her apron, "all alone and unprotected as I am. Sure an' if poor Tim was here he'd wipe the ground wid the both ov yese."

Wildcat Bob, very red and uncomfortable, ate diligently, his eyes glued to the plate. Well did Mary Donovan know how to handle this terror of an earlier day, whose short temper and quick guns still held the respect and admiration of the roughest characters of the great empire of the Southwest, but whose heart could be dissolved by a single tear.

As for Gum Smith, he was only too glad to be relieved of the embarrassment of the Wildcat's further attentions and he too gave himself willingly over to peace and supper. For the balance of the meal, however, conversation languished.

At the Bar Y Ranch the men sat smoking after the evening meal. Bull was silently puffing upon a cigarette. Hal Colby, always good-natured and laughing, told stories. During the silences Texas Pete strove diligently to recall the half-forgotten verses of The Bad Hombre.

But over all there hovered an atmosphere of restraint. No one could have put his finger upon the cause, yet all sensed it. Things were not as they had

been yesterday, or for many days before. Perhaps there was a feeling that an older man should have been chosen to replace Bull, for Colby was one of the newer hands. Without volition and unconsciously the men were taking sides. Some, mostly the men who had worked longest for Henders, drew imperceptibly nearer Bull. Texas Pete was one of them. The others laughed a little louder, now, at Colby's stories.

"By gollies!" exclaimed Pete, "I remember some more of it:

"I am the original bad un, I am, I eats 'em alive an' I don't give a damn Fer how fast they come er how many they be- Of all the bad hombres the wust one is me."

sang Texas Pete. "Good night, fellers, I'm goin' to turn in."

Chapter IV--"I LOVE YOU"

DIANA HENDERS was troubled. Ever since the holdup several days before she had not been able to expunge from her thoughts a recollection of the sinister circumstances that pointed an accusing finger at Bull. There had always been a deep-seated loyalty existing between the Henders and their employees and this alone would have been sufficient to have brought the girl to arms in the defense of the reputation of any of her father's "boys." In the case of Bull there were added reasons why she could not

bear to foster a suspicion of his guilt.

Not only had he been a trusted foreman, but there was something in the man himself, or rather in his influence upon the imagination of the girl, that made it almost impossible for her to believe that he had shot Mack Harber, another employee, and stolen the bullion from her father's mine. He had always been reticent and almost shy in her presence. He had never presumed to even the slight familiarity of addressing her by her given name-a customary procedure among the other men, many of whom had seen her grow so gradually from a little girl to a young lady that they scarce yet discerned the change.

Yet she knew that he liked to be with her, though she was far from being sure that she cared for his company. He was quiet to taciturnity and far from being the pleasant companion that she found in Hal Colby. There was something, however, that she felt when in his company to a much greater degree than when she was with other men-absolute confidence in his integrity and his ability to protect her.

Now she was sorry for him since his reduction from a post of responsibility and her loyalty aroused by the inward suspicions she had permitted herself to entertain, to the end that she was moved by something akin to remorse to make some sort of overtures of friendship that he might know that the daughter of his employer still had confidence in him.

It was a quiet Sunday morning. The men were lazily occupying themselves with the overhauling of their outfits, replacing worn latigo and stirrup leather lacings, repairing hackamores and bridles, polishing silver and guns, cleaning boots with bacon grease and lampblack, shaving, or hair-cutting.

Down past the bunk-house, toward the corrals, came Diana Henders. Presently she would pause near the men and ask one of them to catch up a horse for her. The lucky fellow whom she asked would ride with her.

It was a custom of long standing; but she was earlier than usual this Sunday morning and several of the men worked frantically to complete the jobs they were engaged upon before she should arrive within speaking distance. Two or three affected attitudes of careless idleness indicative of perfect readiness to meet any call upon their time or services.

Texas Pete was cutting the hair of another puncher. He had reached a point where his victim was entirely shorn upon one side, the other displaying a crop of thick, brown hair four or five inches long, when he looked up and saw Diana approaching. Pete tossed the shears and comb into the lap of the victim.

"You-all don't need a hair-cut nohow," he announced, strolling away with what he believed to be a remarkable display of nonchalance, along a line that would quite by accident of course

the man would, quite by accident of course, intercept Diana's course to the corrals.

The deserted and disfigured puncher wheeled upon him with a loud yell.

"Come back here, you knock-kneed, bowlegged, son-of-a-," then his eyes, too, alighted upon Diana. His fountain of speech dried at the source, his tanned face assumed a purple cast, and in two jumps he had reached the seclusion of the bunkhouse.

Hal Colby walked deliberately forward to meet the girl, a pleasant smile of greeting upon his handsome face as he raised his wide sombrero in salutation. Had he been on trial for his life at that moment the entire outfit would have voted unanimously to hang him on the spot; but, gosh, how they envied him!

Bull sat, apparently unmoved, with his back against a cottonwood tree, running a wiping rag through the barrel of a revolver. He did not even look up, though he had seen Diana Henders from the moment that she left the house. Bull realized that after the affair in town that had caused his downfall there was no chance for him to ride with her again for many long days-possibly forever.

"Going for a ride, Di?" asked Colby, confidently, as the girl came abreast of the men.

"Why, yes, I was thinking of it," she replied sweetly. "I was just going to ask Bull if he wouldn't

catch up Captain for me-the rest of you all seem so busy."

Colby appeared abashed but not defeated. "I haven't a thing-to do," he assured her.

"But I've made you ride with me so much lately, Hal," she insisted.

"I'd rather ride with you than eat," he whispered.

Texas Pete had made a feeble pretense of searching for something on the ground, apparently given it up in despair, and was passing them on his way back to the bunk-house.

"I don't think you oughter ride with-with him, nohow," continued Colby.

The girl drew herself up, slightly.

"Don't be nasty, Hal," she said.

"You know I hate to say that," he assured her. "I set a heap of store by Bull. He's one of my best friends, but after what's happened-you can't blame me, Di. I think your dad would say the same thing if he knew."

Bull was halfway to the corrals.

"I'll have the bosses up in a jiffy, Miss," he called back over his shoulder.

"Good-bye, Hal," laughed the girl, teasingly.

"You'll have plenty of time to lay out the work for tomorrow-a foreman's always busy, you know," and she walked away briskly after Bull.

As Colby turned back toward the men he saw broad grins adorning the faces of most of them. Texas Pete, just approaching the bunk-house door, halted, removed his hat with a flourish, bowing low.

"Goin' to git your hair cut, Hal?" he inquired sweetly. "You know I'd rather cut your hair than eat."

A loud roar of laughter acknowledged this sally.

Colby, flushing crimson, beat a hasty retreat toward the office.

"Which way?" asked Bull, when the two had mounted.

"I'm going to town to see how Mack is getting along," replied the girl, watching his face.

"I seen Wildcat Bob yesterday. He said he was getting along fine. Nothing but a flesh wound."

Neither his voice nor his expression betrayed more than ordinary concern.

"Have you seen Mack since he was shot?" she inquired.

"Ain't had time. Colby keeps me pretty busy.

Mack was a dinged fool fer gettin' creased anyhow," he observed. "When a feller's got the drop on you, stick 'em up. They ain't nothin' else to do. Mack orter know better than to make any funny gun-play with them two hombres coverin' him."

"It was mighty brave of him," said Diana. "He's no coward-and he was loyal to Dad."

"I don't see nothin' brave about it," he replied. "It was just plumb foolishness. Why he didn't have a chanct on earth."

"That's what made his act so courageous," she insisted.

"Then the feller what commits suicide must be a regular hero," he rejoined, smiling. "I never looked at it that way. I reckon Mack must have been aimin' to commit suicide."

"You're horrid, Bull. I believe you haven't any heart at all."

"I shore have. Leastways I did have one until-" He hesitated, looked at her in a peculiar way, then let his eyes drop to his saddle horn, "Oh, shucks! what's the use?" he exclaimed.

There was silence for a brief interval. The spirit of coquetry, that is strong in every normal girl, prompted her to urge him on; but a natural kindness coupled with the knowledge that it would

be unfair to him kept her silent. It was the man who spoke again first.

"I was sorry Mack got hurt," he said, defensively; "but he was lucky he wasn't killed. That Black Coyote feller must have been a friend of his'n."

"The brute!" she exclaimed. "He ought to be strung up to the highest tree in the county."

"Yes," he agreed, and then, with another of his rare smiles, "let's speak to Gum Smith about it when we get to town."

"Gum Smith!" Were it possible to snort Gum Smith she had accomplished it. "If an honest vote had been taken for the worst man for sheriff Gum Smith would have been elected unanimously."

"Why Gum's a good sheriff," he teased, "fer tin horns and bandits."

She did not reply. Her thoughts were upon the man at her side. Nothing that he had said had exactly tended to weaken her faith in him, yet it had not materially strengthened it; either.

His apparent callous indifference to Mack's suffering might have been attributed with equal fairness to the bravado of the guilty desperado, or to the conditions and the times in which they lived which placed shootings and sudden death in the category of the commonplace. His suggestion that The Black Coyote must have been a friend of

Mack's, as an explanation of a flesh wound rather than a mortal one, appeared a trifle sinister, though it was amenable to other interpretations. On the whole, however, Diana Henders was not wholly pleased with the result of her probing.

At The Donovan House they found Mack sufficiently recovered to be able to sit upon the veranda, where there were gathered a number of Mrs. Donovan's other guests, including Wildcat Bob and the sheriff. Mary Donovan stood in the doorway, one hand on a hip and the other, the fist doubled, emphasizing some forceful statement she was delivering.

As Diana Henders and Bull appeared suddenly before them, the argument, which had been progressing merrily, lapsed into an embarrassed silence. It would have been evident to the most obtuse that one or the other of the newcomers had been the subject of the conversation, and neither Bull nor Diana was obtuse, the result being that they shared the embarrassment of the others.

The silence, which really lasted but a brief moment, was broken by Mary Donovan's hearty greeting to Diana, followed by a cordial word to Bull, which was seconded by Wildcat Bob. The others, however, spoke only to Diana Henders, appearing not to be aware of the presence of her escort.

"Come now," cried Mary Donovan, "into the house wid ye an' have a bit o' cake an' a cup o'

tay." But Diana Henders did not dismount.

"No, thank you, Mrs. Donovan," she replied. "We just rode down to see how Mack was getting along and to ask if there was anything we could do for him." She turned her glance toward the wounded man.

"I'm all right, Miss," he replied. "'Twasn't nothin' but a scratch. I'll be back at the mine in a couple o' days-an' guardin' the bullion shipments, too, same as usual." He looked straight at Bull as he made this final statement.

"Well," exclaimed Diana, hastily, "I'm glad you're so much better, Mack, and if there isn't anything we can do for you we'll start back for the ranch." She sensed the sullen attitude of most of the men there, the scowls they cast at Bull, and she knew that it would require little to precipitate a direct accusation, which would have been almost certain to have been followed by gunplay. "Come, Bull," she said, and reined her pony about.

They had ridden well out of town when she looked casually into the man's face. It bore a troubled expression and he must have guessed that she noted it.

"I wonder what was eatin' them fellers," he remarked. "No one only Wildcat Bob even spoke to me, an' Mack seemed gosh-almighty sore about somethin'. Well, they ain't none of 'em got their brand on me. If I did shoot un Gurn Smith's joint it

ain't no hair offen none of them."

The girl wondered if he really was ignorant of the suspicions directed against him, or if he took this means to make her believe that the cause of the altered attitude toward him was his drunken gunplay in the sheriff's saloon.

"I was right sorry about that, Miss," he blurted suddenly. "I never aimed for to do it. I wasn't goin' to drink too much no more after what I'd promised you. I'm right sorry. Do you think that, maybe, you-you might forgive me-and give me another chance?"

His voice was pleading and he was very much in earnest. The girl knew how difficult it was for a rough man like Bull to say what he had just said and she felt a sudden compassion for him.

"It made me sorry, too, Bull," she said. "I trusted you and I hated to be so disappointed in you."

"Please don't say you don't trust me, Miss," he begged. "I want you to trust me more'n anything else."

"I want to trust you, Bull," and then, impulsively: "I do trust you!"

He reached across the interval between them and laid his rough hand upon her soft one.

"I love you, Diana," he said, very simply and with a quiet dignity that was unmarred by any hesitancy or

questioning and was marked by my feeling of embarrassment.

She started to speak, but he silenced her with a gesture.

"Don't say anything about it, please," he urged. "I don't expect you to love me; but there's nothing wrong about my loving you. I just wanted you to know it so that you'd always know where I stood and that you could always call on me for anything. With yer dad an' all the other men around that loves you there isn't much likelihood that you'll ever need me more'n another, but it makes me feel better to know that you know now. We won't talk about it no more, Miss. We both understand. It's the reason I didn't quit when yer dad busted me."

"I'm glad you told me, Bull," she said. "It's the greatest honor that any man can bestow upon a girl. I don't love any man, Bull, that way; but if ever I do he'll know it without my telling him. I'll do something that will prove it-a girl always does. Some times, though, the men are awfully blind, they say."

"I wouldn't be blind," said Bull. "I'd know it, I think, if a girl loved me."

"The right one will, some day," she assured him.

He shook his head. "I hope so, Miss."

She flushed, sensing the unintentional double Entendre he had caught in her words. She wondered why she flushed

wondered why she rushed.

They rode on in silence. She was sorry that Bull loved her, but she was glad that, loving her, he had told her of his love. He was just a common cowhand, unlettered, rough, and occasionally uncouth, but of these things she did not think, for she had known no other sort, except her father and an occasional visitor from the East, since childhood. Had she cared for him she would not have been ashamed. She looked up at him with a smile.

"Don't call me 'Miss,' Bull, please-I hate it."

"You want me to call you by your first name?" he inquired.

"The other men do," she said, "and you did---a moment ago."

"It slipped out that time." He grinned sheepishly.

"I like it."

"All right Miss," he said.

The girl laughed aloud, joyishly.

"All right, Diana, I mean," he corrected himself.

"That's better."

So Diana Henders, who was really a very sensible girl, instead of merely playing with fire, made a big one of a little one, all very unintentionally, for how

was she to know that to Bull the calling of her Diana instead of Miss was almost as provocative to his love as Would have been the personal contact of a kiss to an ordinary man?

As they approached the ranch house at the end of their ride they saw a buckboard to which two bronchos were harnessed hitched to the tie rail beneath the cottonwoods outside the office door.

"Whose outfit is that?" asked Diana. "I never saw it before."

"The Wainrights from the north side o' the hills. I seen 'em in town about a week ago."

"Oh, yes, I've heard of them. They're from the East. Mr. Wainright don't like the country north of the mountains."

"He's lookin' fer range on this side," said Bull. "Like as not that's what lie's here fer now. They ain't enough water fer no more outfits though, nor enough feed neither."

They drew rein at the corral and dismounted.

"Thanks, Bull," said the girl, as she passed him her bridle reins. "We've had a lovely ride."

"Thanks-Diana."

That was all he said, but the way he spoke her name was different from the way any other man had

ever spoken it. She was sorry now that she had asked him to call her Diana.

As she was passing the office to go to her room her father called to her.

"Come in, Di; I want you to meet some new neighbors," and when she had entered, "My daughter, Mr. Wainright."

Diana extended her hand to a fat man with close-set eyes, and then her father presented the younger Wainright.

"Mr. Jefferson Wainright, Jr., Diana," he said.

The son was a well-groomed-appearing, nice-looking young fellow of twenty-one or twenty-two. Perhaps his costume was a trifle too exaggerated to be in good taste, but he had only fallen into the same mistake that many another wealthy young Easterner has done before and since upon his advent to the cow-country. From silver-banded sombrero to silver-encrusted spurs there was no detail lacking.

"By gollies, he looks like a Christmas tree," had been Texas Pete's observation the first time that he had seen him. "All they forgot was the candles."

"You live north of the mountains?" inquired Diana, politely.

"Yep," replied the elder Wainright; "but we don't

calc'late to stay there. We're from Mass'chusetts-Worcester-blanketsmade a fortune in 'em-made 'em for the gover'ment mostly. Jeff got it in his head he wanted to go into the cattle business-come by it natch'ral I allow. I used to be in the livery stable business before I bought the mills-so when he graduated from Harvard a year ago we come out here-don't like it tother side the mountains-so I calc'lates to come over here."

"I was just explaining to Mr. Wainright that there is scarcely enough feed or water for another big outfit on this side," interjected Mr. Henders.

"Don't make any difference-set your price-but set it right. I'll buy you out. I c'd buy half this territory I calc'late-if I had a mind to-but the price's got to be right. Ol' Jeff Wainright's got a name for bein' a pretty shrewd trader-fair'n honest, though-fair'n honest. Just name your price-how much for the whole shebang-buildins, land, cattle-everything?"

Elias Henders laughed good-naturedly. "I'm afraid they're not for sale, Mr. Wainright."

"Tut, tut! I'll get 'em-you'll sell-of Jeff Wainright's always got everything he went after. Well, son, I calc'late we'd better be goin'."

"You'll have dinner with us first, of course," insisted Diana; "it must be almost ready now."

"Well, I don't mind if we do," returned the elder Wainright, and so they stayed for the noonday

meal.

Diana found the younger Wainright a pleasant, affable companion. He was the first educated man near her own age that she had ever met and his conversation and his ways, so different from those of the rough vaqueros of her little world, made a profound impression upon her. He could talk interestingly from the standpoint of personal experience of countless things of which she had only secondhand knowledge acquired from books and newspapers. Those first two hours with him thrilled her with excitement-they opened a new world of wondrous realities that she had hitherto thought of more as unattainable dreams than things which she herself might some day experience.

If he had inherited something of his father's egotism she forgot it in the contemplation of his finer qualities and in the pleasure she derived from association with one somewhere near her own social status in life. That the elder Wainright was impossible she had sensed from the first, but the son seemed of different fiber and no matter what his antecedents, he must have acquired something of permanent polish through his college associations.

The disquieting effect of the Wainrights' visit was apparent elsewhere than at the ranch house. There was gloom at the bunk-house.

"Dog-gone his hide!" exclaimed Texas Pete.

whose?" inquired Shorty.

"My of man's. If he hadn't gone an' got hung he might'a sent me to Havaad. What chanct has a feller got agin one o' them paper-collared, cracker-fed dudes anyway!"

Chapter V--THE ROUND-UP

"I HAD a letter from Wainright in the mail today, Di," said Elias Henders to his daughter about a week later. "He is after me again to put a price on the whole 'shebang.'"

"We could go East and live then, couldn't we?" asked the girl.

Henders looked at her keenly. There had been just the tiniest trace of wistfulness in her tone. He crossed the room and put an arm about her.

"You'd like to go East and live?" he asked.

"I love it here, Dad; but there is so much there that we can never have here. I should like to see how other people live. I should like to go to a big hotel, and to the theaters and opera, and meet educated people of my own age. I should like to go to parties where no one got drunk and shot the lights out," she concluded with a laugh.

"We don't have to sell out to go back," he told her. "I am afraid I have been selfish. Because I never wanted to back after your mamma left us. I forgot

that you had a right to the same advantages that she and I enjoyed. The ranch seemed enough-the ranch and you."

"But there'd be no one to manage things if you went away," she insisted.

"Oh, that could be arranged. I thought you felt that we couldn't afford to go unless we sold."

"It would be nice if you were relieved of all responsibility," she said. "If you sold the ranch and the brand you wouldn't have to worry about how things were going here."

"Old Wainright wouldn't pay what they are worth, even if I was ready to sell," he explained. "I'll tell you what I'll do-I'll make him a price. If he takes it I'll sell out, and anyway, whether he does or not, we'll go East to stay, if you like it."

"What price are you going to ask?"

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the ranch and the brand. They might bring more if I wanted to make an effort to get more, but that will show a fair profit for us and I know will be satisfactory to John. He has asked me a dozen times in his letters why I didn't sell the cattle end of the business and come East."

"Yes, I know Uncle John has always wanted. us to come back," she said.

"But old Wainright really doesn't want the ranch and cattle at all," said her father. "What he wants is the mine. He has offered me a million dollars for all our holdings in the county, including the mine. He mentions the fact that the workings have pretty nearly petered out, and he's right, and he thinks I'll grab at it to unload."

"I suspect he's had a man up there for the past six months-the new bookkeeper that Corson sent out while your Uncle John Manill was in Europe-and he thinks he's discovered something that I don't know-but I do. For years, Di, we've been paralleling a much richer vein than the one we've been working. I've known it for the past two years, but John and I figured we'd work out the old one first-we've all the money we need anyway. The mine alone is worth ten or twenty millions."

"Uncle John knows it? There wouldn't be any danger that someone might trick him into a deal?"

"Not a chance, and of course, as you know, he wouldn't do anything without consulting me. Ours is rather a peculiar partnership, Di, but it's a very safe one for both of us. There isn't the scratch of a pen between us as far as any written agreement is concerned, but he trusts me and I trust him. Why before either of us married the only precautions we took to safeguard our interests was to make our wills-I left everything to him and he left everything to me. After we married we made new wills, that was all.

"If I die first everything goes to him, and when he dies it is all divided equally between our surviving heirs; or just the other way around if he dies first. Each of us felt that we could thus best safeguard the interests of our respective families, since we both had implicit confidence in the other's honesty and integrity."

"Oh, let's not talk about it," exclaimed the girl. "Neither one of you is ever going to die."

"All right, Di," laughed her father; "just as you say-you've always had your own way. Now we'll plan that eastern trip. Can't very well go until after the spring round-up, and in the meantime we can be sizing up Colby. If he takes hold all right we couldn't do better than to leave him in charge. I never did like the idea of importing a new man as superintendent if you could possibly use one of your own men. What do you think of him, Di?"

"I don't know yet Dad," she replied. "I like him immensely, and I think he's honest and loyal, but he don't know stock, nor the range, as well as Bull."

"Bull is out of the question," replied her father. "I could never trust him again."

"I know how you feel. I feel the same way, and yet there is something about him, Dad-I can't explain it; but when I am with him I cannot doubt him."

"He's got you hypnotized. I hope he hasn't been

making love to you," he concluded, seriously.

"Oh, they all do," she cried, laughing. "but Bull least of all."

"I suppose you'll have to be marrying one of these days, and if you were going to live here I'd rather you married a western boy; but if you are going East you mustn't fall in love yet, for you are sure to find a great difference between the boys you have known and the boys back there."

"Don't worry, Dad, I haven't fallen in love yet; but if I do soon I'm afraid it's going to be either Hal Colby or Jefferson Wainright."

"Senior?" he asked.

"Oh, isn't he funny-and impossible!" she cried.

"He's all of that and more too," replied her father. .

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. He's one of those blue-bellied Yankees who considers any means as honest that keep him on the right side of a jail door; but the boy appears to be a much more decent sort."

"He is delightful and wonderful," said Diana.

The days passed, lovely, sunshiny days during

which Diana spent long hours dreaming of the coming eastern trip. She rode much, as usual, sometimes with one man, again with another, but more often with her father or Hal Colby.

Bull's assignments usually took him too far afield for her to accompany him. If he thought that Colby had some such purpose in mind when he laid out the work from day to day he said nothing of it; but he could not have failed to notice that following each of the few occasions upon which Diana accompanied him, usually a Sunday, he was given work the next day that kept him in the saddle until late at night, and upon several occasions away from the ranch for two days or more.

At last the time of the spring rodeo arrived. Riders from other outfits commenced straggling in, some from a hundred miles away, until the Bar Y ranch commenced to take on the appearance of an army camp. The chuck wagon was overhauled and outfitted. The cavvy was brought over from West Ranch-wild, half-broken horses, with a sprinkling of colts that had never felt leather-and assigned to the riders. There were enough to give each man a string of eight horses.

With the others came Jefferson Wainright, Jr., arrayed like Solomon. At first the men had a lot of fun with him, but when he took it good-naturedly they let up a bit, and after a few evenings, during which he sang and told stories, they accepted him almost as one of them. He was much with Diana

Henders, with the result that he found himself with four unbroken bronchos in his string. The Bar Y hands grinned when Colby picked them for him, and everyone was present when he first essayed to ride one of them.

Diana was there too. She chanced to be standing near Bull when the first of the four, having been roped, thrown and hogtied, was finally saddled, bridled and let up. It was a ewe-necked, wall-eyed, Roman-nosed pinto and its back was humped like a camel's.

"He shore looks mean," remarked Bull to the girl.

"They ought not to let Mr. Wainright ride him," she replied. "He's not used to bad horses and he may be killed."

"I reckon that's just about how Hal figgered it," said Bull.

"I didn't think it of him. It's a shame!" she exclaimed. "Some one ought to top that horse for Mr. Wainright-some one who can ride-like you, Bull," she added flatteringly.

"You want me to?" he asked.

"I don't want to see the poor man killed."

Bull stepped forward and climbed into the corral. Wainright was standing several feet from the pinto watching several men who were trying to readjust

the blind over the brute's eyes. Bull saw that the man was afraid.

"Want me to top him for you, young feller?" he asked.

"Don't you think he's safe?" asked Wainright.

"Oh, yes, he's safe-like a Kansas cyclone."

Wainright grinned a sickly grin. "I'd appreciate it," he said, "if you'd try him first. I'd be glad to pay you for your trouble."

Bull approached the men with the horse. "Lead him out," he said. "When I rides one like that I wants elbow room"

They ran the pony, bucking, out of the corral. Bull stepped to the animal's side.

"What you doin'?" demanded Colby, who had been standing too far away to overhear the conversation.

"Toppin' this one for the dude," replied Bull.

"No you're not," snapped Colby. His voice was angry. "You'll ride the hosses I tells you to and so will he."

"I'm ridin' this one," replied Bull. He had grasped the cheek strap with his left hand, his right was on the horn of the saddle. Carefully he placed his left foot in the stirrup. Then he nodded to a man

not in the stirrup. Then he reached to a man standing at the horse's head.

The blind was snatched away and the man leaped aside. The horse reared, wheeled and struck at Bull, but Bull was not there—he was in the saddle. The animal lunged forward awkwardly once, then he gathered himself, stuck his nose between his front feet and went to pitching, scientifically and in earnest, and as he pitched he lunged first to the right and then to the left, twisting his body, squealing and kicking. Bull waved his sombrero and slapped the beast on neck and rump with it and the pinto bucked the harder.

Finding that these tactics failed to unseat the rider he commenced suddenly to turn end for end in air at each jump, yet still the man stuck, until the beast, frantic with combined terror and rage, stopped in his tracks and turned savagely to bite at Bull's legs. Just a moment of this until he felt the sting of the quirt and then he reared quickly and threw himself over backward in an effort to crush his rider, nor did he miss him by a matter of more than inches.

There are those who will tell you just how you should throw yourself safely to one side when a horse falls, but any man who has had a horse fall with him, or deliberately throw himself backward, knows that it is five parts chance and the rest luck if he isn't caught, and so it was just luck that Bull fell clear.

Diana Henders felt a sudden lump in her throat and

then she saw the horse scramble to his feet and the rider too, just in time to throw a leg across the saddle, and come up with a firm seat and both feet in the stirrups. The quirt fell sharply first on one flank and then on the other, the pinto took a dozen running jumps and then settled down to a smooth run across the open.

Five minutes later he came loping back, blowing and sweaty, still trembling and frightened, but with the hump out of his back.

"You kin ride him now," said Bull to young Wainright, as he dismounted carefully and stood stroking the animal's neck.

Hal Colby came forward angrily, but Bull had dismounted close to where Diana Henders stood, and it was she who spoke to him first, and Colby, approaching, heard her words.

"Thank you, ever so much, Bull," she said. "I was sorry afterwards that I asked you to ride him, for I thought you were going to be hurt when he threw himself-I should never have forgiven myself."

"Shucks!" said Bull. "It wasn't nothin'."

Colby walked off in another direction. If there had been bad blood between the two men in the past it had never been given outward expression, but from that moment Colby made little or no effort to hide the fact that he had no use for Bull, while the latter in many little ways showed his contempt for the

in many ways showed his contempt for the foreman.

Better friendships than had ever existed between these two have been shattered because of a woman, but there were other exciting causes here. That Colby had gotten Bull's job might have been enough to cause a break, while the foreman's evident suspicion that Bull knew a great deal too much about the holdups in Hell's Bend and the shooting of Mack Harber would have turned even more generous natures than Hal Colby's against the ex-foreman.

In spite of herself Diana Henders could not deny a feeling of chagrin that Jefferson Wainright had permitted another man to top a bad horse for him, although it had been she who had arranged it. Perhaps she was a trifle cool to the young Easterner that evening, but she thawed gradually beneath the geniality of his affable ways and entertaining conversation, and in the weeks that followed, during which she accompanied the outfit throughout the round-up, she was with him much of the time, to the great discomfiture of Hal Colby and others.

The Bar Y foreman had, however, after the day that Bull rode the pinto for Wainright, left the latter severely alone, for the following morning Elias Renders had come to the corral and selected a new string of horses for the "dude" and spoken a few words into the ear of his foreman.

The long, hard days in the saddle left them all

You'll need a big hole ter to plant the remains.'"

On the opposite side of the chuck wagon, where a tent had been pitched for Diana Henders, a little group surrounded her fire. Beside the girl there were her father, Hal Colby and Jefferson Wainright, Jr. The two young men always gravitated in Diana's direction when off duty. Colby had been quick to realize the advantage that the other's education gave him and bright enough to remain a silent observer of his manners and conversation. Inwardly he held the Easterner in vast contempt, yet he cultivated him and often rode with him that he might learn from him something of those refinements which he guessed constituted the basis of Diana's evident liking for Wainright. He asked him many questions, got him to talk about books, and made mental note of various titles with the determination to procure and read the books that he had heard the man discuss with Diana.

Bull, on his part, kept away from the Henders' fire in the evening and in the day time Colby saw to it that his assignments sent him far afield from where there was much likelihood of Diana being, with the result that he saw less of her than was usual at home.

The ex-foreman's natural reserve had degenerated almost to sullenness. He spoke seldom and never smiled, but he rode hard and did his work well, until he came to be acknowledged as the best all-round man in the outfit. There was no horse that he wouldn't ride, no risk that he wouldn't take, no

wouldn't die, no risk that he wouldn't take, no work that he would ever refuse, no matter how unfair the assignment, with the result that the men respected him though there were none who seemed to like his company, with the exception of Texas Pete.

"Well, boys," said Elias Henders, rising, "I guess we'd better be turning in. Tomorrow's going to be a hard day."

The two younger men rose, Colby stretching and yawning. "I reckon you're right, Mr. Henders," he agreed, but waiting for Wainright to make the first move to leave. The latter paused to roll a cigarette-an accomplishment that he had only recently brought to a state even approximating perfection. He used both hands and was rather slow. Colby eyed him, guessing that he was merely fighting for time in order to force the foreman to go first. Slowly the latter withdrew his own pouch of tobacco from his shirt pocket.

"Reckon I'll roll a smoke by the light of your fire, Di, before I do," he remarked.

He creased the paper, poured in a little tobacco, and, as he drew the pouch closed with his teeth and left hand, deftly rolled the cigarette with his right, bending it slightly in the center to keep it from opening up. Wainright realized that if he had -a conversational advantage over Colby there were other activities in which the foreman greatly outshone him. Rolling a smoke was one of them and

that was doubtless why Colby had chosen to roll one at a moment that odious comparison might be made.

Wainright lighted his and shifted to the other foot. Would Colby never leave! Colby permitted three matches to burn out before he finally succeeded in getting a light, thus gaining a considerable advantage in time over Wainright. Elias Henders had repaired to his blankets, just beyond Diana's tent and out of sight.

The girl realized the game that the two men were playing and could scarce repress an inclination to laughter. She wondered which would win, or if she would have to call it a draw and send them both about their business. Wainright decided the matter.

"Come on, Colby," he said, throwing an arm about the other's shoulders, "we're keeping Miss Henders up. Good night, Miss Henders," and raising his hat he moved off, taking Colby with him. They had taken about twenty steps when Wainright halted and wheeled about.

"Oh, I say, Miss Henders," he called, "there's something I wanted to ask you," and he started back. "Don't wait, for me, Colby," he threw over his shoulder; "I'll be along in a moment."

Colby glared at the other's retreating back through the darkness, hurled his cigarette to the ground and stamped away. out-generated. "I'll get him yet," he

numbed. He may be pretty sick at them parlor tricks, but they ain't many parlors in Arizona. The damn dude!"

Wainright rejoined Diana by the fire. "It's too beautiful an evening to go to bed," he said, "and I haven't had half a chance to talk with you. Colby hangs around as though he had a mortgage on your time and was going to foreclose. He sort of puts a damper on conversation unless it revolves about cows-that's all he can talk about."

"It's a subject that is always of interest to us out here," replied the girl loyally. "Cows are really our lives, you know."

"Oh. that's all right, for men; but there are other things in life for a girl like you, Miss Henders. You deserve something better than cows-and cowboys. You love music and books, and you can't deny that you like to talk about them. You belong East-you belong back in Boston."

"We're going back, not to Boston, but to New York, after the round-up-Dad and I," she told him.

"No! really? How funny! I've got to go back too. Maybe we could all go together."

"That would be fine," she agreed.

"Wouldn't you like to stay back there?" he asked, almost excitedly, and then quite unexpectedly he took her hand. "Miss Henders!" he exclaimed.

"Diana! Wouldn't you like to stay there always? I'd make a home for you there-I'd make you happy-I love you, Diana. We could be married before we left. Wouldn't it be wonderful, going back there together on our honeymoon! And then to Europe! We could travel everywhere. Money would mean nothing. I don't have to tell you how rich we are."

"No," she replied, "I have heard your father mention it," and withdrew her hand from his.

He did not seem to notice the allusion to his father's boastfulness.

"Tell me that you love me," he insisted. "Tell me that you will marry me."

"But I don't know that I do love you," she replied. "Why, I scarcely know you, and you certainly don't know me well enough to know that you would want to live with me all the rest of your life."

"Oh, yes, I do!" he exclaimed. "If there was only some way to prove it. Words are so futile-they cannot express my love, Diana. Why, I worship you. There is no sacrifice that I would not willingly and gladly make for you or yours. I would die for you, dear girl, and thank God for the chance!"

"But I don't want you to die for me. I want you to go to bed and give me a chance to think. I have never been in love. Possibly I love you and do not know it. There is no need for haste anyway. I will give you my answer before I go East. Now run

along, like a good boy."

"But tell me, darling, that I may hope," he begged.

"You will do that anyway, if you love me," she told him, laughingly, as she turned and entered her tent. "Good night!"

Chapter VI--THE RENEGADES

THE next morning Colby took Wainright with him. Deep in the foreman's heart was a determination to ride hard over the roughest country he could find and if the "dude" got killed it wouldn't be Colby's fault-nor would it be Colby's fault if he didn't. But the foreman's plans were upset at the last moment by Elias Henders and Diana, who elected to accompany him.

"You and Wainright ride ahead, Hal," directed Henders, "and Di and I will trail along behind."

The foreman nodded silently and put spurs to his pony, and in silence Wainright loped at his side. The arrangement suited neither and each was busy concocting schemes whereby the other might be paired off with Elias Henders, though under ordinary circumstances either would have been highly elated at the prospect of spending a whole day in company with "the old man."

"Glorious morning!" ejaculated Henders to his daughter. "God may have forgotten Arizona in some

respects, but he certainly remembered to give her the most wonderful mornings in the world."

"Don't they fill one with the most exquisite sensations!" she exclaimed.

"Almost as intoxicating as wine," he agreed, and then: "By the way, Bull's been doing fine, hasn't he? I don't believe he's touched a drop since that night at Gum's."

"He's working hard, too," said the girl.

"He always did that-he's the best cow-hand I ever saw and a hog for work. There isn't a man in seven counties that can commence to touch him when it comes to riding, roping, parting, calling brands, judging ages or weights, or handling cattle with judgment under any conditions, nor one that knows the range within a hundred miles like he does. Why, the day before yesterday he had to give a fellow from the Red Butte country some pointers about the fellow's own range-Bull knew it better than he did."

"He's wonderful," said Diana. "I love to see him in the saddle, and anywhere in the cow-country he fits into the picture. I'm always proud that Bull is one of our men. Oh, I hope he don't ever drink again."

Elias Henders shook his head. "I'm afraid he'll never quit," he said. "A man's got to have something to quit for, and Bull has no incentive to stop-only just his job. and when did a little thing like a job

keep a man from drinking, especially the best cow-hand in the territory? There isn't an outfit anywhere that wouldn't hire him, drunk or sober. He don't seem to be hanging around you much lately, Di, and I'm glad of that. I'd hate to see you interested in a man like Bull. I don't take much to garrulous people, but neither do I want 'em as tight-mouthed as Bull. I'm afraid he's got something to hide that makes him afraid to talk for fear he'll let it out."

"What do you suppose happened last night, Dad?" asked Diana, suddenly.

"I don't know, I'm sure-what?" he asked.

"Jefferson Wainright proposed to me."

"No! What did you tell him?"

"What should I have told him?"

"That depends upon how much or little you think of him," replied her father.

"Would you like him for a son-in-law?"

"If you choose him, I shall like him-I should like the Devil if you chose to marry him."

"Well, he isn't quite as bad as all that, is he?" she cried, laughing.

"I didn't mean it that way. He seems to be a nice boy. He could give you everything and he could

take you among the sort of people that you belong among, and you wouldn't have to be ashamed of him, but I don't like his father."

"His father is something of an embarrassment," she assented.

"Do you love the boy, Di?" he asked.

"I don't know, and I told him so. He wants me to marry him before we go East, and all go together."

"What a lovely idea-taking your fathers on a honeymoon! You can count me out, and anyway if some other man is going to take you East I won't have to go at all."

"Well, I haven't gone with him, yet. I told him I'd give him his answer before we left."

"That would be a good idea-if he is going-he might want a few minutes' notice," he bantered, "but how about Hal? I thought you leaned a little in that direction."

"I do," laughed the girl. "When I'm with one I like that one best, and when I'm with the other I like him."

"And when they are both with you at the same time-possibly you can find your answer there."

"I have thought of that, because then I always compare the two-and Hal always suffers by the

comparison. That is when we are sitting talking-but when they are in the saddle it is the other way around."

"People can't spend their married lives in the saddle," he reminded her.

She sighed. "I am terribly perplexed. Of only one thing am I sure and that is that I shall marry either Hal Colby or Jefferson Wainright."

"Or someone else," he suggested.

"No! no one else," she stated emphatically.

It was past noon and they had turned back, gathering up the little bunches of cattle that they had driven down out of canyon and coulee onto the flat below. Elias Henders and Diana were riding quite apart from the foreman and Wainright when Henders turned back to ride to the summit of a low elevation for a final survey of the country for any straggling bunch that might have escaped their notice. Diana was a few yards in rear of him as he drew rein on top of the hillock. It was very quiet. The cattle were at a distance from them, moving slowly off down the valley. There was only the sound of her horse's unshod hoofs in the soft dirt and the subdued noise of a well-worn saddle as she urged her mount toward the side of her father.

Suddenly there was the crack of a rifle and Elias Henders' horse dropped in its tracks. Henders fell clear and whipped out his revolver.

"Get out of here, Di!" he called to the girl. "It's Indians. You've got time if you keep behind this butte and ride like Hell."

She turned and looked toward the two men a quarter of a mile away-Colby and Wainright. She saw them wheel their horses and look toward the point from which the shot had come and from their position she guessed that they could see the Indians, though she could not.

Then she saw Hal Colby put spurs and quirt to his mount until the wiry beast fairly flew over the ground toward her. Wainright hesitated, looked toward the Indians and then back down the valley in the direction of the camp fifteen miles away. Suddenly he wheeled his horse and dashed off.

To her mind flashed the impassioned words that he had poured into her ears only the night before: "I worship you. There is no sacrifice that I would not willingly and gladly make for you or yours. I would die for you, dear girl, and thank God for the chance!"

Her lip curled and her eyes shot a single scornful glance in the direction of the retreating figure of Jefferson Wainright before she turned them back toward Colby. How magnificent he was! He had drawn one of his six-guns and was riding, not for the hill, but straight for the Indians, and just as he passed out of her sight behind the hillock he opened fire. She could hear the crack of his gun, and the

fire. She could hear the crack of his gun mingling with those of the Indians, and then her father, pausing in his fire, turned to her again.

"My God, Di, haven't you gone?" he cried. "Hurry! There is time yet. Hal has got 'em on the run now, but they'll be back again. There must be a dozen of them. Ride back to camp for help."

"Mr. Wainright has already gone, Dad," she told him. "We have always been together, all my life, Dad, and it don't take two to get help. We need all the guns here we can get until the boys come," and she dismounted and crawled to his side, despite his protests.

Over the crest of the hill she could see Colby galloping toward them, while the Indians, a quarter of a mile beyond him, were just circling back in pursuit. In the foreground a dead Indian lay sprawled in the open. To the right a riderless pony was loping away to join its fellows.

Diana lay a few feet from her father, both in readiness to cover Colby's retreat when the Indians came within revolver range. '

"Wish we had a couple of rifles," remarked Elias Henders. "If I had a thirty-thirty I could hold 'em off alone until the boys get here."

"We ought to be able to hold out for an hour, Dad. The boys should be here in that time."

"We'll do the best we can, but, Di-" he paused, a little catch in his voice-"don't let them get you, dear. The boys might not get here in time.

"Wainright is not much of a rider-he won't make the time that one of our boys would. They'd kill the horse, but they'd get there. And then there may not be anyone in camp but the cook that time of day-that's what I'm really most. afraid of.

"We'll do the best we can. Likely as not we'll pull through; but if we don't, why, remember what I said, don't let 'em get you-save one shot. You understand?"

"I understand, Dad."

Colby, his horse stretched to quirt and spur, swung around to their side of the hill, threw his horse to its haunches as he reined in close to them and leaped from the saddle. Without a word he dragged the blowing, half-winded animal directly in front of them, raised his six-shooter to its forehead and shot it between the eyes.

Diana Henders voiced a little gasp of dismay, and then she saw the man turn toward her own pony; but she only covered her eyes with her palms and bit her lip to stifle a sob. A moment later there was a shot and the sound of a falling body.

"Crawl behind that cayuse of mine, Di," said Colby. He was tugging at the body of the girl's pony to drag it closer to the others, in order to form a

rude triangle with the other two dead horses. Henders rose to his knees and gave Colby a hand, while Di opened fire upon the approaching braves.

"Reckon we orter hold out here till the boys come," remarked the foreman.

He was cool and self-possessed-just as cool and self-possessed as Jefferson Wainright would have been in a Boston drawing-room. Even as she took careful aim at a half-naked, yelling buck, and missed him, Diana Henders' mind was considering this fact. She fired again and this time the buck ceased to yell, grasped his stomach with both hands and toppled headlong to the ground. Hal Colby might learn to be cool and self-possessed in a Boston drawing-room, but could Jefferson Wainright ever learn to be cool and self-possessed inside a yelling circle of painted savages thirsting for his life's blood?

The Indians were now riding a wide circle entirely about the hillock, firing as they rode. Naturally their aim was execrable, and the three were in danger only of a chance hit. After the warrior fell to Diana's bullet the circle widened to still greater proportions and a few minutes later the Indians withdrew out of effective revolver range and gathered in a compact group where the three on the hillock could see them gesticulating and talking excitedly.

"They're up to some new devilment," said Renders.

"I hope they don't charge from different directions

I hope they don't charge from different directions before the boys git here," remarked Colby. "If they do we might as well kiss ourselves good-bye. I wish you wasn't here, Di.

"Damn that white-livered dude's hide. Ef he hadn't turned tail you could have gone. You could ride rings about that slab-sided maverick, an' besides you'd have been safe. Look! They're separatin' now."

"Yes, they're riding to surround us again," said Diana.

"If they charge, Hal,- said Henders, "wait until they get close and then stand up and let them have it. Di, you lie as close to the ground as you can. Don't move. Just watch us, acid when you see we're both down you'll know it's all up and--you must do what I told you to."

Hal Colby looked at the beautiful girl at his side, and scowled, for he guessed without being told, what her father meant. "Damn that dude!" he muttered.

"Mebby I hadn't orter shot all the hosses," he said presently. "Mebby Di could have got away."

"No," Henders assured him. "You did just right, Hal. Di wouldn't go. I told her to, but she wouldn't. It was too late then anyway."

"I figgered it was too late," said Colby; "but mebbey

it wasn't. I wish I had that damn dude here."

"They're coming!" cried Diana.

From four sides the Indians were racing toward them, their savage cries breaking hideously the silence of the sun-parched valley. The three crouched, waiting. No word was spoken until the nearest of the red-skins was no more than twenty-five yards away.

Then: "Now!" said Henders, leaping to his feet. Colby was up simultaneously, firing as he rose. Diana Henders, far from lying close to the ground as she had been directed, was on her feet almost as quickly as the men.

"Get down, Di!" commanded her father, but her only reply was a shot that brought down a warrior's pony twenty paces from them.

Colby and Henders had each shot an Indian and there was another pony down in front of Colby. The renegades were close now and presented splendid targets for the three whites, all of whom were excellent revolver shots. At each report of their weapons a hit was scored.

Now a pony screamed and wheeled away, bearing its rider in headlong flight down the gentle declivity of the hillside; another stumbled and crumpled to the ground, sprawling its painted master in the dust; a warrior, wounded, veered to one side and raced off to safety; or, again, one slumped silently to

earth, never to charge again.

Two of the unhorsed warriors sprang into close quarters, clubbing their empty rifles. One was leaping toward Diana, the other for Colby. At the same instant Elias Henders lifted both hands above his head, his gun slipped from nerveless fingers, and he lunged forward across the body of his dead horse.

Colby put a shot through the stomach of the buck leaping upon him, then turned toward Diana. He saw the painted face of a tall chief just beyond Diana's; he saw the rifle swinging to brain her as she pulled the trigger of her Colt with the muzzle almost against the sweat-streaked body; there was no answering report, and then Colby, leaping between them, seized the upraised rifle and tore it from the hand of the red man.

The two clinched, the Indian reaching for his knife, while the white, who had emptied both guns and had no time to reload, strove to brain his antagonist with one of them. Struggling, they fell.

Diana Henders, reloading her own weapon, looked hurriedly about. The other warriors, momentarily dispersed, had rallied and were returning with wild, triumphant yells, for they saw that the battle was already theirs.

Elias Henders raised himself weakly on one elbow and looked about. Instantly his gaze took in the situation

"Di!" he cried, "my little girl. Quick! Don't wait! Shoot yourself before they get you."

"Not yet!" she cried, and turned toward the two men, the red and the white, battling at her feet. Stooping, she held the muzzle of her weapon close to the rolling, tossing men, waiting an opportunity to put a bullet in the chief when she could do so without endangering Colby.

From behind her the returning braves were approaching rapidly, the racing hoofs of their ponies pounding a dull tattoo on the powdery earth. They were almost upon her when Colby's fingers found the chief's throat and the latter's head was pushed momentarily away from that of the white man. It was the instant that Diana had awaited. She stepped in closer, there was the sound of a shot, and the renegade collapsed limply in Colby's grasp.

Simultaneously a wild yell arose from below them in the valley. The remaining Indians, almost upon them, were riding in a close mass from the opposite side. What could it be—more Indians?

Colby had hurled the dead chief aside and was on his feet beside the girl. They both looked in the direction of the new sound to see two horsemen racing madly toward them.

"It's Bull! It's Bull!" cried Diana Henders. "Bull and Texas Pete."

The ponies of the oncoming men were racing neck and neck. The riders were howling like demons. The Indians heard, paused in their charge and wheeled to one side-there were five of them left. The reinforcements were too much for them, and with a parting volley they galloped off.

But Bull and Texas Pete were of no mind to let them go so easily. For a mile or more they pursued them, until they realized that their already almost spent horses could not outdistance the mounts of the Indians. Then they turned and loped slowly back toward the three upon the hillock.

Instantly the immediate necessity of defense had passed Diana Henders kneeled beside her father and lifted his head in her arms. Colby stepped to the opposite side of the prostrate man to help her. Suddenly she looked up into his yes, an expression of horror in hers.

"Oh, Hal! Hal! he's gone!" she cried, and burying her face in her arms, burst into tears.

The man, unaccustomed to a woman's tears, or a sorrow such as this, was at a loss for words, yet almost mechanically his arms went about her and drew her close to him, so that she stood with her face buried in the hollow of his shoulder as Bull and Texas Pete rode up the hill and dismounted beside them. They took in the pitiful scene at a glance, but they saw more in it than the death of "the old man," whom they both loved-at least Bull did.

In the attitude of Diana and Colby he read the death knell of whatever faint hope he might have entertained of ultimate happiness. It was a hurt and bitter man that lifted the dead body of his employer in strong arms and laid it across the saddle of his horse.

"You ride Pete's hors, Miss," he said gently. "Colby, you walk ahead with her. Pete an' I'll come along with the. old man."

They all did as he bid without question. There was something about the man that demanded obedience even if he was no longer foreman. It was always that way with Bull. Wherever he was he was the leader. Even though men mistrusted, or disliked him, and many did, they involuntarily obeyed him. Possibly because he was a strong man who thought quickly and accurately and was almost invariably right in his decision-it was certainly not because a large proportion of them loved him, for they did not. There was that something lacking in Bull-that quality which attracted the love of his fellows.

After Diana and Colby had gone ahead Bull and Pete roped the body of Elias Henders securely to the saddle and presently the sorrowful little cortege took its slow way back toward camp.

Chapter VII--EXIT WAINRIGHT

A WEEK or ten days after Elias Henders' funeral

the Wainright buckboard drew into the Bar Y ranch yard and the Wainrights, senior and junior, alighted and approached the house. They found Diana in the office working on the books, which she had kept for her father when they were without a bookkeeper, which was the case at present.

She greeted them politely, but without marked cordiality. It was the first time that she had encountered either of them since her father's death, having refused to see the younger man on her return to the camp with Elias Hender's body.

"We been calc'latin' to drive ever for several days past, Miss Henders," said the elder man. "Thought mebby you might want some advice or suthin'. Anything we can do, we're at both at your service."

"That's very kind of you, indeed, I'm sure," replied the girl; "but really I have so many good friends here that I couldn't think of inconveniencing you. Everyone has been so kind and considerate."

"Well, they ain't no harm in offerin'," he continued. "Anything we can do, you know. If it's a little matter of money to tide you over till the estate's settled, why, just call on Jefferson Wainright-he's got a lot and he ain't stingy either."

"There is nothing, thank you," she said, with just the faintest tinge of asperity.

He rose slowly from his chair and shoved his fat

hands into his pockets.

"I reckon I'll walk around a bit," he said. "I calc'late that you young folks got suthin' to say to one another," and he winked ponderously at them as he waddled through the doorway.

There was a strained silence for several minutes after he left. Jefferson Wainright, Jr., finally, after clearing his throat two or three times, broke it.

"The governor means all right," he said. "We'd really like to be of service to you, and after the-the talk we had that last night before-before your father was killed-you know-why, I hoped I might have the right to help you, Diana."

She drew herself up very straight and stiff. "I think we had better forget that, Mr. Wainright," she said.

"But you promised me an answer," he insisted.

"After what happened I should think you would know what the answer must be without being subjected to the humiliation of being told in words."

"Do you mean that you are blaming me, too, like the men did, for going for help. You would all have been killed if I hadn't. I think I did just the sensible thing," he concluded, half-defiantly.

"Yes, I suppose so," she replied icily, "and Hal Colby did a very silly thing staying and risking his life for Dad and me."

"I think you're mighty unfair, Diana," he insisted, "and the way it turned out only goes to prove that I was right. I met Bull and that Texas person less than halfway to camp and got them there in time."

"If they had been as sensible as you they would have gone on to camp for more reinforcements, as you did, but like most of our boys out here, Mr. Wainright, they haven't much sense and so they nearly rode their horses down to get to us-only two of them, remember, after you had told them that we were surrounded by a hundred Indians."

"Oh, pshaw, I think you might be reasonable and make some allowance for a fellow," he begged. "I'll admit I was a little excited and maybe I did do the wrong thing, but it's all new to me out here. I'd never seen a wild Indian before and I thought I was doing right to go for help."

"Can't you forgive me, Diana, and give me another chance? If you'll marry me I'll take you away from this God-forsaken country back where there are no Indians."

"Mr. Wainright, I have no wish to offend you, but you might as well know once for all that if you were the last man on earth I would never marry you-I could not marry such a coward, and you are a coward. You would be just as much of a coward back East if danger threatened. Some of our boys are from the East-Hal Colby was born in Vermont-and the day that you ran away was his first

experience, too, with hostile Indians, and if you want another reason why I couldn't marry you-the first and biggest reason-I'll give it to you."

Her voice was low and level, like her father's had been on the rare occasions that he had been moved by anger, but the tone was keen-edged and cutting. "I feel now, and I shall always feel as long as I live, that had you remained instead of running away we might have held them off and Dad would not have been uselessly sacrificed."

She had risen while, she spoke, and he rose too, standing silently for a moment after she had concluded. Then he turned and walked toward the door. At the threshold he paused and turned toward her.

"I hope you will never regret your decision," he said. The tone seemed to carry a threat.

"I assure you that I shall never. Good day, Mr. Wainright."

After he had gone the girl shuddered and sank down into a chair. She wished Hal Colby was there. She wanted someone to comfort her and to give her that sense of safety under masculine protection that her father's presence had always afforded.

Why couldn't all men be like Hal and Bull? When she thought of brave men she always thought of Bull too. How wonderful they had all been that

day-Hal and Bull and Pete. Rough, uncouth they often were; worn and soiled and careless their apparel; afraid of nothing, man, beast or the devil; risking their lives joyously; joking with death; and yet they had been as gentle as women when they took her back to camp and all during the long, terrible journey home, when one of the three had always been within call every minute of the days and nights.

Of the three Bull had surprised her most, for previously he had always seemed the hardest and most calloused, and possessing fewer of the finer sensibilities of sympathy and tenderness; but of them all he had been the most thoughtful and considerate. It had been he who had sent her ahead with Colby that she might not see them lash her father's body to the horse; it had been he who had covered all that remained of Elias Henders with the slickers from his saddle and Pete's that she might not be shocked by the sight of her father's body rocking from side to side with the swaying motion of the horse; and it was Bull who had ridden all night to far-away ranches and brought back two buckboards early the next morning to carry her Dad and her more comfortably on the homeward journey. He had spoken kindly to her in an altered, softened voice, and he had insisted that she eat and keep her strength when she had wanted to forget food.

But the funeral over she had seen nothing more of him for he had been sent back to the round-up to

ride with it for the last few remaining days, while Hal Colby remained at the ranch to help her to plan for the future and gather together the stray ends that are left flying when even the most methodical of masters releases his grip for the last time.

She sat musing after Wainright left the room, the clock upon the wall above her father's desk ticking as it had for years just as though this terrible thing had not happened just as though her father were still sitting in his accustomed chair, instead of lying out there in the sandy, desolate little graveyard above Hendersville, where the rocks that protected the scattered sleepers from the coyotes offered sanctuary to the lizard and the rattle-snake.

Her reverie was disturbed by the fall of heavy feet upon the veranda and she raised her eyes just as the elder Wainright entered the room. He was not smiling now, nor was his manner so suave as usual.

"We got to be goin' now, Miss Henders," he said brusquely; "but I wanted a mite of a word with you before we left. O' course, you don't know nothin' about it, but afore your father died we was negotiatin' a deal. He wanted to get out from under, now that the mine's runnin' out, an' I wanted to git a range on this side o' the mountains. We'd jest about got it all fixed up when this accident happened.

"Now here's what I wanted to say to you. Of course, the mine's no account, and the range's 'bout all fed off, and they ain't scarce enough water fer

the number o' stock I was calc'latin' to put on, but Jefferson Wainright's a man o' his word an' when I says to your father that I'd give him two hundred and fifty thousand dollars fer his holdin's I won't back down now, even if I don't think they be worth so much as that.

"I'll get all the papers ready so's ye won't have to go to no expense fer a lawyer, and then ye can have the money an' go back East to live like ye always wanted to, an' like yer paw was fixin' fer ye."

The deeper he got into the subject the faster he talked and the more he relapsed into the vernacular of his earlier days. Finally he paused. "What do ye say?" he concluded.

"The ranch is not for sale, Mr. Wainright," she replied.

He opened his little eyes and his big mouth simultaneously in surprise.

"What's thet-not for sale? Why, you must be crazy, child. You don't know what you're talkin' about."

"I know exactly what I am talking about," she told him. "Father talked this all over with me and showed me your offer of a million dollars for our holdings. The ranch is not for sale, for a million dollars or any other price, to you, Mr. Wainright, and be careful that you do not stumble over that stool as you go out."

The man's fat face became suddenly empurpled with rage and for a moment he was inarticulate as, backing toward the doorway, he sought for words adequately to express his outraged feelings. He was not humiliated-there are certain types of men whose thick skin serves them as an invulnerable armor against humiliation.

He was just plain mad-mad all the way through to think that he had been caught at his trickery, exposed and thwarted by a chit of a girl, and, like the type he represented naturally would be, he was mad at her rather than at himself. As he reached the doorway he found his voice.

"You'll be sorry for this! You'll be-sorry for this!" he cried, shaking a fist at her. "And, mark you, I'll get this property yet. Jefferson Wainright can buy and sell you twenty times over and he always gets what he goes after."

The figure of a tall man loomed suddenly behind him. Calloused and ungentle fingers seized him roughly by the collar of his coat. A low voice spoke softly in his ear.

"Don't you know better'n to shake your fist in a lady's face, you pot-bellied buzzard?" it inquired, and the elder Wainright was jerked unceremoniously through the doorway, whirled about and projected violently from the veranda, his speed simultaneously accelerated by the toe of a

high-heeled cowboy boot. "I reckon you'd better make yourself damned scarce around here," continued the low tones of the speaker.

Wainright scrambled to his feet and turned upon the owner of the voice. He shook both fists now and fairly danced up and down in his fury. "I'll get you!" he screamed. "I'll get you! Don't you know who I am-why, I could buy and sell you a hundred thousand times over-I'm Jefferson Wainright, I am. I'll get you-layin' your hands on me-you low down, thirty-five-dollar cowpuncher!"

"Vamoose!" said the man, "and do it pronto." He emphasized his injunction with a shot, the bullet kicking up a little spurt of dust between Wainright's feet.

The fat man started on a run for his buckboard which the younger Wainright had driven down to the corrals. The man on the veranda fired again, and again the dust rose about the fleeing feet of the terrified Easterner.

Diana Henders had come to the doorway where she stood leaning against the frame, smiling.

"Don't hurt him, Bull," she said.

The man cast a quick smile over his shoulder. "I ain't a-aimin' to hurt him," he said. "I'm just a-aimin' to eddicate him. Them corn-fed Easterners ain't got no eddication nohow. What they need is someone to lam 'em manners."

As he spoke he kept on firing at the fleeing Wainright and every shot kicked up a puff of dust close to the fat man's feet until he reached the corner of the bunk-house and disappeared behind it.

The shots had called out the cook and the few men who were about, with the result that a small yet highly appreciative audience witnessed Wainright's discomfiture. A part of it was Texas Pete, who rocked to and fro in unholy glee.

"By gollies! did you see him?" he yelled. "He never hit nothin' but the high spots. I'll bet he busted all the world's records between the office and the bunk-house. Why, he done it in nothin' flat, an' you could have played checkers on his coat-tails. He shore stepped high, wide an' handsome."

On the veranda of the ranch house Bull had shoved his gun back into its holster. The smile had left his face.

"I thought you were still out with the outfit, Bull," said the girl.

"We finished up last night," he told her, "and I come in ahead." He looked down at his feet in evident embarrassment. "I come in ahead for my time, Miss."

"Your time! Why, Bull, you're not goin' to quit?"

"I reckon I better," he replied. "I been aimin' to move on fer some spell."

The girl's eyes were wide, and almost noticeably moist, and there was a surprised, hurt look in them, that he caught as he chanced to glance up at her.

"You see, Miss," he hastened to explain, "things ain't been very pleasant for me here. I ain't complainin', but there are those that don't like me, an' I figgered I'd quit before I was let out. As long as your paw was alive it was different, an' I don't need to tell you that I'd be powerful proud to work for you always, if there wasn't no one else; but there is. I reckon you got a good man an' it will be pleasanter all around if I ain't here no more."

At the mere thought of his going a lump rose in Diana Henders' throat, and she realized how much she had come to depend on him just the mere fact that she had known Bull was around had given her a feeling of greater security-he had become in the nature of a habit and it was going to be hard to break the habit.

"Oh, Bull," she cried, "I can't let you go now-I can't spare both you and Dad at the same time. You're like a brother, Bull, and I need a brother mighty badly right now. You don't have to go, do you? You don't really want to?"

"No, Miss, I don't have to an' I don't want to-if you want me to stay."

"Then you will stay?"

He nodded. "But I reckon you'd better tell Colby," he said, "for I expect he's aimin' to give me my time."

"Oh, no, I'm sure he's not," she cried. "Hal likes you, Bull. He told me you were one of his best friends, and he was so sorry about your losing the job as foreman. He said he hated to take it."

Bull made no comment and whatever his thoughts his face did not betray them. Presently he jerked his head in the general direction of the corrals where the Wainrights, having hastily clambered into their buckboard, were preparing to depart.

"Say the word," he told her, "and I'll run them short sports so far outta the country they won't never find their way back."

"No," she replied, smiling; "let them go. They'll never come back here, I'm sure."

"I reckon the old gent figgers he ain't very popular round these diggins," said Bull, with the faintest trace of a smile; "but I don't know so much about how that young dude stands." He looked questioningly at Diana.

"About deuce high, Bull," she replied. "I saw enough of him to last me a couple of lifetimes the day the renegades jumped us."

"I reckoned as much, Miss, knowin' you as I do. Scenery an' the gift o' gab ain't everything, but sometimes they fool wimmen folks-even the brightest of'em."

"He was awfully good company," she admitted.

"When they warn't no Injuns around," Bull completed the sentence for her. "The old feller seemed all het up over somethin' about the time I happened along. I heered him say he was set on gettin' this property. Is that what they come over fer?"

"Yes. He offered me a quarter of what he'd offered Dad for it, and his offer to Dad was only about twenty per cent of what it's worth. You see, Bull, what they want is the mine. They are just using the range and the cattle as an excuse to get hold of the mine because they think we don't know the real value of the diggings; but Dad did know. There's another vein there that has never been tapped that is richer than the old one. Dad knew about it, and somehow Wainright learned of it too."

"The old skunk!" muttered Bull.

The Wainrights were driving out of the ranch yard and heading toward Hendersville. The older man was still breathing hard and swearing to himself. The younger was silent and glum. They were going to town for dinner before starting on the long drive back to their ranch. Approaching them along the

trail at a little distance ahead was a horseman. Young Wainright recognized the rider first.

"That's Colby," he said. "He hasn't any use for that fellow Bull. They are both stuck on the girl. It might not be a bad plan to cultivate him-if you want to get even with Bull."

As they came nearer it appeared evident that Colby was going by them with nothing more than a nod. He did not like either of them-especially the younger; but when they drew rein and the older man called to him he turned about and rode up to the side of the vehicle.

"You're still foreman here, ain't ye?" asked Wainright senior.

Colby nodded. "Why?" he inquired.

"Well, I jest wanted to tell ye that some of your men ain't got a very pleasant way of treatin' neighbors."

"How's that?"

"Well, I was jest a-leavin' after a social call when one of yer men starts shootin' at me. Thet ain't no way to treat friends an' neighbors. Suppose we was to shoot up your men when they came over our way?"

"Who was it?" demanded Colby.

"Bull," said the younger Wainright. "I suppose he was drunk again, though. They say he always goes to shooting whenever he gets drunk. When we left he was up at the house making love to Miss Henders," he added. "I shouldn't think she'd feel safe with a fellow like that around."

Colby scowled. "Thanks fer tellin' me," he said. "I reckon I'll have to fix that feller. He's gettin' too damn fresh."

"Well, I thought ye'd orter know," said Wainright senior. "Well, so long, an' if ye ever git over our way drop in."

"Giddap!" said Jefferson Wainright, Jr., and the two rolled away through the deep dust of the parched road.

Colby rode on at a brisk gallop and as he swung from his saddle cast a glance in the direction of the house where he saw Bull just descending the steps from the veranda where Diana Henders stood. Colby bit his lip and the frown on his face became deeper.

Dragging saddle and bridle from his pony he turned the animal into the corral with a final slap on the rump-a none too gentle slap which reflected the state of his feelings-then he headed straight for the bunk-house which he reached just in time to intercept Bull at the entrance.

"Look here, Bull," said Colby without any

preamble, "this business of drinkin' an' shootin' things up has gone about far enough. I ain't a-goin' to have it around here no more. I reckon you'd better ask fer your time."

"All right," said Bull, "you go an' git it fer me while I'm packin' my war-bag."

Colby, rather surprised and at the same time relieved that Bull took the matter so philosophically, started for the office, while the latter entered the bunk-house, where Shorty, Texas Pete and a couple of others who had overhead the conversation outside the door looked up questioningly.

"By gollies!" exclaimed Texas Pete, "I'm a-goin' to quit. I'm a-goin' after my time right now, pronto," and he arose and started for the doorway.

"Wait a minute, old hoss," advised Bull. "I ain't went yet.

"But didn't Colby jest let you out?" inquired Pete.

"He might change his mind," explained Bull.

Up at the house Colby was entering the office. "Hello, Di!" he cried. "Got your check-book handy?"

"Yes, why?"

"Bull's quittin'."

"Quitting? Why, he just promised me that he'd stay on. I don't understand."

"He just promised you that he'd stay on! You mean you asked him to?"

"Yes," replied Diana. "He came up here to quit. Said he thought he wasn't wanted any more, and I made him promise he wouldn't leave. I tell you, Hal, we could never replace him. Are you sure he was in earnest about quitting? Send him up here and I'll make him stay."

"Well, like as not I was mistaken," said Colby. "I reckon Bull was jest a-kiddin'. I'll ask him again and if he is plumb set on leavin' I'll send him up."

When he entered the bunk-house a few minutes later he nodded at Bull. "You kin stay on, if you want to," he said; "I've changed my mind."

Bull winked at Texas Pete who was vainly endeavoring to remember another verse of the seemingly endless self-glorification of the bad hombre.

"By gollies!" he exclaimed, "I believe I got another:

"He twirls two big guns an' he shoots out a light;
The fellows a-drinkin' there ducks out o' sight;
He shoots through a bottle thet stands on the bar;
An shoots the of ashes plumb off my seegar."

"But it seems like I'd left out somethin' thet orter a-

gone before."

"Nobody'd git sore if you left it all out," Shorty assured him.

"The trouble with you uneddicated cowpunchers," Texas Pete told him, "is thet you are too all-fired ignorant to appreciate my efforts to elivate you-all by means of good poetry. It shore is hell to be the only lit'ry gent in a bunch of rough-necks.

"Come, set up the bottles, you gol darned galoot,' Says he to the boss, 'Fore I opens yore snoot With one o' these yere little babies o' mine,' An' shoots out the no in the no credit sign."

Chapter VIII--"YOU DON'T DARE!"

THE stage lurched down the steep and tortuous gradient of Hell's Bend Pass, bumped through the rutty gap at the bottom and swung onto the left fork just beyond. The right fork was the regular stage route to Hendersville. The left hand road led to town, too, but over Bar Y property and past the home ranch.

The driver never came this way unless he had passengers, express or important messages for the ranch, though the distance was no greater and the road usually in better repair. Today he had a telegram for Diana Henders.

There was a brief pause as he drew up his sweating team in the road before the ranch house, yelled to attract the attention of a ranch-hand working about the corrals, tossed the envelope into the road and then, with a crack of his long whip, was off again at a run, leaving billowing clouds of powdery dust in his wake.

The man working in the corrals walked leisurely into the road, picked up the envelope and, after scrutinizing the superscription and deciphering it laboriously, carried the message to the office, where Diana Henders was working over the books.

"Telegram for ye, Miss," announced the man, crossing the room to hand it to her.

She thanked him and laid the envelope on the desk beside her as she completed an interrupted footing. The arrival of telegrams was no uncommon occurrence even on that far-away ranch, and as they always pertained to business they caused Diana no flurry of excitement. Buyers often wired, while Uncle John Manill used the comparatively new telegraph facilities upon the slightest pretext.

The footing finally checked to her satisfaction, Diana picked up the envelope, opened it and drew forth the message. At first she glanced at it casually, then she read it over again with knit brows as though unable fully to grasp the purport of its contents. Finally she sat staring at it with wide, strained eyes, until, apparently crushed, she

lowered her head upon her arms and broke into sobs, for this is what she had read:

MISS DIANA HENDERS, BAR Y RANCH,
HENDERSVILLE. VIA ALDEA, ARIZONA.
Mr. Manill died suddenly last night. Miss Manill and
I leave for ranch soon as possible after funeral.
MAURICE B. CORSON.

For a long time Diana Henders sat with her face buried in her arms. Gradually her sobs subsided as she gained control of herself. Stunning though the effect of this new blow was, yet she grasped enough of what it meant to her to be almost crushed by it. Though she had not seen her Uncle John Manill since childhood, he had, nevertheless, constituted a very real and potent force in her existence. Her mother had adored him, her only brother, and Elias Henders had never ceased to proclaim him as the finest type of honorable gentleman that nature might produce. His eastern connections, his reputation for integrity and his fine business acumen had all been potent factors in the success of the Henders and Manill partnership.

With the death of her father the girl had felt keenly only her personal loss—for Uncle John Manill loomed as a Rock of Gibraltar to protect her in all matters of business; but now she was absolutely alone.

There was no one to whom she might turn for counsel or advice now that these two were gone. Hal Colby, she realized keenly, was at best only a

good cowman-in matters requiring executive ability or large financial experience he was untried.

Of Corson, Manill's attorney, she knew nothing, but she was reasonably sure that even though he proved honest and possessed of an excellent understanding of matters pertaining to the eastern office, he would not be competent to direct the affairs of ranch and mine at the sources of production.

That she might have carried on herself under the guidance of John Manill she had never doubted, since she could always have turned to him for advice in matters of moment where she was doubtful of her own judgment; but without him she questioned her ability to direct the destinies of this great business with all its numerous ramifications.

Suddenly she arose and replaced the books in the office safe, dabbed at her tear-dimmed eyes with her handkerchief and, putting on her sombrero, walked from the office, adjusting her wavy hair beneath the stiff band of her heavy hat. Straight toward the corrals she made her way. She would saddle Captain and ride out into the sunshine and the fresh air where, of all other places, she knew she might find surcease of sorrow and an opportunity to think out her problems more clearly. As she entered the corral Hal Colby came running up from the bunk-house. He had seen her pass and followed her.

"Ridin', Di?" he asked.

She nodded affirmatively. She was not sure that she wanted company-not even that of Hal Colby-today when she desired to be alone with her grief.

"You weren't goin' alone, were you? You know it ain't safe, Di. Your dad wouldn't have let you an' I certainly won't."

She made no reply. She knew that he was right. It was not safe for her to ride alone, but today she felt that she did not care what happened to her. Fate had been cruel-there was little more that it could do to harm her.

In a way she half resented Hal's new air of proprietorship, and yet there was something about it that carried a suggestion of relief from responsibility. Here there was at least someone who cared-someone upon whose broad shoulders she might shift a portion of her burden, and so she did not follow her first impulse to send him back.

Together they rode from the corral, turning down the road toward town and neither spoke for several minutes, after the manner of people accustomed to being much together in the saddle. The man, as was usual with him when they rode, watched her profile as a lover of art might gloat over a beautiful portrait, and as he looked at her he realized the change that had come over her face and noted the reddened lids.

"What's the matter, Di?" he asked presently. "You look like you'd been cryin'. What's happened?"

"I just got a telegram from New York, Hal," she replied. "Uncle John is dead-he died night before last. The stage just brought the message in from Aldea."

"Shucks," he said, at a loss for the proper words, and then, "that's shore too bad, Di."

"It leaves me all alone, now, Hal," she continued, "and I don't know what I'm going to do."

"You ain't all alone, Di. There ain't anything I wouldn't do for you. You know I love you, Di. Won't you marry me? It would make it easier all around for you if we was married. There's them that's always tryin' to take advantage of a girl or a woman what's left alone, but if you got a husband you got someone to look out for you an' your rights. I got a little money saved up."

"I have plenty of money, Hal."

"I know it. I wish you didn't have none. It makes me feel like you thought that was what I was after, but it ain't. Won't you, Di? Together we could run the ranch just like your dad was here."

"I don't know, Hal. I don't know what to do. I think I love you, but I don't know. I don't even know that I know what love is."

"You'd learn to love me," he told her, "and you wouldn't have to worry no more. I'd look after everything. Say yes, won't you?"

The temptation was great-greater even than the man himself realized-to have a place to lay her tired head, to have a strong man to carry the burden and the responsibilities for her, to have the arm of love about her as it had been all her life until her father had been taken away. She looked up at him with a faint smile.

"I won't say yes-yet," she said. "Wait a while, Hal-wait until after Mr. Corson and my cousin come and we see how things are going to turn out, and then-then I think that I shall say yes."

He leaned toward her impulsively and put an arm about her, drawing her toward him with the evident intention of kissing her, but she pushed him away.

"Not yet, Hal," she told him; "wait until I have said yes."

A week later a group of boarders were lounging on the veranda of The Donovan House in Hendersville. It was almost supper time of a stage day and the stage had not yet arrived. Mack Harber, whose wound had given more trouble than the doctor had expected, was still there convalescing, and Mary Donovan was, as usual, standing in the doorway joining in the gossip and the banter.

"Bill ain't niver late 'less somethin's wrong," said Mrs. Donovan.

"Like as not he's been held up again," suggested Mack.

"I'd like to be sheriff o' this yere county fer 'bout a week," stated Wildcat Bob.

"Sure, an' phawt would ye be after doin'?" inquired Mary Donovan, acidly.

Wildcat Bob subsided, mumbling in his stained beard. For the moment he had forgotten that Mrs. Donovan was among those present.

"Here they come!" announced Mack.

With the clank of chain, the creaking of springs, and the rapid pounding of galloping hoofs the stage swung into the single street of Hendersville in a cloud of dust and with a final shrieking of protesting brakes pulled up before The Donovan House.

"Where's Gum Smith?" demanded Bill Gatlin from the driver's seat.

"Dunno. Held up agin?" asked one of the loungers.

"Yes," snapped Gatlin.

Mack Harber had risen from his chair and advanced to the edge of the veranda.

"The Black Coyote?" he asked.

Gatlin nodded. "Where's thet damn sheriff?" he demanded again.

"He ain't here an' he wouldn't be no good if he was," replied Wildcat Bob.

"We don't need no sheriff fer what we oughter do," announced Mack Harber, angrily.

"How's thet?" asked Wildcat.

"You don't need no sheriff fer a necktie party," said Mack, grimly.

"No, but you gotta get yer man fust."

"Thet's plumb easy."

"How come?" inquired Wildcat.

"We all know who The Black Coyote is," stated Mack. "All we gotta do is get a rope an' go get him. " 'Meanin' get who?" insisted the little old man.

"Why, gosh all hemlock! you know as well as I do thet it's Bull," replied Mack.

"I dunno nothin' o' the kind, young feller," said Wildcat Bob, "ner neither do you. Ef ye got proof of what ye say I'm with ye. Ef ye ain't got proof I'm ag'in ye."

"Don't Bull always wear a black silk

handkerchief?" demanded Mack. "Well, so does The Black Coyote, an' they both got scars on their chins. There ain't no doubt of it."

"So ye want to string up Bull 'cause he wears a black bandana and a scar, eh? Well, ye ain't goin' to do nothin' o' the kind while of Wildcat Bob can fan a gun. Git proof on him an' I'll be the fust to put a rope 'round his neck, but ye got to git more proof than a black handkerchief."

"Shure an' fer onct yer right, ye ould blatherskite," commended Mary Donovan. "Be after comin' to yer suppers now the all of yese an' fergit stringin' up dacent young min like Bull. Shure an' I don't belave he iver hild up nothin' at all, at all. He's that nice to me whinever he's here, wid his Mrs. Donovan, mum, this an' his Mrs. Donovan, mum, that, an' a-fetchin' wood fer me, which the loikes o' none o' yese iver did. The viry idea ov him bein' The Black Coyote-gon on wid ye!"

"Well, we all know that Gregorio's one of them, anyway-we might string him up," insisted Mack.

"We don't know that neither," contradicted Wildcat; "but when it comes to stringin' up Gregorio or any other greaser I'm with ye. Go out an' git him,

Mack, an' I'll help ye string him up."

A general grin ran around the table, for of all the known bad-men in the country the Mexican,

Gregorio, was by far the worst. To have gone out looking for him and to have found him would have been equivalent to suicide for most men, and though there were many men in the county who would not have hesitated had necessity demanded, the fact remained that his hiding place was unknown and that that fact alone would have rendered an attempt to get him a failure.

"Thar's only one way to git them, sonny," continued Wildcat Bob, "an' thet is to put a man on the stage with the bullion, 'stid o' a kid."

Mack flushed. "You was there when they got me," he fired back. "You was there with two big six-guns an' what did you do-eh? What did you do?"

"I wasn't hired to guard no bullion, an' I wasn't sittin' on the box with no sawed-off shotgun 'crost my knees, neither. I was a-ridin' inside with a lady. What could I a-done?" He looked around at the others at the table for vindication.

"Ye couldn't done nothin' ye,*" said Mary Donovan, "widout a quart o' barbed-wire inside ye an' some poor innocent tenderfoot to shoot the heels offen him."

Wildcat Bob fidgeted uneasily and applied himself to his supper, pouring his tea into his saucer, blowing noisily upon it to cool it, and then sucking it through his whiskers with an accompanying sound not unlike snoring; but later he was both mollified and surprised by a second, generous helping of

dessert.

When word of the latest holdup reached the Bar Y ranch it caused the usual flurry of profanity and speculation. It was brought by a belated puncher who had ridden in from the West ranch by way of Hendersville. The men were gathered at the evening meal and of a sudden a silence fell upon them as they realized, apparently simultaneously and for the first time, that there was a single absentee. The meal progressed in almost utter silence then until they had reached the pudding, when Bull walked in, dark and taciturn, and with the brief nod that was his usual greeting to his fellows. The meal continued in silence for a few minutes until the men who had finished began pushing back their plates preparatory to rising.

"I reckon you know the stage was held up again, Bull, an' the bullion stolen," remarked Hal Colby, selecting a toothpick from the glassful on the table.

"How should I know it?" asked Bull. "Ain't I ben up Sinkhole Canyon all day? I ain't seen no one since I left the ranch this morning."

"Well, it was," said Colby. "The same two slick gents done it, too."

"Did they git much?" asked Bull.

"It was a big shipment," said Colby. "It always is. They don't never touch nothin' else an' they seem to know when we're shippin' more'n ordinary. Looks

know when we're shipping more ordinary. Looks suspicious."

"Did you just discover that?" inquired Bull.

"No, I discovered it a long time ago, an' it may help me to find out who's doin' it."

"Well, I wish you luck," and Bull resumed his meal.

Colby, having finished, rose from the table and made his way to the house. In the cozy sitting room he found Diana at the piano, her fingers moving dreamily over the ivory keys.

"Some more bad news, Di," he announced.

She turned wearily toward him. "What now?"

"The Black Coyote again-he got the bullion shipment."

"Was anyone hurt?"

"No," he assured her.

"I am glad of that. The gold is nothing-I would rather lose it all than have one of the boys killed. I have told them all, just as Dad did, to take no chances. If they could get him without danger to themselves I should be glad, but I could not bear to have one of our boys hurt for all the gold in the mine."

"I think The Black Coyote knows that," he said,

"and that's what makes him so all-fired nervy. He's one of our own men, Di-can't you see it? He knows when the shipments are big an' don't never touch a little one, an' he knows your Dad's orders about not takin' no chances.

"I've hated to think it, but there ain't no other two ways about it-it's one o' our men-an' I wouldn't have to walk around the world to put my finger on him, neither."

"I don't believe it!" she cried. "I don't believe that one of my men would do it."

"You don't want to believe it, that's all. You know just as well as I do who's doin' it, down in the bottom of your heart. I don't like to believe it no more'n you do, Di; but I ain't blind an' I hate to see you bein' made a fool of an' robbed into the bargain. I don't believe you'd believe it, though, if I caught him in the act."

"I think I know whom you suspect, Hal," she replied, "but I am sure you are wrong."

"Will you give me a chance to prove it?"

"How?"

"Send him up to the mine to guard the bullion until Mack gits well an' then keep Mack off the job fer a month," he explained. "I'll bet my shirt thet either there ain't no holdups fer a month or else they's only one man pulls 'em off instead o' two. Will you do

it?"

"It isn't fair. I don't even suspect him."

"Everybody else does an' thet makes it fair fer it gives him a chance to prove it if he ain't guilty."

"It wouldn't prove anything, except that there were no holdups while he was on duty."

"It would prove something to my mind if they started up again pretty soon after he was taken off the job," he retorted.

"Well-it might, but I don't think I'd ever believe it of him unless I saw him with my own eyes."

"Pshaw! the trouble with you is you're soft on him- you don't care if your gold is stole if he gits it."

She drew herself to her full height. "I do not care to discuss the matter further," she said. "Good night!"

He grabbed his hat viciously from the piano and stamped toward the doorway. There he turned about and confronted her again for a parting shot before he strode out into the night.

"You don't dare try it!" he flung at her. "You don't dare!"

After he had gone she sat biting her lip half in anger and half in mortification, but after the brief tempest

of emotion had subsided she commenced to question her own motives impartially. Was she afraid? Was it true that she did not dare? And long after she had gone to bed, and sleep would not come, she continued thus to catechize herself.

As Hal Colby burst into the bunk-house and slammed the door behind him the sudden draft thus created nearly extinguished the single lamp that burned upon an improvised table at which four men sat at poker. Bull and Shorty, Texas Pete and one called Idaho sat in the game.

"I raise you ten dollars," remarked Idaho, softly, as the lamp resumed functioning after emitting a thin, protesting spiral of black soot.

"I see that an' raise you my pile," said Bull, shoving several small stacks of silver toward the center of the table.

"How much you got there?" inquired Idaho, the others having dropped out.

Bull counted. "There's your ten," he said, "an' here's ten, fifteen, twenty-five-" He continued counting in a monotone. "Ninety-six," he announced. "I raise you ninety-six dollars, Idaho.

"I ain't got ninety-six dollars," said Idaho. "I only got eight."

"You got a saddle, ain't you?" inquired Bull, sweetly.

"An' a shirt," suggested Texas Pete.

"My saddle's worth three hundred an' fifty dollars if it's worth a cent," proclaimed Idaho.

"No one ain't never said it was worth a cent," Shorty reminded him.

"I'll cover it an' call you," announced Bull. "I don't want your shirt, Idaho, it's full o' holes."

"What are you coverin' it with?" asked Idaho. "I don't see nothin'."

Bull rose from the table. "Wait a second," he said, and stepped to his blankets where he rummaged for a moment in his war-bag. When he returned to the table he tossed a small buckskin bag among his silver.

"They's five hundred dollars' worth of dust in that," he said. "If you win we kin weigh out what's comin' to you over at the office tomorrow mornin'."

Hal Colby looked on-an interested spectator. The others fell silent. Texas Pete knit his brows in perplexity.

"Let's see it," demanded Idaho.

Bull picked up the bag, opened it and poured a stream of yellow particles into his palm. "Satisfied?" he inquired.

Idaho nodded.

"What you got?" demanded Bull.

Idaho laid four kings on the table, smiling broadly.

"Four aces," said Bull, and raked in the pot.

"Why didn't you raise him?" demanded Shorty.

"I just told you I didn't want his shirt," said Bull, "an' I don't want your saddle, neither, kid. I'll keep the money-it ain't good fer kids like you to have too much money-but you keep the saddle."

"I'm goin' to turn in," said Shorty, pushing back and rising.

"You'd all better turn in an' give someone else a chance to sleep," said the foreman. "What with your damn game an' Pete's singin' a feller ain't got no more chance to sleep around here than a jackrabbit. Why don't you fellers crawl in?"

"Crawl in! Crawl in!" exclaimed Texas Pete. "Crawl in! Crawl out! By gollies, I got another verse!

"The boss he crawls out then, all shaky an' white,

From under the bar where he's ben sittin' tight.

'Now set out the pizen right pronto, you coot,'

The stranger remarks, 'Or I shore starts to shoot,
I only ben practicin' so far,' says he;
'A bar-keep er two don't mean nothin' to me.
Most allus I has one fer breakfast each day-
I don't mean no harm-it's jest only my way.'"

Chapter IX--LILLIAN-MANILL

"You sent fer me, Miss?" asked Bull, as he stepped into the office the following morning, his hat in his hand, his chaps loose-buckled about his trim hips, his two big six-guns a trifle forward against the need for quick action, the black silk handkerchief falling over the blue shirt that stretched to his deep chest, and his thick, black hair pushed back in -an unconscious, half pompadour.

From silver-mounted spurs to heavy hat band he was typical of the West of his day. There was no item of his clothing or equipment the possession of which was not prompted by utilitarian considerations. There was ornamentation, but it was obviously secondary to the strict needs of his calling. Nothing that he wore was shabby, yet it all showed use to an extent that made each article seem a part of the man, as though he had been molded into them. Nothing protruded with stiff awkwardness-even the heavy guns appeared to fit into accustomed hollows and became a part of the

man.

The girl, swinging about in her chair to face him, felt a suggestion of stricture in her throat, and she felt mean and small and contemptible as she looked into the eyes of the man she knew loved her and contemplated the thing she was about to do; yet she did not hesitate now that she had, after a night of sleepless deliberation, committed herself to it.

"Yes, I sent for you, Bull," she replied. "The stage was held up again yesterday as you know. Mack won't be fit for work again for a long time and I've got to have someone to guard the bullion shipments-the fellow who came down with it yesterday has quit. He said he was too young to commit suicide."

"Yes'm" said Bull.

"I don't want you to take any chances, Bull-I would rather lose the gold than have-you hurt."

"I won't get hurt, Miss."

"You don't mind doing it?" she asked.

"O' course I'm a puncher," he said; "but I don't mind doin' it-not fer you. I told you once thet I'd do anything fer you, Miss, an' I wasn't jest talkin' through my hat."

"You don't do everything I ask you to, Bull," she said, smiling.

"What don't I do?" he demanded.

"You still call me Miss, and I hate it. You're more like a brother, Bull, and Miss sounds so formal." It must have been a woman who first discovered the art of making fire.

A shadow of pain crossed his dark countenance. "Don't ask too much of me, Miss," he said quietly as he turned on his heel and started for the doorway. "I go up to the mine today, I suppose?" he threw back over his shoulder.

"Yes, today," she said, and he was gone.

For a long time Diana Henders was troubled. The assignment she had given Bull troubled her, for it was a tacit admission that she gave credence to Colby's suspicions. The pain that she had seen reflected in Bull's face troubled her, as did his parting words and the quiet refusal to call her Diana. She wondered if these had been prompted by a feeling of pique that his love was not returned, or compunction because of a guilty knowledge that he had betrayed her and her father.

Hal Colby had told her that morning of the bag of gold dust Bull had displayed in the poker game the night before, and that troubled her too, for it seemed to bear out more than anything else the suspicions that were forming around him-suspicions that she could see, in the light of bits of circumstantial evidence, were far from groundless.

"I won't believe it!" she said half aloud. "I won't believe it!" and then she went for a ride.

All the men had left but Hal Colby and Texas Pete when she reached the corrals; but she did not feel like riding with Hal Colby that morning and so she rode with Texas Pete, much to that young man's surprise and rapture.

The days dragged along and became weeks, the stage made its two trips a week, the bullion shipments came through regularly and safely and there were no holdups, and then one day Maurice B. Corson and Lillian Manill arrived. The stage took the Bar Y road that day and pulled up before the gate of the ranch house just as Diana Henders and Hal Colby were returning from a trip to the West Ranch. Diana saw Lillian Manill for the first time in her life. The eastern girl was seated between Bill Gatlin, the driver, and Bull. All three were laughing. Evidently they had been enjoying one another's company.

Diana could not but notice it because it was rarely that Bull laughed. It was Bull who stepped to the wheel and helped her to alight.

Maurice B. Corson emerged from the inside of the coach, through the windows of which Diana could see three other passengers, two of whom she recognized as the Wainrights, and then she dismounted and ran forward to greet her cousin, a

handsome, dark-haired girl of about her own age.

Bull, still smiling, raised his hat to Diana. She nodded to him, briefly. For some reason she was vexed with him, but why she did not know. Bull and Colby ran to the boot and dragged off the Corson-Manill baggage, while Lillian presented Corson to Diana. Corson was a young man-a typical New Yorker-in his early thirties.

"Git a move on there, Bull," shouted Gatlin, "or they'll think I ben held up agin."

"I reckon The Black Coyote's gone out o' business, fer a while," said Colby, shooting a quick look at Diana.

Instantly the girl's loyalty was in arms. "He's afraid to try it while Bull's guarding the gold," she said.

"How much longer you goin' to keep me on the job?" asked Bull, as he clambered to the seat of the already moving coach. "Mack looks pretty all-fired healthy to me."

"Just another week or two, Bull," Diana shouted after him as the stage careened away at full gallop.

"Isn't he wonderful!" exclaimed Miss Manill. "A real cowboy and the first one I ever talked to!"

"Oh, there are lots of them here," said- Diana, "just as nice as Bull."

"So I see," replied Lillian Manill, smiling frankly at

SO LUCY, replied Lillian, smiling warmly at Hal Colby, "but Bull, as you call him, is the only one I've met."

"Pardon me!" exclaimed Diana. "This is Mr. Colby, Miss Manill."

"Oh, you're the foreman-Mr. Bull told me-how exciting!"

"I'll bet he didn't tell you nothin' good about me," said Colby.

"He told me about your heroic defense of Diana and my poor uncle," explained Lillian.

Colby flushed. "If it hadn't ben fer Bull we'd all 'a' ben killed," he said, ashamed.

"Why, he didn't tell me that," exclaimed the girl. "He never said he was in the battle, at all."

"That is just like Bull," said Diana.

They were walking toward the house, Diana and Colby leading their ponies, and the two Easterners looking interestedly at the various buildings and corrals over which hung the glamour of that irresistible romance which the West and a cattle-ranch always hold for the uninitiated-and for the initiated too, if the truth were but known.

"It is just too wonderful, Mr. Colby, " Lillian confided to the big foreman walking at her side; "but doesn't it get awful lonesome?"

"We don't notice it," he replied. "You know we keep pretty busy all day with a big outfit like this and when night comes around we're ready to turn in-we don't have no time to git lonesome."

"Is this a very big outfit, as you call it?" she asked.

"I reckon they ain't none much bigger in the territory," he replied.

"And to think that you are foreman of it! What a wonderful man you must be!"

"Oh, it ain't nothin'," he assured her, but he was vastly pleased. Here, indeed, was a young lady of discernment.

"You big men of the great out-doors are always so modest," she told him, a statement for which he could find no reply. As a matter of fact, though he had never thought of it before, he realized the justice of her assertion, and fully agreed with her.

She was looking now at the trim figure of her cousin, walking ahead of them with Corson. "How becoming that costume is to Diana," she remarked; "and I suppose she rides wonderfully."

"She shore does-an' then some," he assured her.

"Oh, how I wish I could ride! Do you suppose I could learn?"

"Easy, Miss. It ain't nothin', oncet you know how."

"Do you suppose someone would teach me?" She looked up at him, archly.

"I'd be mighty proud to larn you, Miss."

"Oh, would you? How wonderful! Can we start right away, tomorrow?"

"You bet we can; but you can't ride in them things," he added, looking ruefully at her New York traveling costume.

She laughed gaily. "Oh, my! I didn't expect to," she cried. "I am not such a silly as that. I brought my habit with me, of course."

"Well, I suppose it's all right," he said politely; "but you don't have to bring no habits to Arizony from nowheres-we mostly have enough right here, such as they be-good an' bad."

Again her laugh rang out. "You big, funny man!" she cried. "You are poking fun at me just because you think I am a tendershoe-trying to make me believe that you don't know what a riding habit is. Aren't you ashamed of yourselfteasing poor little me?"

They were passing the bunk-house at the time, where the boys, having scrubbed for supper, were squatting about on their heels watching the newcomers with frank curiosity. After they had

passed Shorty gave Texas Pete a shove that sent him sprawling on the ground. "Say," he said, "did you see them pants?"

"I shore did," replied Pete, "but you don't have no call to knock me down an' git my ridin' habit all dusty, you goshdinged tendershoe, jest because a guy blows in with funny pants on."

"Did you see the mug on Colby?" inquired Idaho. "He don't know a ridin' habit from the cigarette habit."

"I reckon he thought she was confessin' a sin," said Texas Pete.

"Oh, them pants! Them pants!" moaned Shorty, rocking to and fro on his heels, his long arms wound around his knees. Shorty was six-feet-three and thought Kansas City was on the Atlantic seaboard.

Corson's keen, quick eyes were taking in the salient features of their immediate surroundings as he walked at Diana's side toward the two-story adobe ranch house, on two sides of which a broad, covered veranda had been built within recent years. He saw the orderly, well-kept appearance not only of the main buildings, but of the corrals, fences and outbuildings as well. Everything bespoke system and excellent management. It was evidently a well-ordered plant in smooth running condition. He thought of it in terms of eastern factories and found it good.

"You keep things up well here," he said to Diana Henders. "I want to compliment you."

"Thank you," she replied. "It was something that Dad always insisted upon, and of course I have carried out all his policies since his death."

"What are these buildings-they look like cement, but of course you wouldn't have that out here. The freight on it would make the cost prohibitive."

"They are adobe," she explained, "just big, clay bricks dried in the sun."

He nodded in understanding. "Nothing much very fancy about the architecture," he commented, laughing. "The only attempt at ornamentation is that sort of parapet on the roof of the house, with the loopholes in it, and that doesn't add much to the looks of the place."

Diana thought that his criticisms were in rather poor taste, and there was something about them that vaguely suggested the air of a man viewing for the first time a property that he had only recently acquired-something proprietorial that she inwardly resented. Outwardly she was polite.

"You would think that it added a lot to the place," she told him, "if you should ever chance to be here when the Apaches stage a raid-it was never intended to be ornamental."

He sucked in his breath with a whistling sound

He sucked in his breath with a whistling sound. "You don't mean," he exclaimed, "that they are so bad you have to live in a fortress?"

"They haven't been on the warpath in any considerable numbers for a long time," she assured him; "but that parapet has been used more than once since the house was built, and there is always the chance that it may come in handy again. It may not be beautiful from this side, but I can tell you that it looks mighty good from the other side when there are sneaking Apaches skulking behind every out-house. I know, because I've viewed it under those conditions."

"You think there is any great danger?" he asked her, looking about nervously.

"There is always danger," she replied, for she saw that he was afraid and a spirit of mischief prompted her to avenge his indelicate criticisms of the home she loved. It is only a matter of weeks, you know," she reminded him, "since Dad was killed by Apaches."

Corson appeared worried and his further scrutiny of the house as they approached it was influenced by other than artistic architectural considerations.

"I see you have heavy shutters at all the windows," he said. "I suppose you have them closed and fastened every night?"

"Oh, my, no!" she cried, laughing. "We never close

them except for dust storms and Indians."

"But suppose they come unexpectedly?"

"Then we stand a chance of getting dust or Indians in the house."

"I think you had better have them closed nights while Miss Manill is here," he said. "I'm afraid she will be very nervous."

"Oh, your rooms are on the second floor," she replied, "and you can lock them all up tight-possibly you'll get enough air from the patio. The nights are always cool, you know, but I'd feel stuffy with all the shutters closed."

"We'll see," was all he said, but there was something about the way he said it that she did not like. In fact, Diana Henders was sure that she was not going to like Mr. Maurice B. Corson at all.

As they sat down to supper an hour later Lillian Manill looked inquiringly at her cousin. "Where is Mr. Colby?" she asked.

"Over at the cook-house eating his supper, I suppose," replied Diana.

"Don't he eat with us? He seems such a nice fellow."

"He is a nice fellow," replied Diana, "but the boys would rather eat by themselves. Women folks

would take away their appetites. You have no idea how we terrify some of them."

"But Mr. Colby seemed very much at ease," insisted Lillian.

"Hal is different, but the very fact that he is foreman makes it necessary for him to eat with the other men-it is customary."

"Mr. Bull seemed at ease too, after I got him started," continued Lillian. "He isn't much of a talker, but he didn't seem a bit afraid of me."

"Bull is not afraid of anything," Diana assured her; "but if you got him to talk at all you must exercise a wonderful power over men. I can scarcely ever get a dozen words out of him."

"Well, I guess I've got a way with men," said Lillian, complacently.

"I'm afraid that you will find that Bull is not very susceptible," said Diana, with just the vaguest hint of tartness.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the other; "he has promised to teach me to ride and shoot."

Diana ate in silence for several minutes. She was wondering already if she were going to like her cousin. But then, of course she was-how silly of her to think she was not, she concluded.

"I met an old friend on the stage today" remarked

THE AN OLD HIND ON THE STAGE TODAY, REMARKED
Corson, presently.

Diana raised her eyebrows politely. "How nice," she said.

"Yes, it was. Haven't seen him for a couple of years. Nice chap, Jefferson Wainright. Fraternity brother. Of course I was years ahead of him, but I used to see him when I'd go down to Cambridge for the games. His governor's a nice old chap, too, and got a wad of the long green."

"So he has told us," said Diana.

"Oh, you know them? They didn't mention it."

"I have met them. Mr. Wainright tried to buy the ranch."

"Oh, yes, I believe he did mention something of the kind. Why didn't you sell it to him?"

"His offer was too low, for one reason, and the other is that I do not care to sell my interest."

Corson and Miss Manill exchanged a quick glance that escaped Diana.

"How much did he offer you?" asked Corson.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Why that seems a very fair price," said Corson.

"It is ridiculous, Mr. Corson," replied Diana, "and if you are at all familiar with Mr. Manill's business you know it as well as I."

"I am very familiar with it," replied the New Yorker. "In fact, from your remarks I imagine that I am much more familiar with it than you."

"Then you know that the cattle interests alone are worth three times that amount, without considering the mine at all.'"

Corson shook his head. "I'm afraid that way out here you are too far from the financial center of the country to have a very comprehensive grasp of values. Now, as a matter of fact, the bottom has dropped out of the live-stock market. We'll be lucky if we make expenses for the next year or so, and it probably never will come back to what it was. And as for the mine, that, of course, is about done. It won't pay to work it a year from now. If we could get two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for this business we'd be mighty lucky; but I doubt if old Wainright would renew that offer-he's too shrewd a business man."

Diana Henders made no reply. She was wondering just how much Maurice B. Corson did know about the live-stock market and the mine. She was inclined to believe that he knew a great deal more than his remarks concerning them would indicate.

At the same hour Mary Donovan's boarders were gathered about her table. She had other guests this

evening in addition to her regular clientele. There were the Wainrights, and Bull was there for supper and breakfast as was usual when the bullion came down from the mine.

It was not a gay company. Mack Harber and Jim Welter looked with suspicion on Bull, an attitude that would have blossomed into open and active hostility could they have gained the support of Gum Smith; but Gum was not searching for trouble. He glowered at his plate and hated Bull. Wildcat Bob inhaled soup and hated Gum Smith.

The Wainrights scarcely raised their eyes from the business of eating for fear of the embarrassment of meeting those of the man who had run the elder Wainright off the Bar Y Ranch--an occurrence which rankled horribly in the breasts of both. Bull, taciturn as usual, ate in silence with something of the mien of a lion feeding among jackals. Mary Donovan hovered in the doorway. Bull laid down his spoon, drank a glass of water and rose from the table.

"Sure an' won't ye have another helpin' o' puddin' now, Bull?" urged Mary.

"No, thanks, Mrs. Donovan," he replied, "I'm plumb full." He walked past her into the kitchen and out the back door. An almost audible sigh of relief rose from the remaining guests.

"I reckon he thinks he owns the shack,"

commented Jim Weller apropos of Bull's exit through the sacred precincts of Mary Donovan's kitchen.

"Sure, he could have it fer the askin', the fine b'y he is," shot back Mary. "Him a-goin' out to fetch in wood fer me while the loikes o' ye, Jim Weller, what ain't fit to black his boots, sits here and makes remarks about him, ye lazy whelp!" Mr. Weller subsided.

The meal over, the guests departed with the exception of Mack Harber, Jim Weller, and the Wainrights who had congregated on the veranda.

"You don't seem to like the fellow they call Bull," remarked the younger Wainright to Weller.

"I didn't say I didn't like him an' I didn't say I did," ; replied Weller, noncommittally.

"Well, I don't like him," said Mack, vehemently. "I wouldn't like my grandmother if she shot me in the belly."

"You mean that he shot you?" asked Wainright.

"The Black Coyote shot me, an' if Bull ain't The Black Coyote my name's McGinnis."

"You really think that he has been pulling off these holdups?" demanded the elder Wainright.

"I ain't the only one what thinks so," replied Mack.
"I remember that thing -- out of my head -- about

"Everyone, most, thinks so, an' er we had a decent sheriff that feller'd be behind the bars where he belongs, er strung up to a cottonwood in Hell's Bend. 'Pears to me like Gum was either in on the deal er afeard of Bull."

"Gum's afeard of every one," said Weller.

"Well," remarked Jefferson Wainright, senior, "when we come over on this side o' the hills I calc'late as how things air goin' to be a heap sight different. There won't be no more o' this here funny gunplay stuff. I'm a-goin' to run all o' these would-be bad-men out o' the country."

"You figgerin' on cumin' over here?" asked Mack.

"I certainly am. I'm a-goin' to buy the whole Bar Y out-fit."

"The Hell you is!" exclaimed Mack. "I heard that Miss Di wouldn't sell it to you."

"She ain't got nothin' to say about it. I'm a-goin' to buy it from the man that's runnin' that outfit now, an' he's a mighty good business man, too."

"Who's that-Colby?"

"No, Colby nothin'-it's Mr. Corson of Noo York. He's handlin' all o' John Manill's interests an' he just come here today with Manill's daughter. We come over on the stage with them. I was tellin' Corson of the fine airs that chit of a Henders girl puts on, but this is a sight to be different from Corson's sight to

things is goin' to be different now. Corson's goin' to close out the estate an' the holdins here is as good as sold to me already."

Chapter X--WILDCAT BOB GOES COURTING

BULL sat in a corner of The Chicago Saloon watching the play at the faro table. It was too early to go to bed and he was not a man who read much, nor cared to read, even had there been anything to read, which there was not. He had skimmed the latest eastern papers that had come in on the stage and his reading was over until the next shipment of gold from the mine brought him again into contact with a newspaper. Then he would read the live-stock market reports, glance over the headlines and throw the paper aside, satisfied. His literary requirements were few.

A man who had drunk not wisely but too well lurched up to him.

"Have a drink, stranger!" he commanded. It was not an invitation.

"Ain't drinkin'," replied Bull, quietly.

"Oh, yes, you be," announced the hospitable one. "When I says drink, you drinks, see? I'm a bad-man, I am. Whoopee!" and drawing a six-shooter he commenced firing into the floor at Bull's feet.

Suddenly a large man enveloped him from the rear, held his gun hand aloft and dragged him away into an opposite corner, where, to the accompaniment of a deluge of lurid profanity, he counselled him to a greater discretion.

"Why you blankety, blank, blank, blank!" he cried. "You tryin' to commit sewerside? Don't you know who that is, you blitherin' idjit?" then he whispered something in the other's ear. The effect was electrical. The man seemed sobered instantly. With staring eyes he looked across the room at Bull.

"I'm goin' to git out o' here," he said, "he might change his mind."

"I cain't see yit why he didn't bore ye," agreed his friend. "You better go an' apologize."

Slowly the pseudo bad-man crossed the room toward Bull, who had not moved sufficiently to have changed his position since the man had first accosted him. The man halted in front of Bull, a sickly grin on his bloated countenance.

"No offense, pardner. Jest had a drop too much. No offense intended. Jest jokin'-thet was all jest jokin'."

Bull eyed him intently for a moment. "Oh, yes," he said presently, "I remember you now-you're the flannel mouth that got gay with of Wildcat a coupla months ago. Did you ever return that window sash

you took with you? I hearn Gum was powerful cut up about that window sash." Not the shadow of a smile crossed Bull's face. "I warn't there, but I hearn all about it."

The other flushed, attempted some witty repartee that fell flat, and finally managed to make his escape amid a roar of laughter from the nearer card players and spectators who had overheard the brief dialogue.

Bull rose. "coin'?" asked an acquaintance.

"I reckon so. Good night."

"Good night, Bull."

The man stepped out into the clear, star-lit night. Involuntarily he turned and looked toward the northeast in the direction of the Bar Y ranch. Diana was there. For a long time he stood motionless gazing out across the arid, moon-bathed level that stretched away to her loved feet. What emotions played behind the inscrutable mask of his face? Who may say?

As he stood there silently he heard voices coming from between The Chicago Saloon and Gums Place-Liquors and Cigars..

"He's in there now," said one. "I kin see him. If there weren't so tarnation many fellers at the bar I c'd git him from here."

"You'd better come along afore you git in more trouble than you got the capacity to handle," urged a second voice.

"Thas all right. I know what I'm doin'. There cain't no dried up of buffalo chip like thet run me out o' no man's saloon an' get away with it, an' thas all they is to thet."

"Well, I'm goin' home," stated the second voice. "I know when I'm well off."

"You go home. After I shoot the ears offen this Wildcat Bob party I'm comin' home, too."

"You go to shootin' any ears offen Wildcat Bob an' you won't need no blankets where you're goin'."

"Thas-so? Well, here goes-you better stay an' see the fun."

"I'm goin' now while I got the chanct," said the other, and Bull heard him coming from the side of the building. The former stepped quickly back into the doorway of the Chicago Saloon and an instant later he saw the large man who had dragged his friend from him a few minutes before pass-up the street at a rapid walk. Then Bull looked from his place of concealment, just in time to see another figure emerge from between the buildings and enter Gum's Place.

Bull was close behind him. The door was open a crack. He saw that the other had advanced into the

room a few feet and was standing behind one of the rough columns that supported the second story. Across the room, at the far end, Wildcat Bob had just set down his whiskey glass upon the bar, wiped his beard on his sleeve, and turned away toward the tables where the gambling was in progress. For a moment he would be alone, with only the rough rear wall behind him.

Bull saw the stranger raise his six-gun to take deliberate aim. He was too far away to reach him before he pulled the trigger and it would do no good to warn the Wildcat. There was but a single alternative to standing supinely by and watching old Wildcat being shot down in cold blood by a cowardly murderer.

It was this alternative that Bull adopted. As the smoke rose from the muzzle of his gun the stranger threw his hands above his head, his weapon clattered to the floor, and he wheeled about. His eyes alighted upon Bull standing there, grim-faced and silent, the smoking six-gun in his hand.

Suddenly the wounded man gave voice to- a shrill scream. "He done it!" he cried, pointing at Bull. "He done it! The Black Coyote done it! He's killed me!" and with these last words the body slumped to the floor.

Bull stood facing them all in silence for just a moment. The whole roomful of men and women was staring at him. Then he slipped his gun into its

holster and advanced into the room, a faint smile on his lips. He walked toward Wildcat Bob.

"That hombre was after you, Bob," he said. "He was drunk, but I couldn't stop him no other way. He's the feller you chased through the window that time."

Gum Smith hurried to the rear of the bar. Then he leaned over it and pointed a finger at Bull. "Yo-all's undah arrest!" he cried. "Yo-all's undah arrest fo murder."

"Go kick yourself through a knot-hole!" advised Bull. "Ef I hadn't got that hombre he'd a-got Bob. They wasn't nothin' else to do."

"Yo-all hearn what he called him, didn't yo?" yelled Gum. He pointed at first one and then another. "Ah depatize yo! Ah depatize yo!" he cried. "Arrest him, men!"

No one moved, except Wildcat Bob. He came and stood beside Bull, and he drew both his long, heavy guns with their heavily notched grips.

"Anyone what's aimin' to take this boy, why, let him step up," said Wildcat Bob, and his watery blue eye was fixed terribly upon the sheriff.

"Ah want yo-all to know thet when Ah depatizes yo, yo-all's depatized," shrilled Gum. "Yo hearn what the corpse called him. Ain't that enough? Do yo duty, men!"

One or two of the men, friends of Gum's, moved restlessly. Bull, sensing trouble, had drawn both his weapons, and now he stood beside the Wildcat, his steady gray eyes alert for the first hostile move.

"Don't none o' you gents go fer to start nothin'," he advised. "You all seen what happened. You know I couldn't a-done nothin' else, an' as fer what thet drunken bum called me ef Gum thinks I'm The Coyote why don't he step up an' take me? I ain't a honin' fer trouble, but I don't aim to be the subject o' no postmortem neither."

"Do yo-all surrendah, then?" demanded Gum.

"Don't try to be no more of a damn fool than the Lord made yuh, Gum," advised Wildcat Bob. "You know thet if this here boy ain't The Black Coyote you don't want him, an' ef he is The Black Coyote you wouldn't never git outen behind thet bar ef you was to try to take him. Fer my part I don't believe he is, an' I got two of pea-shooters here what thinks the same as I does. What do you think, Gum?"

"Well," said the sheriff after a moment's deliberation, "Ah reckon as mebbly the corpse was mistook. Hev a drink on the house, gents!"

As Bull and Wildcat Bob entered the office of The Donovan House Mary Donovan espied them through the open doorway of her sitting room and called to them.

"Come in an' have a drop o' tay wid me before yese go to bed," she invited, and as they entered she scrutinized Wildcat Bob with a stern eye. Evidently satisfied, her face softened. "I know they ain't run out o' whiskey in Hendersville," she said, "so I reckon ye must o' run out o' money, Wildcat."

The little old gentleman reached into his pocket and drew forth a handful of silver, which he displayed with virtuous satisfaction.

"The saints be praised!" exclaimed Mary Donovan. "Ye've money in yer pocket an' yer home airy an' sober! Be ye sick, Wildcat Bob?"

"I've re-formed, Mary-I ain't never goin' to tech another drop," he assured her, solemnly.

"Ye've not had a drink the avenin'?" she demanded.

"Well-" he hesitated, "you see"

"Yis, I see," she snapped, scornfully.

"But, Mary, I only had one little one-you wouldn't begrudge an old man one little nightcap?"

"Well," she consented, relenting, "wan little one wouldn't do no harm. I wouldn't moind one meself."

Wildcat Bob reached for his hip pocket. "I was thinking that same thing, Mary, and that's why I brung one home fer yuh," and he drew forth a pint

flask.

"The devil fly away wid ye, Wildcat Bob!" she cried, but she was smiling as she reached for the flask.

Bull rose, laughing. "Good night!" he said, "I'm going to turn in."

"Have a drop wid us before ye go," invited Mary.

"No thanks, I've quit," replied Bull. A moment later they heard him mounting the stairs to his room.

"He's a good b'y," said Mary, wiping her lips and replacing the cork in the bottle.

"He is that, Mary," agreed Wildcat, reaching for it.

There was a period of contented silence.

"It's a lonesome life fer a widdy-lady, that it is," remarked Mary, with a deep sigh.

Wildcat Bob moved his chair closer, flushed at his own boldness, and fell to examining the toe of his boot. Mary rocked diligently, her red hands folded in her ample lap, keeping an eye cocked on the Wildcat. There was another long silence that was broken at last by Mrs. Donovan.

"Sure," she said, 'an' it's funny ye never married, Bob."

Bob essayed reply, but a mouthful of tobacco juice prevented. Rising, he walked into the office, crossed that room, opened the front door and spat copiously without. Returning to the room he hitched his chair closer to Mary's, apparently by accident, as he resumed his seat.

"I-" he started, but it was evidently a false start, since he commenced all over again. "I=" again he paused.

"You what?" inquired Mary Donovan with soft encouragement.

"You-" said Wildcat Bob and stuck again. Inward excitement evidently stimulated his salivary glands, with the result that he was again forced to cross to the outer door. When he returned he hunched his chair a bit closer to Mary's.

"As ye was about to remark," prodded Mary.

"I-I"

"Yes," said Mary, "Go on, Bob!"

"I was just a-goin' to say that I don't think it'll rain tonight," he ended, lamely.

Mary Donovan placed her hands upon her hips, pressed her lips together and turned a withering glance of scorn upon Wildcat Bob-all of which were lost upon him, he having again returned to whole-souled consideration of the toe of his boot, his foot pressed with some

his face suffused with purple.

"Rain!" muttered Mary Donovan. "Rain in Arizony this time o' year? Sure, an' ye mane ye thought it wouldn't shnow, didn't ye?" she demanded.

Wildcat Bob emitted only a gurgle, and again silence reigned, unbroken for long minutes, except by the creaking of Mary's rocker. Suddenly she turned upon him.

"Gimme that flask," she said.

He handed it over and she took a long drink. Wiping the mouth of the bottle with the palm of her hand she returned it to him. Then Wildcat Bob took a drink, and the silence continued.

The evening wore on, the flask emptied and midnight came. With it came Gum Smith, reeling bedward. They watched him stagger across the office floor and heard him stumbling up the stairs. Mary Donovan arose.

"Be off to bed wid ye," she said. "I can't be sittin' here all night gossipin' wid ye."

He too, arose. "Good night, Mary," he said, "it's been a pleasant evenin'."

"Yis," said Mary Donovan. ,

As Wildcat Bob climbed the stairs toward his room he was mumbling in his beard. "Doggone my bide!" he said. "Ef I'd jest had a couple drinks I

him: "He said, 'I'd just had a couple drinks & mout a-done it.'"

"Sure," soliloquized Mary Donovan, as she closed the door of her bedroom, "it's not so dum funny after all that the ould fool nivr was married."

Chapter XI--"RIDE HIM, COWBOY!"

LILLIAN MANILL awoke early and viewed the brilliant light of the new day through the patio windows of her room-the outer windows were securely shuttered against Indians. She stretched languorously and turned over for another nap, but suddenly changed her mind, threw off the covers and arose. It was a hideously early hour for Lillian Manill to arise; but she had recalled that there was to be a riding lesson after breakfast and Diana had explained to her that the breakfast hour was an early one. Dressing, she selected a tailored walking suit-she would change into her riding habit after breakfast-for she wanted to stroll about the yard a bit before breakfast, and she knew that this new walking suit was extremely fetching.

A few minutes later as she stepped into the yard she saw signs of activity in the direction of the horse corrals and thither she bent her steps. Texas Pete, who was helping the chore boy with the morning feeding, saw her coming and looked for an avenue of escape, being in no sense a lady's man and fully aware of the fact; but he was too late-there was no avenue left, Lillian Manill being already between him and the bunk-house. So he applied himself vigorously to the pitchfork he was wielding and pretended not to see her, a pretense that made no impression whatever upon Lillian Manill. She

paused outside the bars and looked in.

"Good morning!" she said.

Texas Pete pretended that he had not heard.

"Mornin'," replied Pete, pulling at the brim of his hat and immediately resuming the fork. He wished she would move on. The horses were fed and there was no other excuse for him to remain in the corral, but in order to reach the bunkhouse he must pass directly by this disconcerting person. Diana he did not mind-he was used to Diana, and aside from the fact that he was madly in love with her she caused him little embarrassment or concern except upon those few occasions when he had attempted to maintain an extended conversation with her. Dr. Johnson would have found nothing in Pete's conversational attainments to have aroused his envy.

Pete continued feeding the horses. He fed them twice as much as they could eat in a day, notwithstanding the fact that he knew perfectly well they were to be fed again that evening; but finally he realized that he could defer the embarrassing moment no longer and that the girl had not left. He stuck the fork viciously into the haystack and crossed the corral. He tried to appear unconcerned and to pass her by without looking at her, but in both he failed-first because he was very much concerned and second because she placed herself directly in his path and smiled sweetly at him.

"I don't believe I had the pleasure of meeting you last night," she said. "I am Miss Manill-Miss Renders' cousin."

"Yes'm," said Pete.

"And I suppose you are one of the cow-gentlemen," she added.

Pete turned suddenly and violently purple. A choking sound issued from his throat; but quickly he gained control of himself. Something in that remark of hers removed instantly all of Texas Pete's embarrassment. He found himself at once upon an even footing with her.

"No'm," he said, "I hain't one o' the cow-gentlemen-I'm on'y a tendershoe."

"I'm sure you don't look it," she told him, "with those leather trousers with the fleece on. But you ride, don't you?" she added quickly.

"I ain't lamed yit," he assured her.

"Oh, isn't that too bad! I thought of course you were a wonderful equestrian and I was going to ask you to teach me to ride; but you'd better come along after breakfast and we'll get Mr. Colby to teach us both."

"I reckon he wouldn't like it," explained Pete. "You see I'm in his afternoon ridin' class. He don't take nothin' but ladies in the mornin' "

"Oh, does he teach riding regularly?"

"My, yes, that's what he's here fer. He's larnin' us all to ride so's we kin go out on hosses an' catch the cows 'stid o' havin' to hoof-it."

"I thought he was foreman," she said.

"Yes'm, but that's one of his jobs-larnin' cowgentlemen to ride"

"How interesting! I've learned so much already and I've only been in Arizona since day before yesterday. Mr. Bull was so kind and patient, answering all my silly little questions."

"I reckon Bull could answer most any question," he told her.

"Yes, indeed; but then he's been here in Arizona so long, and had so much to do with the development of the country. Why, do you know he planted all the willows along that funny little river we followed for so long yesterday-miles and miles of them?"

"Did he tell you that?" inquired Texas Pete.

"Yes, isn't it wonderful? I think it shows such an artistic temperament."

"There's more to Bull than I ever suspected," murmured Texas Pete, reverently.

A sudden, clamorous, metallic din shattered the quiet of the cool Arizona morning. The girl gave a little scream and sprang for Texas Pete, throwing both arms about his neck.

"O-o-h!" she cried; "what is it-Indians?"

"No'm," said Pete, striving to disengage himself, for he saw the malevolent eyes of several unholy cow-gentlemen gloating upon the scene from the doorway of the bunk-house. "No'm, that ain't Injuns-that's the breakfast bell."

"How silly of me!" she explained. "Now I suppose I must be going. I'm so glad to have met you, Mr,

"My name's 'Texas Pete."

"Mr. Pete, and I do hope you learn to ride quickly. I am sure we could have some lovely excursions, picnicking among the beautiful hills. Oh, wouldn't it be divine just you and I, Mr. Pete?" and she let her great, lovely eyes hang for a moment on his in a fashion that had turned more sophisticated heads than Texas Pete's.

When she had gone and Pete was making his way toward the cook-house he ran his fingers through his shock of hair. "By gollies!" he muttered. "The outside o' her head's all right, anyway."

As he entered the cook-house Shorty seized him and threw both arms about his neck. "Kiss me darlin' !" he cried. "I ain't had a single kiss before

breakfast."

"Shet up, you long-legged walrus," replied Pete, grinning, as he shoved the other aside.

He ate in silence despite the gibes of his companions, who quickly desisted, realizing the futility of attempting to arouse Texas Pete's ire by raillery. He was quick enough of temper and quicker still with his guns when occasion warranted; but no one could arouse his anger so long as their thrusts were shod with fun.

"Lookee here, cook," he called promptly to that individual; "you're the best eddicated bloke in this bunch o' long-horns-what's a questeen?"

"Somethin' you puts soup in," replied the cook.

Texas Pete scratched his head. "I thought all along that I didn't like her," he muttered, "an' now I knows it."

Diana Henders greeted her guests with a cheery smile and a word of welcome as they entered the dining room for breakfast. "I hope you slept well," she said.

"Oh, I did," exclaimed Lillian Manill. "I never knew a thing from the time my head touched the pillow until broad daylight this morning. I had a perfectly wonderful night."

"I didn't," said Corson, and Diana noticed then that

he looked tired and haggard. "What happened last night?" he asked.

"Why, nothing, that I know of," replied Diana. "Why do you ask?"

"Have you seen any of your men this morning-or any of the neighbors?" he continued.

"I have seen a couple of the men to talk with-we have no neighbors."

"How many women are there on this place?" he went on.

"Just Lillian and I."

"Well, something terrible happened last night," said Corson. "I never spent such a hideous night in my life. It's funny you didn't hear it."

"Hear what?" asked Diana.

"That woman-my God! I can hear her screams yet.

"Oh, Maurice! what do you mean?" cried Miss Manill.

"It was about midnight," he explained. "I had been rather restless just dozing a little-when all of a sudden the dogs commenced to bark and then a woman screamed-it was the most awful, long-drawn, agonized wail I ever heard-some one must have been torturing her. I'll bet the Indians were out

last night and the first thing you know you'll hear about a terrible massacre. Well, it stopped all of a sudden and pretty soon the dogs commenced to yap again-there must have been fifty of 'em-and then that woman shrieked again-I'll hear that to my dying day. I don't think you ought to let any of the men go away today until you find out just what happened last night. The Indians may just be waiting for 'em to go and then they'll rush down on us and kill us all."

A faint smile had slowly curved Diana's lips and brought little wrinkles to the corners of her eyes.

"What are you smiling about, Miss Henders?" demanded Corson. "If you'd heard that woman you wouldn't feel like smiling-not for a long time."

"That wasn't a woman you heard, Mr. Corson-they were coyotes."

He looked at her blankly. "Are you sure?" he asked, presently.

' 'Of course I'm sure," she told him.

Corson breathed a sigh of relief. "I'd like to believe it," he said. "I'd sleep better tonight."

"Well, you can believe it, for that is what you heard."

"I'd hate to be caught out after dark by 'em," he said. "A pack of fifty or a hundred such as there

was last night would tear a fellow to pieces in no time."

"They are perfectly harmless," Diana assured him, "and the chances are that there were no more than two or three of them-possibly only one."

"I guess I heard 'em," he insisted.

"They have a way of sounding like a whole lot more than they really are."

He shook his head. "I guess I know what I heard."

"I'll have to show that cook of yours how to make coffee," remarked Corson a few minutes later.

Diana flushed. "I suppose We don't get the best coffee out here," she said, "but we are accustomed to it and learn to like it first rate. I think Wong does the best he can with what he has to do with."

"Well, it won't hurt him any to learn how to make coffee," said Corson.

"He has been with us a great many years and is very faithful. I think he would be terribly hurt if a stranger criticized his coffee," said Diana.

"Maurice is very particular about his food," said Miss Manill. "It is really an education to hear him order a dinner at Delmonico's, and the way he does flay the waiters if everything isn't just so. I always get such a thrill-you can see people at the nearby tables listening to him, vying to see another "

tables listening to him, whispering to one another.

"I can imagine," said Diana, sweetly, but she did not say just what she could imagine.

Corson swelled visibly. "Call the Chink in, Miss Henders," he said, "and I'll give him a lesson now—you might learn something yourself. Way out here, so far from New York, you don't get much chance, of course. There's really nothing quite like the refining influences of the East to take the rough edges off of people."

"I think I prefer to speak to Wong privately and in person, if I find it necessary," said Diana.

"Well, just so I get some decent coffee hereafter," said Corson, magnanimously.

Lillian Manill, having finished her breakfast, rose from the table.

"I'm going to put on my riding habit now, Maurice," she said. "Go out and tell Mr. Colby to wait for me."

Diana Henders bit her lip, but said nothing as Corson rose and walked toward the door. He was garbed in a New York tailor's idea of the latest English riding mode, and again Diana bit her lip, but not in anger. Corson, setting his hat jauntily over one eve, stalked into the open and down toward the corrals where the men were saddling up for the day's work.

He lighted a big, black cigar and puffed contentedly. As he hove in sight work in the corral ceased spontaneously.

"My Gawd !" moaned Texas Pete.

"Who left the bars down?" inquired Idaho.

"Shut up," cautioned Colby. "That feller's likely to be boss around here."

"He won't never boss me," said Shorty, "not with that funny hat on. I wonder could I crease it, ♦" and he reached for his gun.

"Don't git funny, Shorty. They's friends o' Miss I-tenders," whispered Colby. "It'd only make her feel bad."

He could not have hit upon a stronger appeal to these men. Shorty lowered his hand from the butt of his gun and almost at once work was resumed. When Corson joined them he could not have guessed that he was the object either of ridicule or pity, though he was--of both.

"Say, Colby," he said. "Saddle up a couple of safe horses for Miss Manill and me, and wait around until she comes out. I want you to give her a few lessons in riding."

"Did Miss Henders say that it would be all right?" lie asked. "You know the work is pretty well laid out on my girl, but none too many hands."

out and we ain't got none too many hands.

"Oh, that's all right, my man," Corson assured him. "You'll be safe to do anything that I say. I'm handling Miss Manill's interests and looking after everything in general until the estate is closed. Just trot along and saddle up a couple of horses, and see to it that they are gentle. I haven't ridden for a number of years, although I was pretty good at it when I was a boy."

Hal Colby eyed Mr. Maurice B. Corson for a long minute. What was transpiring in his mind it would have been difficult to guess from the expression on his face; though what should have been going on within the convolutions of his brain the other men knew full well, and so they lolled around, their faces immobile, waiting for the fun to begin, but they were doomed to disappointment, for there was no gunplay-Colby, they thought, might have at least "made the dude dance." Instead he turned away without a word to Corson, gave some final directions for the day's work, swung into the saddle and rode toward the office, utterly ignoring the Easterner's instructions. Corson flushed angrily.

"Here you, one of you men," he snapped, turning toward the punchers, most of whom had already mounted their ponies, "I want two horses saddled immediately--one for Miss Manill and one for me."

Silently, ignoring him as completely as though he had not existed, the riders filed out of the corral past him. At a little distance they drew rein, waiting

for Colby.

"I've saw gall before," remarked Texas Pete in an undertone, "but thet there dude tenderfoot's got more'n a brass monkey."

"If he don't c'ral thet jaw o' his pronto," growled Shorty, "I ain't a-goin' to be responsible fer what happens--I cain't hold myself much longer."

"I wouldn't a-took what Colby did," said Idaho.

"Some blokes'll take a lot to hold their jobs," said Shorty.

"They c'n hev mine right now," stated Texas Pete, "ef I gotta take thet dude's lip."

"Here comes the boss now," said Idaho. "She'll settle things, dum her pretty little hide," he added affectionately.

Diana had stopped just below the house to listen to Colby, whom the men could see was talking earnestly to her.

"Look here, Di," he sas saying, "I want to know ef I gotta take orders from thet tin-horn lawyer feller. Is he boss round these diggin's, or is you?"

"Why, I supposed I was, Hal," she replied, "though I must admit there appears to be a suspicion of doubt on the subject in Mr. Corson's mind. What has he said to you?"

Colby told her, repeating Corson's words as nearly as he could, and the girl could not suppress a laugh.

"Oh, I reckon it's funny, all right," he said, testily, "but I don't see the joke-hevin' a paper-collared cracker-fed dude like that-un callin' me 'my man' an' orderin' me to saddle up a hoss fer him, right in front o' all the boys. 'Trot along,' he says, 'an saddle up a couple o' hosses, an' see to it thet they're plumb gentle.' My Gawd, Di! you don't expect me to take thet sort o' jaw, do you?"

Diana, by this time, was frankly in tears from laughter, and finally Colby himself was unable to longer repress a smile.

"Don't mind him, Hal," she said, finally. "He is just one of those arrogant, conceited, provincial New

Yorkers. They are mighty narrow and disagreeable, but we've got to put up with him for a short time and we might as well make the best of it. Go and ask Willie to saddle up two horses for them, and be sure that the one for Miss Manill is plumb gentle." She accompanied her last instructions with the faintest trace of a wink.

Colby wheeled his pony and loped off to the corral, where he imparted the boss's orders to the chore boy, Willie, lank, raw-boned and pimply. Willie, who always thought of himself as Wild Bill, swooped off to catch up the two ponies grinning

struggled on to catch up the two ponies, gaining inwardly as he roped Gimlet for Mr. Maurice B. Corson.

Corson, seeing Diana approaching, had gone to meet her. He was still red and angry.

"Look here, Miss Henders," he exclaimed. "You've got to tell those fellows who I am. I asked them to saddle up a couple of horses and they absolutely ignored me. You tell them that when I give orders they are to be obeyed."

"I think it will be less confusing if the orders come from me, Mr. Corson," she replied. "It is never well to have too many bosses, and then, you see, these men are peculiar. They are unlike the sort of men you have apparently been accustomed to dealing with. You cannot talk to them as you would to a Delmonico waiter-unless you are tired of life, Mr. Corson. They are accustomed to me-we are friends-and they will take orders from me without question, so I think that it will be better all around if you will explain your wants to me in the future. Colby told me what you wanted just now and the horses are being saddled."

He started to speak and then, evidently reconsidering, caught himself with a palpable effort. "Very well," he said, presently, "we'll let it pass this time."

Together they walked toward the corral where Willie was saddling a quiet, old horse for Miss

Manill. Beside him stood Gimlet with drooping head and dejected mien.

"Which one is for me, sonny?" demanded Corson.

Wild Bill glanced up in sullen scorn, eyed Mr. Corson for a brief moment and then jerked a soiled thumb in the direction of Gimlet.

"What! that old crow-bait?" exclaimed the New Yorker.

"You said you wanted a gentle hoss," explained Colby, lolling in his saddle nearby, ".an' Gimlet won't pitch."

"I don't want to ride a skate," growled Corson. "When I'm on a horse I want to know I'm on something."

"You'll know you're on Gimlet," Colby assured him, sweetly, "he ain't so dumb as he looks. Jest stick your spurs into him an' he'll act quite lively."

"All right," said Corson, glumly; "tell him to hurry-I see Miss Manill coming now."

There were others who saw her coming, too. Texas Pete was only one of them.

"By gollies!" he exclaimed. "Look what's got loose!"

Lillian Manill was approaching jauntily, clothed in a black riding habit with a long voluminous skirt, a

black riding habit, with a long, voluminous skirt, a man's collar and tie and black silk hat, with a flowing veil wound around it. Shorty eyed her for a long minute, then he let his gaze wander to Mr. Corson.

"It wouldn't never be safe fer me to go to New York," he confided to Idaho. "I'd shore laugh myself to death."

By the time Miss Manill joined the group the two horses were saddled and Willie had led them out of the corral.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Miss Manill. "Haven't you a side-saddle? I could never ride one of those horrid things."

"I'm sorry," said Diana, "but we haven't one. I doubt if there is a side-saddle in the county. I think you can work it though, if you will put your leg around the horn. Next time I'll fix you up with a skirt like mine and then you can ride astride."

"Are you sure the horse is perfectly safe?" inquired Lillian. "I'll have to have a few lessons before I can ride one of those bouncing ones. Oh, Mr. Colby, good morning! Here I am all ready for my first lesson."

Her eyes took in the punchers grouped a few yards away. "I see you are going to have quite a class this morning. Mr. Pete told me, though, that you taught the cow-gentlemen in the afternoon."

Colby shot a quick glance at Pete, who had just been overcome by a violent fit of coughing, and knowing Texas Pete, as he did, grasped the situation at once.

"Oh, I had to give up the afternoon class," he told her, "after I found they was a few like Mr. Pete who wouldn't never larn to ride."

"Isn't that too bad," she said, politely. Then she turned toward Corson. "I think you'd better try it first, Maurice. I'll watch how you do it."

"All right," said he. "It's been a long time since I have ridden, but I guess it'll come back to me quick enough. I might be able to give you a few pointers at that."

He walked up to Gimlet's off side and took hold of the saddlehorn, neglecting the reins, which Willie still held. Gimlet eyed him sadly. When he essayed to place a foot in the stirrup the pony side-stepped rapidly in the opposite direction.

"You'd better mount from the other side, Mr. Corson," advised Diana. "These horses are not broken to work with from the off side."

"I knew all along he was a damn Injun," remarked Idaho.

"An' you better take the reins, you may need 'em," supplemented Willie, who, at bottom, had a kind

heart and shrank from bloodshed.

Corson walked to the near side of Gimlet, gathered the reins loosely in his right hand, stuck a foot into the stirrup, took hold of the horn with both hands and pulled himself laboriously into the saddle. Gimlet stood quietly.

"Giddap!" said Mr. Corson, but Gimlet moved not.

"Throw the hooks into him!" shouted Willie, gleefully.

"Why don't the old skate go?" demanded Corson, shaking the reins.

"Use your spurs!" called one of the cowboys. "That's what you bought 'em fer, ain't it?"

Mr. Corson used his spurs. The result was electrical, galvanizing Gimlet into instant and surprising action-action which glowingly elucidated the derivation of his name. He wheeled dizzily round and round upon the same spot, and with lightning rapidity.

Mr. Corson's funny hat flew off. He clawed at the horn in intervals that he was not clawing at the loose reins in a mad effort to gather them. Then Gimlet stopped and commenced wheeling again. Mr. Corson lost a stirrup. Then he let go both reins and seized the horn with two hands.

"Stop him!" he yelled. "Stop him! Whoa! Whoa!"

"Rip him open!" shrieked Willie. "Spur him in the eyes!"

"Ride him, cowboy!" yelled Idaho.

Again Gimlet bolted and this time Mr. Corson commenced to slip dangerously to one side. A hundred-yard sprint back to where he had started and Gimlet paused to wheel once more. It was the end. Mr. Corson spun off, alighting on his back. He rolled over with surprising agility and on his hands and knees crawled rapidly away from this man eater that he was sure was pursuing him. But Gimlet was only standing dejectedly, with drooping ears.

Corson came to his feet. The men about him-rough fellows with none of the finer sensibilities of New Yorkers-were laughing rudely.

"It was a put-up job," he spluttered. "It was a put-up job. You'll suffer for this, Colby! You told me that animal was gentle."

"I told you he wouldn't pitch mister!" snapped Colby. "An' he didn't pitch."

Miss Manill had started back toward the house. "I think I'll not ride this morning," she said.

Chapter XII--CORSON SPEAKS

"COME here!" he yells then to the rest o' us boys,

'Step up to the fun'ral an' don't make no noise

The while we inter all the barb-wire what's here,

After which we'll dispose o' the seegars an' beer.'" "

sang Texas Pete. "Hello! See who's came!" "

Bull entered the bunk-house with a grin and a nod. "Still singin' I see, Pete," he said. "Ain't you finished thet one yit?"

Two weeks had slipped by since the arrival of Corson and Miss Manill. Bull had just been relieved from duty as bullion guard and was only now returning to the home ranch. In the weeks that he had brought the gold down from the mine there had been no holdup-The Black Coyote or Gregorio had not once been seen.

"How's everything?" asked Bull.

"So-so," replied Texas Pete.

"Where's Colby? I gotta report to him."

"Up at the house-he eats there now."

Bull made no comment. He thought he understood why Hal Colby ate at the house. One day soon, doubtless, he would sleep there, too, as master.

"This Manill heifer got stuck on him an' insists on his eatin' there," explained Pete. "Things ain't been

the same since them two shorthorns hit the diggin's. The boss she looks tired and worried all the time an' sadlike. I reckon she ain't got no more use fer 'em than the rest o' us."

"Is Colby gone on this Manill girl?" asked Bull.

"I dunno. Sometimes I reckons he is an' sometimes I reckons he ain't. Looks like as if he weren't quite sure which side his bread was buttered on an' he's waitin' to find out."

Bull busied himself arranging his blankets on his old bunk, working in silence. Texas Pete eyed him surreptitiously. There was a troubled look in Pete's eyes. Presently he coughed nervously. The two men were alone in the bunkhouse.

"Say, Bull," Pete finally broke the silence, "you an' me's ben good pals."

Bull looked up from the work of folding his tarpaulin. "Who said we ain't?" he inquired.

"Nobody ain't said we ain't," Pete assured him.

"Then what's eatin' you?"

"It's only just what everybody's sayin', Bull," said Pete. "I thort you'd better know about it."

"What?"

"Thet you an' The Black Coyote air the same feller. Not that it makes any difference with me. I

ain't askin' whether you air or whether you ain't. I'm just a-tellin' you fer your own good."

Bull smiled one of his slow smiles. "If I wasn't I'd say so, wouldn't I?" he asked.

"I reckon you would."

"An' if I was I'd say I wasn't, wouldn't I?"

"I reckon you would," assented Pete.

"Then what the hell's the use o' sayin' anything?" he demanded. "And 'specially when I don't give a damn what they think."

Pete shook his head. "I dunno," he said.

Bull started for the doorway. "I'm goin' up to the house to report to Colby," he said.

"Look out thet Manill heifer don't git her grubhooks on you," cautioned Pete.

In the office he found Diana Henders writing a letter. She looked up with a little start as she heard his voice.

"Oh, Bull!" she cried, "I'm so glad you're back."

"Thanks, Miss. I come up to report to Colby, but I see he ain't here."

"He's in the living-room with Mr. Corson and Miss

Manill," she told him.

"I reckon I'll see him later then." He started to leave.

"Don't go, Bull," she said. "I want to talk with you. Please sit down."

He walked toward her and lowered himself into the big easy chair that had been her father's. His movements were like those of a lion-silent, powerful and yet without stealth.

For the first time in weeks the sense of loneliness that had constantly oppressed her vanished. Bull was back! It was as if a big brother had come home after a long absence-that was why she was so glad to see him. Her heart forgot the thing that her reason had been practically convinced of-that Bull was the bandit of Hell's Bend-that it was Bull who had been robbing her father and her for months-that it was

Bull who had shot Mack Harber.

She only knew that she felt relief and safety when Bull was near. Nearly everyone feared him-many hated him. Could they all be wrong? Could she alone be right in believing in him?-as her heart did against the wise counseling of reason.

"Yes, Miss?" he said, interrogatively.

"The Wainrights are trying to buy the ranch again,

Bull," she said, "and Mr. Corson seems to favor the idea."

"Do you want to sell?" he asked.

"No, I do not; but the worst of it is the price they want to accept-two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for all our holding-ranch, cattle and mine. They are bringing all kinds of pressure to bear on me. Mr. Corson says I must either buy them out or agree to the sale. I haven't the cash to buy them out and they won't take my notes."

"Don't sell, Miss, at that price, an' don't sell at all if you don't want to-they can't force you to sell."

"But they make it so unpleasant for me, and Mr. Corson is always telling me that the bottom has fallen out of the live-stock business and that the new vein in the mine doesn't exist."

"The live-stock business is all right, Miss. It wasn't never better, an' as fer the new vein that's all right too. I was scratchin' around a little bit myself while I was up there these past six weeks. The gold's there all right. The trouble is that you ain't got the right man up there-that new superintendent looks to me like a sharper. Did you know the Wainrights was up there often?"

"No! really?"

"Yes, an' that superintendent is thick as thieves with 'em."

"He has no business to permit them on the property."

"He does though," said Bull, "but he raised thunder when he found I'd been snootin' around the workings. I don't like that hombre, Miss."

"Everybody seems to be against me, Bull, and it's so hard to know what to do, now that Dad's gone. Mr. Corson and my cousin are nagging at me all the time to agree to sell. Sometimes I am almost determined to just to get rid of them."

"If you want to get rid o' them, Miss, that's easy," said Bull. "All you gotta do is say so an' I'll run 'em off the ranch an' outta the county. I wouldn't like nothin' better."

"I thought you had taken quite a fancy to my cousin, coming in on the stage," said Diana.

"The only rope she could ever have on me, Miss, is that she's your cousin," replied Bull, and she knew that he meant it. "If you want me to run 'em out of the country, say the word, an' I'll start 'em in ten minutes-an' keep 'em on the jump, too."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do, Bull," she said, smiling.

"I don't see why not," he replied.

Just then, Hal Colby entered the room. He nodded

to Bull.

"You back?"

Bull took no notice of a question so obviously foolish.

"How long you ben back?" continued Colby.

"Bout half an hour."

"Why didn't you report?" Colby was vexed. The easy familiarity of Bull's attitude, stretched comfortably as he was in Mr. Henders' chair, and in pleasant converse with Diana, galled him.

"Ain't you got eyes?" inquired Bull. "Cain't you see me sittin' here reportin' to my boss?"

"You're supposed to report to me," snapped Colby.

"I'm apt to do lots of things I ain't supposed to do," Bull told him softly.

"I reckon most everybody knows that, too," said Colby, meaningly.

"Come!" cried Diana. "Don't you boys quarrel-I have troubles enough now. Bull was looking for you to report, when he came up here," she told Colby. "He asked for you."

"Why didn't he say so, then? I got some work for him an' I ben expectin' him all day."

"Well, I'm here," said Bull. "What do you want me to do?" His voice, unlike Colby's, carried no trace of anger, if he felt any.

"Cramer wants off a few days an' I want you to go over to the West Ranch an' look after the hosses 'til he comes back. They's some colts over there that needs to be rid-Cramer'll tell you all there is to do."

"When do you want me to go?"

"Tonight-that'll give Cramer a chance to git an early start in the mornin'."

"All right," said Bull, rising. "Good night, Miss."

"Good night, Bull. I may ride over while you're at the West Ranch. I've been intending to look the place over for a month or more. Cramer said we needed some new corrals."

He nodded and left the room.

"I don't see how you kin be decent to a feller what's ben robbin' you an' your dad fer months," said Colby, after Bull had left. " Er mebbby you don't believe it even now?"

"I know it looks suspicious, Hal; but it's so hard to believe it of Bull. I hate to believe it. I almost don't believe it. You are hard on him because you don't like him."

"Didn't I tell you he was one of my best friends- you know that-'til I got wise to his game. I ain't a-wantin' no rattle-snake like thet as no friend o' mine."

Diana sighed and rose wearily from her chair. "I'm going to wash up for supper," she said.

She had been gone but a moment when Corson entered the office.

"Well," he asked, "has she changed her mind?"

"I didn't say nothing about the matter to her," replied Colby. "It wouldn't have done no good after what I hears Bull atellin' her just afore I come in the room."

"What was that?" demanded Corson.

"He was a-tellin' her not to sell, an' furthermore he offers to run you an' Miss Manill outta the country if she gives the word."

"What did she say to that?" Corson's voice showed indications of nervousness.

"Oh, she wouldn't stand fer that o' course; but he's a dangerous feller to have around her. He's got too damn much influence over her."

"I wish we could get rid of him," said Corson. "It seems funny that he isn't arrested, when everyone knows he's The Black Coyote."

"He'll run his neck into a noose one o' these days," replied Colby.

"But in the meantime he may spoil this deal with Wainright," said Corson, "and I've got my heard set. on that. I want to get out of this damned country. It gives me the willies. Too many Indians, and coyotes, and irresponsible kids with firearms-it isn't safe."

"I don't see why you are so anxious to sell now," said Colby. "You can get more if you half try."

"That would mean going back to New York. There isn't any capital out here. Wainright is a find, pure and simple. I can't chance taking the time to arrange a deal back East-I don't know what Miss Henders would be up to out here. What Miss Manill wants to do is get some ready money out of it quick and get out. I guess there's only one thing to do and that's to spring my last card on the girl. I'd rather have done it an easier way, but she's so damn stubborn she's forcing me to it."

"To what?" asked Colby.

Corson leaned close to him and whispered for several minutes into his ear.

When he was through Colby leaned back in his chair and whistled. "You don't mean it!" he exclaimed.

"Wainright is coming over to Hendersville on the stage tomorrow and I want to get this matter settled with the Henders girl so that I can have something definite to say to him. I think she's coming around all right now that she is commencing to realize that the mine's about played out and that the cattle business isn't much better. Of course it don't make much difference what she thinks about it except that she could make it mighty unpleasant around here if she wanted to."

"She shore could make it unpleasant fer you and Wainright ef she wanted to," agreed Colby, "an don't fool yourself that she thinks the business ain't worth nothin'. Ef you had her thinkin' so today, Bull's give her something new to think about since he was here."

"How's that?" demanded Corson.

"I Learn him tellin' her he'd been diggin' 'round in the mine while he was up there an' that he knows the new vein's rich as all get-out, an' he told her the cattle business was all right, too. I reckon she'll believe him afore she will you."

Corson bit his lip. "That settles it!" he exclaimed. "I've fooled around long enough. I'm going to tell her tonight."

Outside the bunk-house some of the men were washing for supper. Inside, Bull was rolling and roping his bed preparatory to moving to the West Ranch after the evening meal

"What yuh doin'?" demanded Texas Pete. "Yuh ain't quit?"

"Goin' over to the West Ranch-Cramer's gettin' off fer a spell," explained Bull.

"Looks like they weren't crazy fer your company here," remarked Pete.

Bull shrugged his shoulders and went on with the business of half-hitches, to the final knot, after which he tossed the bed-roll onto his bunk.

"I shouldn't think you'd stay on, Bull," said Texas Pete. "Let's pull our freight. I ain't never ben to Calyformy-hev you'?"

The ex-foreman shook his head. "I got my own reasons fer stayin' on a spell yet, Pete," he said.

Pete said nothing more on the subject. Bull's answer to his suggestion that they leave the country troubled him, however. It was not Diana Henders who was keeping Bull, of that Pete was certain, because Hal Colby had long since as much admitted that he, Colby, was engaged to marry the dainty boss.

It, wasn't because of any love he had for the job, either-Texas Pete knew that-for Colby had never made Bull's job any too easy since the former had become foreman, and Bull was not staying because he loved Colby. It was true that he never spoke a

derogatory word concerning him, nor once had he criticized his methods as foreman, but Texas Pete knew as well as though Bull had told him that the latter had no use for the foreman.

What was it, then, that was keeping Bull? Texas Pete's loyalty to his friend made it difficult for him to harbor the only answer that his knowledge of events permitted him to entertain; but that answer to the question persisted in obtruding itself upon his consciousness.

If Bull, was, after all, The Black Coyote he could not work to better advantage as a bandit than while in the employ of the Bar Y outfit, where he could easily obtain first-hand knowledge of every important bullion shipment.

"By gollies!" soliloquized Texas Pete, "I don't give a darn ef he be, but I'll be durned ef I believe it yit!",

At the house Hal Colby was talking earnestly to Lillian Manill in the sitting room. Supper had not yet been served, Carson had gone to his room to clean up and Diana had not yet come down.

"Look here. Lill," Colby was saying. "I don't like the way Corson's treatin' Di. I think a heap o' thet little girl an' I don't want to see her git the worst of it."

Lillian Manill reached up and encircled his neck with her arms. "I thought you were all over that,

Hal," she said. "You've been telling me how much you love me, but how do you expect me to believe it if you're always thinking of her and not ever considering my interests. You want her to have all the property and you don't want me to have any. You don't love me!"

"Yes, I do, Lill-I'm crazy about you," he insisted.

"Then act like it," she advised him, "and quit siding with her all the time. I'm going to be a rich girl, Hal, and we can have a mighty good time after we're married, if you don't go and make a fool of yourself and try to keep me out of what rightly belongs to me."

"I ain't always so durned sure you're goin' to marry me," he said gloomily. "You've ben pretty thick with thet feller Corson, an' he's sweet on you-enry fool c'd tell thet."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Lillian Manill, laughing lightly; "why, Maurice is only like a big brother to me. Now give me a kiss and tell me that you won't let Diana or anyone else steal all our money." She drew his face down to hers and their lips met in a long kiss.

When they separated Colby was panting heavily. "Gawd!" he exclaimed huskily. "I'd commit murder fer you."

In the shadows of the hall stood Maurice B. Corson, scowling darkly upon them through the

partially opened doorway. Presently he coughed discreetly and a moment later entered the room, where he found Lillian idly turning sheets of music at the piano, while Colby was industriously studying a picture that hung against the wall.

Corson accosted them with a pleasant word and a jovial smile, and a minute later Diana Henders entered the room and the four went in to supper. The meal, like its predecessors for some weeks, was marked by noticeable constraint. The bulk of the conversation revolved about the weather, about the only thing that these four seemed to have in common that might be openly discussed, and as Arizona summer weather does not offer a wide field for discussion the meals were not conspicuous for the conversational heights attained. Nor was this one any exception to the rule. When it was nearly over Carson cleared his throat as is the habit of many when about to open an unpleasant subject after long deliberation.

"Miss Henders," he commenced.

Hal Colby arose. "I gotta see Bull before he leaves," he announced hastily, and left the room.

Corson started again. "Miss Henders," he repeated, "I have a painful duty to perform. I have tried to work in harmony with you, but I have never met with any cooperation on your part, and so I am forced to reveal a fact that we might successfully have gotten around had you been willing to abide by my judgment in the matter of the sale of the

by my judgment in the matter of the sale of the property."

"And what fact is that?" asked Diana, politely.

"We will get to it presently," he told her. "Now, my dear young lady, your father's death has left you in very unfortunate circumstances, but, of course, as is natural, Miss Manill wants to do what she can for you."

"I am afraid that I do not understand," said Diana. "Lillian and I have suffered equally in the loss of our fathers and uncles, and together we have inherited the responsibilities of a rather large and sometimes cumbersome business. I am sure that we wish to help one another as much as possible-I as much as she."

"I am afraid that you do not understand, Miss Henders," said Corson, solemnly. "By the terms of your uncle's will everything would have gone to your father had he survived Mr. Manill, but he did not. Your father made a similar will, leaving everything to your uncle. So you see, Miss Henders!" Corson spread his palms and raised his brows in a gesture of helplessness.

"I must be very dense," said Diana, "for I am sure I do not know even yet what you are driving at, Mr. Corson."

"It is just this," he explained; "your father left everything to your uncle-your uncle left everything

to his daughter. It is very sad, Miss Henders-Miss Manill has grieved over it a great deal; but the law is clear-it leaves you penniless."

"But it is not what was intended and there must be another will," exclaimed Diana. "Uncle John and Dad both wished that, when they were gone, the estate should be divided equally between their lawful heirs-half and half. Dad left such a will and it was his understanding that Uncle John had done likewise-and I know he must have for he was the soul of honor. Their wills were identical-Dad has told me so more than once. They had such implicit confidence in one another that each left everything to the other with the distinct understanding that eventually it all was to go to the heirs of both, as I have explained."

"I do not doubt that your father left such a will, if you say he did; but the fact remains that Mr. Manill did not," said Mr. Corson, emphatically.

"But you shall not want, Miss Henders. Your cousin will see to that. She has already authorized me to arrange for an annuity that will keep you from want until you are married-we thought best not to continue it beyond that time for obvious reasons."

"You mean," asked Diana, dully, "that I have nothing? That I am a pauper-that even this roof under which I have lived nearly all my life does not belong, even in part, to me-that I have no right here?"

"Oh, please, don't say that, dear!" exclaimed Lillian Manill. "You shall stay here just as long as you wish. You will always be welcome in my home."

"My home!" Diana suppressed a sob that was partially grief and partially rage. The injustice of it! To take advantage of a technicality to rob her of all that rightly belonged to her. She was glad though that they had come out into the open at last-why had they not done so before?

"Of course," said Corson, "as Miss Manill says, you are welcome to remain here as long as the property is in her hands, but, as you know, we have received an advantageous offer for it and so it is only fair to tell you that you might as well make your plans accordingly."

"You are going to sell to Wainright for two hundred and fifty thousand?" asked Diana.

Corson nodded. Diana rose and walked the length of the room, then she turned and faced them. "No, you are not going to sell, Mr. Corson, if there is any way in which I can prevent it. You are not going to steal my property so easily. Why have you been attempting all these weeks to persuade me to agree to a sale if you knew all along that I had no interest whatsoever in the property?" she demanded suddenly.

"That was solely due to a desire on our part to make it as easy as possible for you," he explained,

suavely. "Your cousin would have given you half the purchase price rather than have had to tell you the truth, Miss Henders; but you have forced it upon us. She desires to sell. It is her property. You alone stood in the way. You have been your own worst enemy, Miss Henders. You might have had one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars had you not been stubborn-now you must be content with whatever Miss Manill sees fit to allow you in the way of annuity."

Diana squared her shoulders as she faced them. "Miss Manill shall give me nothing-I will not accept as a gratuity what rightfully belongs to me. If you think, Mr. Corson, that you are going to take my property away from me without a fight, you are mistaken," and she wheeled about and started for the doorway.

"Wait a moment, Miss Henders!" cried the New Yorker. "I am a lawyer and I know how expensive litigation is. Such a case as you contemplate, and I take it for granted that you purpose taking the matter to court when you say 'fight,' might drag on for years, wasting the entire property in attorneys' fees and legal expense, so that neither of you would get anything-I have seen such things happen scores of times.

"Now, let us rather compromise. We were willing to make you a gift of half the purchase price immediately on the consummation of the sale to Mr. Wainright. That offer is still open. It is extremely fair

and generous and if you will take my advice you will accept it."

"Never!" snapped Diana.

Corson and Lillian sat in silence listening to Diana's foot-falls as she ascended the stairs. Presently they heard her door close, then the girl turned upon Corson. "You poor sucker, you!" she exclaimed. "What do you think you are, offering her a hundred and twenty-five thousand when we don't have to give her a cent!"

"Don't be a hog, Lill," advised the man. "We'll get enough, and if we can save a lot of trouble we'd better let her have the hundred and twenty-five. You can't tell what these people out here'll do.

"Take that Bull fellow, for instance-he's already offered to run us out of the country if she says to. Look what he did to old man Wainright, for instance. Why, say, there are a lot of her friends here that would think no more of shooting us full of holes than they would of eating their Sunday dinners, if she just so much as hinted that she thought we were trying to do her out of anything.

"And we'll be getting plenty, anyway-you and I get a third and Wainright gets the other third-and that mine is worth millions. Why, we could afford to give her the whole two hundred and fifty thousand dollars if she'd agree to the sale."

"I'm not so keen as you on giving my money

away," replied Lillian.

"Your money, hell," he replied. "You wouldn't have anything if it wasn't for me, and as for that measly little hundred and twenty-five thousand, why, it'll cost us all of that to square these people around here before we get through with it-I've promised Colby ten thousand already, and say, speaking of Colby, I saw you two in the sitting room before supper. You got to lay off that business-you're getting too thick with that fellow to suit me. You belong to me," he added suddenly and fiercely.

"Oh, come on, Maurice, don't be silly," replied Lillian. "You told me to get him on our side. How did you suppose I was going to do it-by making faces at him?"

"Well, you don't have to go too far. I heard you telling him what you two would do after you were married. You may be a good little actress, Lill, but that kiss you gave him looked too damn realistic to suit me. I'm not going to have you running off with him after you get your mitts on a little money."

"Say, you don't think I'd marry that rube, do you?" and Lillian Manill burst into peals of laughter.

Colby found Bull in the bunk-house.

"Bull," he said, "I wish you'd ride up Belter's tomorrer an' see how the water's holdin' out."

"Listen, Bull," said Texas Pete, "I got the rest of it:

"An' so we lines up at the bar, twelve or more;
The boss tries to smile, but he caint, he's so sore.
The stranger says: 'Pronto! you -dum little runt.'
Jest then we hears someone come in at the front,
"An' turnin' to look we see there in the door
A thin little woman-my gosh, she was pore!-
Who lets her eyes range 'til they rest on this bloke
With funny ideas about what was a joke.
"She walks right acrost an' takes holt o' his ear.
'You orn'ry old buzzard,' she says, 'you come
here!"
He give us a smile thet was knock-kneed an' lame,
An', 'Yes, dear, I'm comin'!' he says, an' he came."

Chapter XIII--THE NECKTIE PARTY

WHEN Diana Henders left the dining room after hearing Corson's explanation of her status as an heir to the estate of her father and uncle she definitely severed relations with the two whom she now firmly believed had entered into a conspiracy to rob her of

her all. The following day she ate her meals in the kitchen with Wong to whom she confided her troubles. The old Chinaman listened intently until she was through, then he arose and crossed the kitchen to a cupboard, a crafty smile playing over his wrinkled, yellow countenance.

"Me fixee-me no likum," he said, as he returned with a phial of white powder in his hand.

"O, Wong! No! No!" cried the girl, grasping instantly the faithful servitor's intent. "You mustn't do anything so horrible as that. Promise me that you won't."

"All lightee jest samee you say," he replied with a shrug, and returned the phial to the cupboard.

"I'm going away tonight, Wong," she told him, "and I want you to promise me that nothing like that will happen while I am away and that you will stay until I return. There is no one else I could trust to look after the house."

"You clomee backee?"

"Yes, Wong, I'm going to Hendersville tonight so that I can catch the stage for Aldea in the morning. I am going to take the train for Kansas City and consult some of Dad's friends and get them to recommend a good lawyer. You'll take care of things for me, Wong?"

"You bletee bloteel!"

That afternoon she sent for Hal Colby wid told him what Corson had said to her. Colby seemed ill at ease and embarrassed.

"I'm mighty sorry, Di, " he said, but I don't see what you kin do about it. If I was you I'd accept half the purchase price. They got you dead-to-rights an' you won't make no money fightin' 'em."

"Well, I won't accept it, and I'm surprised that you'd advise me to."

"It's only fer your own good, Di," he assured her. "It ain't Lillian's fault that your uncle done your dad outen the property. You cain't blame her fer wantin' what was left to her an' I think it was mighty pretty of her to offer to split with you."

"I don't," she replied, "and I think there is something behind that offer that is not apparent on the face of it. I am going to find out, too. I'm going to Kansas City to hire a lawyer and I'll want the buckboard and one of the men to drive me to town after supper tonight."

"I'm plumb sorry, Di, but Corson an' Lillian have took the buckboard to town already."

"Then I'll go on Captain," she said. "Please have him saddled for me right after supper."

She packed her traveling dress and other necessary articles in a small bag that could be tied

necessary tricks in a small bag that could be tied to a saddle, leaving on her buckskin skirt and blouse for the ride to town, and after supper made her way to the corral after waiting a few minutes for Captain to be brought to the house and rather wondering why Hal had neglected to do so.

To her surprise she discovered that Captain had not even been saddled, and was, as a matter of fact, still running in the pasture a mile from the house. She went to the bunk-house to get one of the men to catch him up, but found it deserted. From there she walked to the cook-house, where she found only the cook setting bread for the morrow.

"Where are all the men?" she asked.

"They's a dance to Johnson's tonight an' some of 'em went there," he told her. "The rest went to town. Idaho, Shorty an' Pete went to the dance."

"Where's Hal?"

"I reckon he went to town-I ain't seen him since this artemnoon some time."

"Did Willie go too?"

"No'm, he's here sommers-hey, Willie! You Willie!"

Willie appeared from the outer dusk. "Oh, Willie," said Diana, "won't you please catch Captain up for me and saddle him?"

"You ain't goin' to ride tonight all alone, be you?" he asked.

"I've got to get to town, Willie, and Hal forgot to tell anyone to ride with me," she explained.

"Well, I'll go along with you," said Willie. "I'll have the hosses saddled pronto," and off he ran.

Ten minutes later they were in the saddle and loping through the rapidly falling night toward town.

"I can't understand how Hal happened to let all the boys go at the same time," she said, half musingly. "It was never done before and it isn't safe."

"Bull wouldn't never have done it," said Willie. "Bull was a top-notch foreman."

"You like Bull?" she asked.

"You bet I do," declared Willie, emphatically; "don't you?"

"I like all the boys," she replied.

"Bull wouldn't never have left you here alone at night. He set a heap o' store by you, Miss." Willie was emboldened to speak freely because of the darkness that would cover any sudden embarrassment he might feel if he went too far. The same darkness covered Diana's flush-a flush of contrition that she harbored a belief in Bull's villainy.

Before they entered Hendersville they became aware that something unusual was going on in town. They could hear the hum of excited voices above which rose an occasional shout, and as they rode into the single street they saw a hundred figures surging to and fro before Gum's Place. A man stood on the veranda of the saloon haranguing the crowd.

"This business has gone fer enough," he was saying as Diana and Willie paused at the outskirts of the crowd. "It's high time we put a end to it. You all knows who's a-Join' it as well as I do. What we orter do is ride out 'n git him tonight-they's a bunch o' cottonwoods where he is right handy an' we got plenty o' ropes in the cow-country. Who's with me?"

Two score voices yelled in savage assurance of their owners' hearty cooperation.

"Then git your bronchs," cried the speaker, "an' we'll go after him an' git him!"

Diana saw that the orator was Hal Colby. She turned to one of the men who was remaining as the majority of the others hastened after their ponies.

"What is it all about?" she asked. "What has happened?"

The man looked up at her, and as he recognized her, pulled off his hat awkwardly. "Oh. it's you.

Miss Henders! Well, you see, the stage was held up ag'in today an' Mack Harber was kilt-it was his first trip since he was wounded that time. It was the first trip, too, since Bull quit guardin' the gold, an' a lot o' the fellers has got it in their heads thet it's Bull as done it.

"Tain't no sech thing!" cried a little old man, nearby, "tain't Bull."

The speaker was Wildcat Bob. "I don't like to think so neither," said the first man; "but it shore looks bad fer him-the fellers is all bet up. There ain't one in thet crowd but what would lynch his grin-maw ef he had another drink, an' they sure hev had plenty-Gum's bee settin' 'em up in there fer a couple hours on the house. Never did see Gum so plumb liberal."

"He's aimin' to get someone else to go after The Black Coyote," said Wildcat Bob, "or he wouldn't be so doggone liberal with his rot-gut-he couldn't git up enough nerve ef he drunk a whole distillery."

"You think they really intend to lynch Bull?" asked the girl.

"They ain't no two ways about it, Miss," said the man she had first accosted. "They're aimin' to do it an' I reckon they will. You see they're pretty sore. Mack tried to put up a little fight an' this Black Coyote feller bored him plumb between the eyes. Then he takes the gold, cuts all the bosses loose

from the stage an' vamooses. That's why we didn't hear oil it 'til just a bit ago, cause they didn't have no way to git to town only hoofin' it."

Already the avenging mob was gathering. I hey came whooping, reeling in their saddles. Not one of them, sober, would have gone out after the ex-foreman of the Bar Y, but, drunk, they forget. ' heir fear of him, and Diana knew that they would carry out their purpose.

They were going to lynch Bull! It seemed incredible, and yet, could she blame there? Knowing him as she did she had herself half admitted the truth of the rumor of his guilt before, this, the latest outrage, that seemed to fix the responsibility beyond peradventure of a doubt. For the six weeks that Bull had guarded the bullion there had been no holdup, and now on the very first stage day after he had been relieved the depredations had been renewed.

She recalled the fact that he had been seen with Gregorio on the very afternoon of a previous holdup; she recalled the blood upon his shirt that same day-the day that Mary Donovan had fired upon the bandits; she thought of the bag of gold dust that he had displayed at the bunk-house. There seemed no possible avenue of escape from a belief in his guilt.

The yelling avengers were milling around in a circle in front of Gun's Place, firing off their guns, cursing, shouting. The sheriff appeared on the veranda and

showing. The sheriff appeared on the porch and raised his hand for silence.

"Ah'm sheriff yere," he said. "an as an ahm of the law Ah cain't permit yo-all to go fen to lynch nobody, but Ah can an' do invite yo-all in to hev a drink on the house befo' yo go."

There was a wild shout of approval and a scramble for room at the tie rail. Those who lost out rode their ponies into the saloon, and as the last of them disappeared, Diana, who had lost sight of Willie in the jostle and excitement of the past few minutes, turned her pony about and rode back in the direction from which she had come.

Just beyond the last house she turned abruptly to the left-the Bar Y ranch lay to the right-urged Captain into a lope and started off through the darkness toward the west. Presently she struck a well-defined trail and then with a word and a touch of her spurs she sent Captain into a run. Swiftly the wiry animal sprang through the night while the beating of his mistress's heart kept time to the rapid fall of his unshod hoofs.

What was she doing? Was she mad? A dozen times Diana Henders repeated those questions to herself, but the only answer was a monotonous cadence that beat upon her brain, reasonless, to the accompaniment of Captain's flying hoofs:

They shall not kill him! They shall not kill him! They shall not kill him!

Constantly she listened for sounds of the coming of the lynching party, though she knew that she had sufficient start to outdistance them completely, even had Captain not been the fleet- and powerful runner that he was. It was ten miles to the West Ranch from

Hendersville and Captain made it in thirty minutes that night.

Diana threw herself from the saddle at the gate and crawled through the bars, leaving Captain on wide-stretched feet and with nose to ground blowing after his hard run, knowing that he would not move from the spot for some time. She hastened to the darkened cabin and pounded on the door.

"Bull!" she cried. "Bull!" but there was no answer. Then she opened the door and entered, fumbling around for a table she found it and matches, striking one. The cabin, a one-room affair, was empty. Her ride for nothing! Bull was away, but they would hide in the brush and wait for him to come back and then they would shoot him down in cold blood, and he would never have a chance for his life. If she only knew where he had gone, she might ride out and meet him; but she did not know.

Wait! There was one chance! If he was The Black Coyote he would doubtless come in from the north or the northeast, for in the latter direction lay Hell's Bend, the scene of his many holdups.

But it wasn't Bull-it couldn't be Bull-Bull, of all the men in the world, could never have robbed her, or killed her messenger.

Slowly she returned to Captain, standing with heaving sides and dilated nostrils. The animal staggered a bit as she mounted, but at a touch of the rein he turned and walked out into the sagebrush toward the north. She rode for a quarter of a mile and then she reined in her mount and called the man's name aloud.

There was no reply and she turned to the east and rode in that direction for a while, now and then calling "Bull!" her voice sounding strange and uncanny in her own ears. In the distance a coyote yapped and wailed.

She turned and rode west to a point beyond the cabin and then back again, establishing a beat where she might hope to intercept the returning Bull before he reached the danger of the ambush. At intervals she called his name aloud, and presently she halted frequently to listen for the coming of the lynchers.

It was a matchless Arizona night. The myriad stars blazing in the blue-black vault of infinite space cast their radiance softly upon vale and height, relieving the darkness with a gentle luminosity that rendered distant objects discernible in mass, if not in form, and because of it Diana saw the black bulk of the approaching horsemen while they were yet a

considerable distance away, and, seeing them, dared not call Bull's name aloud again.

The mob rode silently now-a grim and terrible shadow creeping through the darkness to lay bloody hands upon its prey. A quarter of a mile from the cabin it halted while its members dismounted and, leaving a few to hold the horses, the balance crept stealthily forward on foot.

Diana, too, had dismounted, knowing that she would be less conspicuous thus, and was leading Captain over a circuitous trail toward the north and east. The girl knelt and placed an ear to the ground.

Faintly, as though at a great distance, she heard the rhythmic pounding of a horse's hoofs. He was coming-loping through the night, Bull was coming-all unconscious of what awaited him there in the darkness. He was riding to his death. She hastened forward a short distance and listened again. If the sounds should be plainer now she would be sure that he was coming from the northeast.

The self-appointed posse crept toward the cabin and according to a general plan imparted to them by Colby, separated into two sections and surrounded it, finally worming their way close in on hands and knees, taking advantage of the cover of the sage to shield them from the sight of the man they believed to be there, then Colby arose and walked boldly to the door. Knocking, he called Bull's name aloud. There was no response.

"Hey, Bull!" cried Colby again, in a friendly voice, "it's Hal." Still no reply. Colby pushed the door open and entered. Of all the motley crew that followed him he alone had the courage to do the thing that he was doing now. He struck a match and lighted a candle that stood on the rude table, embedded in its own grease in the cover of a baking powder can.

A brief survey of the interior showed him that it was untenanted. He extinguished the light and returned to his party where word was passed around that they were to remain quietly in hiding where they were until the quarry came.

In the meantime a lone horseman had thrown himself from a half-spent pony in the Bar Y ranch yard and seeing a light in the cook-house had burst in upon the astonished cook. "What in all tarnation's the matter of ye, Wildcat Bob?" he demanded.

"Where's Bull?" asked the little old man.

"Reckon he's over at the West Ranch-leastways there's where he's supposed to be, why?"

"Warn't they a gang o' the boys jest here lookin' for him?"

"No."

A burst of lurid profanity filled the room as Wildcat Bob explained just how he felt and what he thought of himself

"They set out to lynch Bull," he explained finally, "an' I supposin' o' course that he was here got away ahead o' 'em, an' now, ding-bust my ornery of carcabs, like as not they already got him over at the West Ranch. Where's the rest o' the boys? Where's Texas Pete? You don't reckon that critter's with Colby, do you?"

"Not by a long shot," replied the cook. "He'd stick up fer Bull ef he massacred the whole durn county. So'd Shorty an' Idaho, but they ain't none o' 'em here-they's all down to Johnson's to a dance."

"Well," said Wildcat Bob, "I done my best, which same ain't no good. Ef I hed a hoss instead o' a hunk o' coyote fodder I'd try to git to the West Ranch in time, but I reckon they ain't no chanct now. Howsumever I'll do the best I kin. So-long!" and he was gone.

A half-hour later his horse fell dead a mile north of Hendersville while his rider was taking a short cut straight across country for the West Ranch. It was a warm and lurid Wildcat Bob who plodded through the dust of Hendersville's lone thoroughfare and stopped at the veranda of The Donovan House some time later to be accosted by one of a group gathered there in semi-silent expectancy.

"The saints be praised!" exclaimed Mary Donovan. "Is it a banchee or is it not?"

"It's worse," said Bill Gatlin, the stage driver; "it's Wildcat Bob-walkin'."

"Did they git the poor b'y?" demanded Mary, whereat the little old gentleman burst forth anew with such a weird variety of oaths that Mr. Jefferson Wainright, Jr., could feel the hot flush that mounted to his ears fairly scorching his skin.

"Ef I ever gits a-hold o' the blankety, blank, blank thet loaned me that blankety, blank, blank ewenecked, ring-boned, spavined excuse fer a cayuse I'll cut his heart out," announced Wildcat Bob in a high falsetto.

Finally Mary Donovan inveigled the facts from him. "Ye done well, Bob, thet ye did," she assured him. "Shure an' how was yese to know thet he wasn't at the home ranch."

"I shouldn't think you'd care if they did hang a bandit and murderer," declared Mr. Jefferson Wainright, Jr.

"Who in the hell told you to think, you durn dude?" screamed Wildcat Bob, reaching for his gun.

Mr. Wainright sought the greater safety of the office, tipping over his chair and almost upsetting Mary Donovan in his haste. "Don't shoot!" he cried. "Don't shoot! I meant no offense."

Wildcat Bob would have followed him within, but Mary Donovan caught him around the waist and

pushed him into a chair. "Be ca'm, Robert," she soothed him.

As Diana arose to her feet after listening close to the ground for the second time she was assured by the increased loudness of the sounds she had heard that the lone rider was rapidly approaching from the northeast and in that direction she again led Captain, intending to mount once more as soon as she had reached what she considered a safe distance from the cabin and the hidden watchers encircling it. She had forged ahead for about five minutes when the way dipped into a shallow swale in which the sagebrush grew to greater size.

Here would be a good place to remount, and with this intention crystallized she wound downward among the scattered brush toward the bottom, when, rounding a particularly high bush, she came suddenly face to face with a man leading a horse.

"Stick 'em up!" whispered the man in a low voice, presenting an evil-looking six-gun at the pit of her stomach.

"Oh, Bull!" she cried in low tones, for she would have known his voice among thousands.

"You?" he cried. "My gawd, Miss, what are you doin' here?"

"They have come to lynch you, Bull," she told him. "There are forty or fifty of them lying in the brush around your cabin now. They say that you held up

the stage and killed Mack Harber today."

"And you came to warn me?" His voice sounded far away, as though, groping for a truth he could not grasp, he spoke half to himself.

"You must go away, Bull," she told him. "You must leave the country."

He paid no attention to her words. "I seen a light flash fer a minute in the shack," he said, "an' so I reckoned I'd hev a look around before I come too close. That was why I was walkin' when I hearn you.

I was just a-goin' to leave Blazes here an' go ahead an' scout aroun' a bit. Mount up now an' I'll take you home."

"No," she said, "you get away. I can get home all right-only I have to go to town. I'm stopping at Mary's tonight."

"I'll ride with you," he insisted.

She knew him well enough to know that he would never let her ride to town alone through the night and so she mounted as he did and together they followed the swale which ran in the general direction of Hendersville.

"You say you're stoppin' at Mary's?" he asked.

"Just for tonight. I'm taking the stage for Aldea in

the morning. I'm going to Kansas City to consult a lawyer. They are trying to take the property away from me, Bull," and then she told him all that had transpired since yesterday.

"You don't need a lawyer, Miss," he told her. "What you need is a .two-gun man, only you don't need him, 'cause you got one already. You go back to the ranch an' come mornin' there won't be airy dude or dudess to try to put their brand on nothin' that belongs to you."

"Oh, Bull, don't you understand that you mustn't do anything like that?" she cried. "It would only make things worse than they are now. Wong wanted to poison them."

"Good of Wong!". interjected Bull.

"But we can't make murderers of ourselves just because they are wicked."

"It ain't murder to kill a rattle-snake," he reminded her.

"But promise me that you won't," she urged.

"I wouldn't do nothin' you didn't want done, Miss," he said.

They were nearing town now and could see the lights plainly, shining through the windows and doorways. "You'd better go now, Bull," she said.

"Not 'til I get you in town safe," he replied.

"But I'm safe now-it is only a little way, and I'm afraid they might get you if you came in."

"Shucks, they won't git me now that I know they're after me," he replied. "Say, Miss," he exclaimed suddenly, "you ain't asked me ef it was me kilt Mack."

She drew herself up proudly. "I'll never ask you, Bull," she said.

"But you wouldn't hev come out to warn me ef you'd thought it," he suggested.

She was silent for a moment, and then: "Yes, I would, Bull," she said in a very little voice.

He shrugged his shoulders. "As I told Pete, ef I had done it or ef I hadn't done it, I'd say I hadn't, so what's the use o' wastin' breath; but I shore appreciates what you've done, Miss."

"And you will go away?" she asked.

"No,'m, I'll stay here. I reckon you need me, Miss, from what you've told me, so I'll hang around a spell. I'll ride over to the ranch o' nights now an' then. Ef you happen to hear a meadow-lark settin' up late after dark you'll know it's me."

"But I'm afraid they'll get you, Bull, if you stay in the country. They're terribly angry," she warned,

him

"They won't be so keen to find me after they're sobered up a bit," he said, with a smile. "Colby's the only one that's got the nerve to go agin' guns singlehanded."

"I don't see why he hates you so," she said. "I used to think that he liked you."

"Then all I got to say, Miss, is that you must be plumb blind," said Bull.

Diana was evidently not so blind as he thought her, for she flushed deliciously.

"Now you must turn back," she said. They were almost in town.

"I will, because they mustn't see you ridin' in with me," he replied.

She reined in her horse and held out her hand to him. "Good-bye, Bull," she said.

He took her slim hand in his and pressed it strongly. "Good-bye-Diana!" said Bull.

She spoke to Captain and moved off toward the little town and the man sat there in the darkness watching her retreating form until it was hidden behind a corner of The Donovan House.

Chapter XIV--BULL SEES

COLBY

BULL turned Blazes' head toward the northeast and rode off slowly in the direction of Coyote Canyon near the head of which there was a wild and almost inaccessible country just east of Hell's Bend Pass. There was water there and game for himself, with year round pasture for Blazes.

As he rode he hummed a gay little air, quite unlike the grim, taciturn Bull that his acquaintances knew, for Bull was happy-happier than he had been for months.

"An' to think," he mused, "thet she rode out there all alone to warn me. An' once she said to me, 'Bull,' says she, 'I don't love any man, Bull, thet way; but if ever I do he'll know it without my tellin' him. I'll do something thet will prove it-a girl always does.'"

"Thet's what she says -them's her very words. I ain't never fergot 'em an' I ain't never goin' to-even ef I don't believe it. It was just her good heart that sent her out to warn me-she'd a-done as much fer any of the boys."

When Diana reined in before those assembled on the veranda of The Donovan House she was greeted by a gasp of astonishment from Mary Donovan.

"Diana Henders, child!" she exclaimed. "What are

ye doin' here this time o' night? Sure an' I thought ye had gone back to the ranch, after hearin' ye was in town airlier in the av'nin'."

Diana dismounted without making any reply and tied Captain to the rail in front of the hotel. As she mounted the steps to the veranda the younger Wainright rose, politely. Corson and the elder Wainright nodded, the latter grunting gruffly. Lillian Manill pretended that she did not see her.

"I am going to stop here tonight, Mrs. Donovan," said Diana to the proprietress, "that is if you have room for me."

"An' if I didn't I'd be after makin' it," replied the latter.

"I wonder if you'd mind putting Captain up for me, Bob," said Diana, turning to the Wildcat, and as the old man stepped from the veranda to comply with her request, Diana turned and entered the office, followed by Mary Donovan.

"May I have a cup of tea, Mrs. Donovan?" asked the girl. "I feel all fagged out. This evening has been like a terrible nightmare."

"You mane about poor Bull?" asked Mary.

Diana nodded.

"They ain't back yit," said Mary; "but I suppose they got him, bad 'cess to 'em."

Diana came close to the older woman and whispered. "They didn't get him. I just saw him-he brought me to the edge of town."

"Now, the Lord be praised for that!" ejaculated Mary Donovan, "for shure an' if it's guilty he is I'll not be after belavin' it at all, at all."

"It looks pretty bad for him, Mrs. Donovan," said Diana, "but even so I can't believe it of him either-I won't believe it."

"An' no more don't yese, darlin'," advised Mary Donovan, "an' now make yersilf comfortable an' I'll have ye a cup o' tay in no time."

As her hostess left the sitting room by one doorway, Jefferson Wainright, Jr., appeared in the other which opened from the office, his hat in his hand.

"May I have just a word with you, Miss Henders?" he asked.

The girl nodded her assent, though none too cordially, and Wainright entered the little sitting room.

"I can't begin to tell you, Miss Henders," he commenced, after clearing his throat, "how badly I feel over this matter that Mr. Corson has explained to us. There isn't any question, of course, about the unfairness and injustice of it; but the fact remains

that the law is the law, and I don't see how you are going to get around it by fighting them."

"It is a matter, Mr. Wainright, that I do not care to discuss with you," said Diana, rising.

"Wait a minute, Miss Henders," he begged. "That wasn't exactly what I wanted to discuss with you, though it has a bearing on it. There is a way out for you and it was that I wanted to talk over. Your--father was a wealthy man-you have been accustomed to everything that money could buy in this country. To drop from affluence to penury in a single day is going to be mighty hard for you, and it is that I want to save you from."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," she told him, "but I cannot see how you, of all people, can help me, for your own father is a party to this whole transaction."

"I think you are a bit hard on him," he said. "You surely cannot blame him for wanting to drive as good a bargain as possible--he is, first and last, a business man."

Diana only shrugged her shoulders.

"Now, as I said," continued Mr. Wainright, "there is a way for you to continue to have, not only the luxuries you have been accustomed to, but many more, and at the same time to retain the Bar Y Ranch."

She looked up at him questioningly. "Yes!" she said, "and how?"

"By marrying me, Miss Henders. You know I love you. You know there is nothing I would not do for you. There is no sacrifice that I would not willingly and gladly make for you. I would die for you, dear girl, and thank God for the chance."

Diana Henders' lip curled in scorn. "It seems to me that I heard you make that very assertion once before, Mr. Wainright, and in those self-same words-the night before you ran away, like the coward you are, and left us at the mercy of the Apaches.

"If you had half the courage that you have effrontery, the lion would appear a mouse by comparison. Please, never mention the subject to me again, nor is there any reason why you should ever address me upon any subject. Good night!"

"You'll regret this," he cried as he was leaving the room. "You'll see if you don't. You might have had one friend, and a good one, on your side-now you haven't any. We'll strip you to the last cent for this, and then you'll marry some ignorant, unwashed cow-puncher and raise brats in a tumble-down shack for the rest of your life-that's what you'll do!"

"An do yuh know what you'll do?" demanded a squeaky voice behind him.

Jefferson Wainright, Jr., turned to see Wildcat Bob

glaring at him from the center of the office floor. The young man turned a sickly hue and glanced hurriedly for an avenue of escape, but the Wildcat was between him and the outer doorway and was reaching for one of his terrible guns.

With a half-stifled cry Wainright sprang into the sitting room and ran to Diana. Seizing her he whirled the girl about so that she was between him and the Wildcat's weapon.

"My God, Miss Henders, don't let him shoot me! I'm unarmed-it would be murder. Save me! Save me!"

His screams brought his father, Corson, Lillian Manill and Mary Donovan to the room, where they saw the younger Wainright kneeling in abject terror behind Diana's skirts.

"What's the meanin' of all this?" yelled the elder Wainright.

"Your son insulted me-he asked me to marry him," said Diana. "Let him go, Bob," she directed the Wildcat.

"Gosh-a-mighty, Miss!" exclaimed the old man in an aggrieved tone, "yuh don't mean it, do yuh? Why, I just ben honin' fer a chanct to clean up this here whole bunch o' tin-horns an' now that I got an excuse it don't seem right to let it pass. By cracky, it ain't right! 'Tain't moral, that's what it ain't!"

"Please, Bob-I've got trouble enough-let him go.

Slowly Wildcat Bob returned his gun to its holster, shaking his head mournfully, and Jefferson Wainright, Jr., arose and sneaked out of the room. As his party returned to the veranda the young man's father was growling and spluttering in an undertone, but Wildcat Bob caught the words "law" and "sheriff."

"What's that?" he demanded in his high falsetto.

The elder Wainright cringed and stepped rapidly through the doorway. "Nothin'," he assured the Wildcat. "I didn't calc'late to say nothin' at all."

It was almost morning when the weary and now sobered members of the necktie party returned to town. Gum Smith and several others, among whom was Wildcat Bob, met them in the street.

"Git him?" demanded the sheriff.

"No," replied Colby, "an' I don't savvy it neither-someone must o' put him wise; but I got some evidence," and he drew a worn leather pouch from his shirt. "Here's one o' the bullion bags that was took from the stage yesterday-I found it under his blankets. He may o' ben there an' saw us comin', but thet ain't likely 'cause we snuck up mighty keerful-someone must o' put him wise."

"Ah wondeh who-all it could o' ben," wondered
Gum Smith

As the crowd was dispersing, Wildcat Bob caught sight of Willie among them.

"Hey, thar, you!" he called. "What was you doin' with thet bunch-I thought you claimed to be a friend o' Bull's."

"Course I am," maintained Willie, stoutly; "but I hain't never seed no one hanged."

A few hours later Diana Henders left on the stage for Aldea and after she had departed Cot son and Lillian Manill rode back to the ranch, taking the Wainrights with them, while Hal Colby trotted along beside them. He had not seen Diana before she left, nor had he made any effort to do so.

"We might save a right smart o' rouble if we could get everything fixed up before she gets back, Corson," the elder Wainright was saying.

"The government patent to the land as well as Manill's will are in the New York office," replied Corson. "I've sent for them. They ought to be along now any time. I rather expected them on yesterday's stage-they certainly must come in on the next and I imagine she won't get back for a week at least-that will give us three days. Then we'll all go to Aldea, have the papers drawn up there, you turn the money over to us and Miss Manill and I can get away for New York on the train that night-I've had all of this damn country I want."

Hal Colby, fortunately for his peace of mind, did not overhear the conversation. It outlined an entirely different plan from that which Lillian Manill had explained to him only the preceding day—a plan which included a hasty wedding and a long honeymoon, during which the Bar Y foreman would taste the sweets of world travel in company with a charming and affectionate bride.

"You're goin' to leave me here to run all the risk, eh?" demanded Wainright, senior.

"Oh, there's no risk now that that Bull fellow is out of the way," Corson assured him.

"I wish I was sure he was out o' the way," said Wainright, dubiously. "I don't like that fellow a little bit."

"He'll never show up again," said Corson, confidently, "and anyway, just as soon as I get to New York I'll look up a good man to represent me here, and I'm going to pick the toughest one I can find in New York, too."

"I'm afraid I'm buyin' a heap o' trouble with that one-third interest of mine," said Wainright, scratching his head.

"But look what you're going to get out of it," Corson reminded him. "I'll bet we take a million out of that mine in the next year."

Back at the ranch Colby was met by a scowling trio--'Texas Pete, Shorty, and Idaho. "Where's Bull?" demanded Texas.

"How should I know?" replied Colby, gruffly. "When was I elected his nurse-girl?"

"You went out after him with a bunch o' drunken short-horns last night," accused Shorty. "You know whether you got him or not."

"They didn't git him," said Colby, shortly.

"It's a good thing fer you, Colby, thet they didn't," said Texas Pete, "an' another thing--we wants our time. We ain't a-aimin' to work under no pole-cat no more."

"I reckon we kin git along without you," retorted Colby, ignoring the insult. "You kin come back here in a week fer your checks--the boss ain't here."

"Then we'll stay 'til she is," said Pete.

"Suit yerselves," replied Colby, as he turned and walked away.

The routine of the ranch moved in its accustomed grooves as the days passed, though there was noticeably absent the spirit of good-fellowship that marks the daily life of a well-ordered cow outfit. A little coterie, headed by Texas Pete, herded by itself, in the vernacular of the West, while the remaining punchers grouped themselves about the

foreman.

Mealtimes, ordinarily noisy with rough but good-natured badinage, had become silent moments to be gotten through as rapidly as possible. There was a decorous restraint that was far too decorous, among these rough men, to augur aught of good. It revealed rather than veiled the proximity of open hostilities.

There was one topic of conversation that was eschewed particularly. It would have been the steel to the flint of prejudice which lay embedded in the powder of partisanship. Bull's name was never mentioned when the factions were together.

The stage came again to Hendersville on the third day after Diana's departure. It brought mail for the ranch, but the vaquero who had been sent from the Bar Y for it tarried longer at Gum's Place-Liquors and Cigars-than he had intended, with the result that it was well after supper and quite dark before he delivered it to the office.

As he approached the yellow rectangle of the open office door it may have been the light shining in his eyes that prevented him seeing the figure of a man beneath the darkness of the cottonwoods that surround the house, or the horse, standing as silently as its master, fifty feet away-a blazed-face chestnut with two white hind feet.

The vaquero entered the office, where Corson was sitting in conversation with the two Wainrights and

laid the mail upon the table. The New Yorker picked it up and ran through it. There was a bulky letter addressed to him, which he opened.

"Here's what we've been waiting for," he said, glancing quickly through two enclosures and laying them aside to peruse the accompanying letter.

The man beneath the shadows of the cottonwoods moved closer to the open office doorway, keeping well out of the yellow shaft of the lamp-light.

Bull had not come down to the Bar Y from his hiding place in Coyote Canyon for the purpose of spying upon Corson. He had hoped against hope that Diana might return on the day's stage, for he wanted a word with her. He knew that she could not have made the trip to Kansas City and return in so short a time, but then she might have changed her mind at Aldea and given up the trip. It was on this chance that he had come down out of the mountains tonight.

Diana had not returned-he had convinced himself of this-but still he tarried. These were her enemies. It could do no harm to keep an eye on them. He did not like the proprietorial airs of Corson, sitting there in "the old man's" easy chair, and as for the Wainrights, they too seemed much more at home than suited Bull. His hand caressed the butt of a six-gun affectionately.

"Hell!" exclaimed Corson, explosively. "The addle-

brained idiot!"

"What's the matter?" inquired the elder Wainright.

Corson was in the midst of the letter. He shook it violently and angrily in lieu of anything more closely representative of its writer.

"The chump has dug up some papers that we don't want-we don't want 'em in Arizona at all. He's a new man. I thought he had good sense and discretion, but he hasn't either. He's sendin' 'em out here by registered mail.

"If anything happens to them, if they fall into the Henders girl's hands our goose is cooked. He says they 'put a new aspect on the situation' and that 'he knows I'll be delighted to have them.' They surely will put a new aspect on the situation, but I don't want 'em-not here.

"If I'd had any sense I'd have destroyed them before I left New York; but who'd have thought that they weren't safe right in my own office. I'd be delighted to have him-by the neck. Lord! suppose they're lost now! They should have been here with this other mail."

"If it's registered stuff it may have been delayed just enough to miss the stage at Aldea by one train," suggested Wainright. "If that is the case it'll be along by the next stage."

"What were the papers?" demanded the elder

Wainright, suspiciously.

Corson hesitated. He realized that he had been surprised by his anger into saying too much.

"Perhaps I overestimate their value," he said. "They might not do any harm after all."

"What were they?" insisted Mr. Wainright.

"Oh, they were reports that show the tremendous value of the new vein in the mine," lied Corson, glibly.

Wainright sank back in his chair with a sigh of relief. "Oh, if that's all they was we don't need to worry none about them," he said. "We as good as got the place now. We'll drive over to Aldea tomorrer and fix things up, eh?"

"I think I'll wait for the next mail," said Corson. "Those reports might not do any harm, but I'd rather be here when they come and see that no one else gets hold of them."

"Mebby you're right," assented Wainright. He arose, yawning, and stretched. "I calc'late to go to bed," he said.

"I think I'll do the same," said his son. "I hope Miss Manill is feeling better by morning."

"Oh, she'll be all right," said Corson. "Just a little headache. Good night! I'm coming along too."

They lighted lamps, blew out the one in the office, and departed for their rooms. The man in the shadows turned slowly toward his horse, but he had taken only a few steps when he halted listening.

Someone was approaching. He glanced through the darkness in the direction of the sounds which came out of the night along the pathway from the bunk-house. Stepping quickly behind the bole of a large tree, Bull waited in silence. Presently he saw dimly the figure of a man and as it came nearer the star-light revealed its identity.

It was Colby. Like himself, Colby waited in the shadows of the trees-waited silently, watching the dead black of the office windows. The silence was tangible, it was so absolutely dominant, reigning supreme in a world of darkness. Bull wondered that the other did not hear his breathing. He marvelled at the quietness of Blazes-even the roller in his bit lay silent. But it could not last much longer-the horse was sure to move in a moment and Colby would investigate. The result was a foregone conclusion. There would be shooting.

Bull did not want to shoot Colby-not now. There were two reasons. One however would have been enough-that Diana Henders was thinking of marrying the man.

And then the silence was broken. Very slightly only was it broken. A suspicion of a sound came from the interior of the house. and following it a dim

light wavering mysteriously upon the office walls, growing steadily brighter until the room was suddenly illuminated.

From where he now stood Bull could not see the interior of the office, but he knew that someone carrying a lamp had come down the stairway, along the hall and entered the office. Then he saw Colby move forward and step lightly to the veranda and an instant later the office door swung open, revealing Lillian Manill in a diaphanous negligee.

Bull saw Colby seize the girl, strain her to him and cover her lips with kisses. Then the girl drew her lover into the room and closed the door.

With a grimace of disgust Bull walked to Blazes, mounted him and rode slowly away. Now there was only one reason why he could not kill Colby yet.

Chapter XV--"NOW, GO!"

IT WAS Wednesday again. Four horses, sweat streaked, toiled laboriously to drag the heavy coach up the north side of Hell's Bend Pass. It was a tough pull even with a light load-one that really demanded six horses and would have had six in the old days-and today the load was light. There was but a single passenger. She sat on the driver's box with Bill Gatlin with whom she was in earnest discussion.

"I tell you I don't believe he did it," she was saying. "I'll never believe that he did it, and I'm mighty glad that he got away."

Gatlin shook his head. "There ain't no one got a better right to say that than you has, Miss," he said, "fer 'twas your gold as was stole, an' your messenger as was shot up; but nevertheless an' howsumever I got my own private opinion what I'm keepin' to myself thet it was Bull all right as done it."

"I'd just like to see this Black Coyote once," said the girl. "I'd know if it was Bull or not."

"They ain't no chanct today, Miss," Gatlin told her. "They ain't no gold shipment today, unless I'm mighty mistook."

"Don't he ever make a mistake?" asked the girl.

"Never hain't yet, Miss."

Diana relapsed into silence, her thoughts reverting to her interview with the Kansas City attorney. He had not held out very roseate hopes. By means of litigation-long and expensive-she might, after a number of years, get a small portion of her father's share of the business. She had better take a cash settlement, if she could get one, he thought. A hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars in the hand would be much better, in his opinion, than a long drawn-out suit that could be nothing better than an expensive gamble with the odds against her.

"But I won't! I won't! I won't be robbed," she ejaculated beneath her breath.

"How's that, Miss?" inquired Bill Gatlin. "Was you speakin' to me?"

"I must have been thinking aloud," she said, smiling. "What a long pull this is, Bill!"

"We're nigh to the summit," he replied, pulling in his team to breathe them for a moment.

On the shoulder of Wagon Mountain overlooking the south stretch of Hell's Bend Pass road two men sat their horses amidst a clump of chaparral that effectually hid them from the road, though they could see nearly its entire length from the summit to the gap at the bottom. Presently one of them spoke.

"Here it comes," he said. He was a swarthy, powerfully built Mexican, somewhere in his thirties, Gregorio, the bandit.

His companion was adjusting a black silk handkerchief across his face in such a way as to entirely hide his features. There were two small holes cut in the handkerchief opposite its wearer's eyes which, through them, were fixed upon the stage as it topped the pass and started downward upon its rapid and careening descent toward the gap and Hendersville.

"Come," said Gregorio, and wheeled his horse

about.

His companion's mount moved suddenly before the handkerchief was finally adjusted and as the man reached for his reins the thing fell away from his face, revealing it. It was Bull.

A second attempt was more successful and then the men rode down the sheer mountain-side, keeping just below the crest upon the south side and hidden from the view of the driver and the passenger upon the stage. Their horses moved with extreme care and without haste, for the way was precarious, occasionally requiring that the horses sit upon their haunches and slide for short distances until they found footing again further down. The riders seemed unperturbed either by the dangers of the descent or fear of being late at their rendezvous, suggesting habitude with the work in hand. In a dense growth of scrub just above the gap they tied their horses, continuing on foot.

The stage lumbered downward, rocking from side to side. Diana held tight and said nothing. She had ridden with Bill Gatlin before, many times. He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye.

"This ain't nothin'," he said, as though in answer to a remonstrance on her part. Diana knew what was coming. She had heard it many times. "No, siree," continued Bill, "this ain't nothin'. Why, you'd orter ben with me one night when I was on the Denver run in the ol' days, afore the railroads spoiled the countrv. The trail crossed plumb over the top of a

country, the men crossed plains over the top of a mountain.

'Twarn't no road. 'Twarn't nothin' but a trail. I hed the of stage plumb full an' passengers a-hangin' onto the boot. It was pitch dark-the doggonest, darkest night I ever see. Couldn't see airy wheel-horse. Only ways I knowed I hed any horses was when their shoes struck fire on the stony parts o' the road. Jest afore we struck the top o' the mountain they was the worst cloud-bust I ever did see. Them horses had to swim the last hundred rods to the top o' thet mountain, an' the of stage was bobbin' aroun' so on the waves thet eight of the passengers got sea-sick.

"But thet wa'n't nothin'. When we come to the top I found the road'd ben all washed away. They wa'n't no more road 'n a jack-rabbit; but I was a-carryin' the mail, jest like I be now an' I hed to git through. It was a high mountain an' tolably steep, but not no trees, so I see there wa'n't only one thing to do an' thet was to go down road or no road, so right there on the top o' thet mountain I threw the leather into 'em an' headed 'em fer Denver an' down we goes faster'n ever I rid afore or since, the wheelers a jumpin' to keep out o' the way o' the stage an' the leaders a jumpin' to keep out o' the way o' the wheelers.

"Well, sir, we was a-goin' so fast thet the fust thing I knowed the friction hed melted the nut offen the nigh front wheel an' away went thet wheel hell-bentfer-election down the mountain, but it couldn't

keep up with the stage an' purty soon it was left behind, but the stage was a-goin' so fast thet it never missed thet wheel at all. An' purty soon off came the off rear wheel, an' thet wheel couldn't keep up, though I could see it was doin' its best outen the corner o' my eye.

"Well, sir, 'twa'n't long afore tother hind wheel came off, but we was goin' about twict as fast now as when the fust wheel came off an' that of stage jest skimmed along on one wheel a dinged sight smother an' it ever done on four. When we were about to the bottom off come the last wheel an' then thinks I fer sure we gotta quit an' we ain't to Denver yit, but we'd got so much mo-mentum by this time thet the last wheel didn't make no more difference then the others.

"Them horses jest drug thet stage out behind them like a comet does its tail an' on we went streakin' down thet mountain an' five mile out onto the flat afore the stage hit the ground an' then, o' course, we hed to stop. It was too bad. I tell you I felt plumb sore. I hadn't never ben off schedule sence I took the run.

"Then, all of a suddint, says one o' the passengers, 'Look back yender, Bill,' says he. 'Look what's comin'!' An' I looked an' there come them four wheels a-tearin' across the flat straight fer us. Well, to make a long story short, they peters out right beside the stage an' with the help o' the passengers an' some extra nuts we got 'em back on where they

belonged an' pulled into Denver two hours ahead o' time. But I tell you, Miss, that was some ride. I'd hate to hev to take it again. Why-

"Hands up! Put 'em up!"

The stage had slowed down for the rough road through the gap, when two men with muffled faces stepped before the leaders, covering the driver and his lone passenger with wicked-looking six-guns.

Diana Henders sat as one turned to stone, her eyes fixed upon the tall, fine figure of the leading high wayman. A little gust of wind moved the handkerchief that covered his face so that she saw, or she thought she saw, a scar upon the square chin. She was not afraid. It was not fear-physical fear that held her motionless-it was worse than that. It was the paralyzing terror of the heart and soul. Was it Bull? Could it be Bill?

But, dear God, could she be mistaken in the familiar lines of that figure-every movement, every gesture proclaimed the numbing truth? He had not spoken. She was glad of that, for she wanted something upon which to hang a doubt. The second man had given the brief commands. That he was Gregorio she had no doubt.

"Throw down the mail pouch," he commanded, and Bill Gatlin threw it down.

The taller man took it and went to the rear of the stage, out of sight. Five minutes later Gregorio

commanded them to drive on. That was all. The thing had not consumed six minutes, but in that brief time the structure of Diana's life had been shaken to its foundations. A new, a terrible truth had engulfed her—a truth that should have up-borne her upon a wave of exaltation and happiness now dragged her down into the vortex of a whirlpool of self-loathing and misery.

They rode on in silence for a few minutes, Bill

Gatlin cracking his long whip—above the ears of the leaders, galloping smoothly over a comparatively level road.

"Doggone!" he said presently. "It's gettin' too almighty reg'lar to suit me, though I reckon as how I mought git lonesome if I wasn't held up oncet in a while; but you hed your wish, Miss—you got to see

The Black Coyote, all right, and now what do you think? Is it or isn't it Bull?"

Diana Henders bit her lip. "Of course it was not Bull," she said.

"Looked powerful like him to me," said Gatlin.

As they drew up in front of The Donovan House the usual idlers came forth to learn what new element this, their sole link to civilization, had infused into their midst. They greeted Diana none the less cordially because she was the only passenger and the stage had brought no new

passenger and the stage had brought to new interest to Hendersville.

"Held up agin," announced Bill. "Some on you better go an' tell Gum-he might want to deputize someone."

Immediately the crowd was interested. They asked many questions.

"They wa'n't much to it," said Bill Gatlin. "Bein' as how they wa'n't no gold he took the mail. I reckon if you was lookin' fer any letters you won't git them."

A man from the Bar Y spoke up. "Thet New York feller up to the ranch was lookin' fer a important piece o' mail," he said. "He sent me down special to git it."

"Hey, what's this?" demanded another, peering into the interior of the coach. "Here's yer mail bag, Bill, a-lyin' right in here." He dragged it out and exhibited to the others.

"They's somethin' wrong with it-it's ben cut open," said another, pointing to a slit in the leather. Then the postmaster came up and rescued the sack. The crowd followed him to the general store in which the post-office was conducted. Here the postmaster, assisted by the crowd, went through the contents of the sack.

"Course I caint tell what's missin'," he said, "only there aint no registered letter fer Mr. Carson."

Diana Henders had gone immediately into The Donovan House as quickly as she could clamber from the stage after it had come to a stop, and Mary Donovan had taken her into the privacy of her sitting room for the cup "o' tay" that Diana had been looking forward to for the past couple of hours. Here she told the motherly Irish woman the details of her trip to Kansas City and the quandary she was in as to what procedure to follow in her future dealings with Corson.

"If I had anything to fight with, I'd fight," she exclaimed; "but I'm all alone-even the law seems to be on their side, against justice."

"Shure, an' it's not all alone ye are," Mary Donovan assured her. "What wid all the friends ye have that would fight fer ye at the drop o' the hat. Faith, they'd run thim tin-horns out o' the country, an' ye give the word."

"I know," assented the girl, "and I appreciate what the boys would do for me, but it can't be done that way. Dad always stood for law and order and it wouldn't do for me to sponsor illegal methods."

"Ye've got to fight the divil wid fire," said Mary.

Diana made no reply. She sat sipping her tea, her expression one of troubled sadness, but she was not thinking of those who would take her property from her nor of their unfair methods. Mary

Donovan was moving about the room tidying up.

Diana set her empty cup upon the rickety center table which supported an oil lamp, a bible, a red plush photograph album and a gilded conch shell, and sighed. Mrs. Donovan glanced at her out of the corner of her eye and guessed shrewdly that there was something more than New Yorkers troubling her. Presently she came and stood in front of the girl.

"What is it, mavourneen?" she asked. "Be after tellin' Mary Donovan."

Diana rose, half turned her head away and bit her lower lip in an effort to hide or suppress a short, quick intaking of the breath that was almost a gasp.

"The stage was held up again today," she said, mastering herself and turning, wide-eyed, toward the older woman. "I saw them-I saw them both."

"Yis!" said Mary Donovan.

"But it wasn't-it wasn't he! It wasn't, Mary Donovan!" and Diana, throwing herself upon the broad, motherly bosom, burst into tears, through which she gasped an occasional, "It wasn't! It wasn't!"

"Shure, now, it wasn't," soothed Mary, "an' the first wan that'll be after sayin' it was'll wish he'd nivir bin born, an' even if it was, Diana Henders, there's many a good man's gone wrong an' come right

again.

"Why look at that ould fool Wildcat Bob! They do be sayin' he was a road agent his-self thirty year ago an' he's killed so many men he's lost count o' 'em, he has; but now look at him! A quiet an' peaceable ould man, an' a good citizen whin he ain't full o' barbwire, which ain't often."

Diana dried her tears through a smile. "You're very fond of Bob, aren't you?" she asked.

"Run along wid ye, now!" exclaimed Mary Donovan, smiling coyly.

"I think Bob would make you a good husband," continued Diana, "and you really need a man around here. Why don't you marry him? I know he's anxious enough."

"Marry him, indade!" sniffed Mary. "The ould fool's stricken dumb ivery time he's alone wid me. If iver he's married it is, it's the girl that'll be havin' to pop the question."

They were interrupted by a rap on the sitting room door. It was the vaquero from the Bar Y who had come down for the mail.

"Bill Gatlin told me you was here, Miss," he said. "Do you want me to tell Colby to send the buckboard down for yore?"

"❖ I left Captain here, thanks," replied Diana, "and

as soon as I change my clothes I'll ride back to the ranch."

"Shall I wait for you?" he inquired.

"No, thanks. I don't know how long I'll be," she told him; "but if Pete is there you might ask him to ride out and meet me."

A half-hour later Diana rode out of Hendersville on Captain along the winding, dusty road bordered by interminable sage and grease.-wood that stretched off in undulating billows of rolling land to the near mountains on the north and away to the south as far as the eye could reach where the softened outlines of other mountains rose, mysterious, through the haze. The low sun cast- long shadows toward the east, those of herself and her mount transformed into a weird creature of Brobdingnagian proportions mincing along upon preposterous legs.

The inhabitants of a prairie-dog village watched her approach with growing suspicions, scampering at last to the safety of their catacombian retreat---all but a single patriarch and two owls, who watched her from the safe proximity of burrow mouths until she had passed.

Drear and desolate the aspect of the scene, perhaps, but to Diana it was home, and a tear came to her eye as she thought that in a day or a week she might be leaving it for-ever. Her home! And they were driving her away from it--stealing it from her--her home that her father had built for her

mother--that he had planned that Diana should have after he had gone. The wickedness of it! The injustice! That was what rankled--the injustice! She dashed away the tear with an angry gesture. She would not be dispossessed! She would fight! Mary Donovan was right. It was no sin to light the devil with fire.

It was at this moment that she saw a horseman approaching her from the direction of the ranch. Her eyes, long accustomed to keen observation and to vast expanses, recognized the man minutes before his features were discernible, and a little cloud crossed her brow. It was not Texas Pete, as she had hoped, but Hal Colby. Perhaps it was for the best. She would have to see him sometime, and tell him. As he approached her she saw that there was no welcoming smile on his face, which wore a troubled expression. But his greeting was cordial.

"Hello, Di!" he cried. "Why didn't you let me know that you was comin' today?"

"There was no way to let you know, of course," she replied. "You might have guessed that I would be back as soon as I could."

"Tom jest got in from town an' told me you was comin'. I hurried out to head you off. You don't want to come to the ranch now, it wouldn't be no ways pleasant for you."

"Why?" she demanded.

"The Wainrights is there for one thing," he said, drawing rein in front of her.

She set her firm little jaw and rode around him. "I am going home," she said.

"I wouldn't be foolish, Di," he insisted. "It'll only make more trouble. They as good as got the place now. We can't fight 'em. It wouldn't get us nowheres.

"Lemme see what I kin get 'em to do fer you. They're willin' to give you enough to live decent on if you're reasonable, an' I'll git the most I kin fer you; but if you go to fightin' 'em they won't give you nothin'."

"They'll never give me anything," she cried. "I'd never accept anything from them, but I'll take and keep what's mine, and my friends will help me."

"You'll only git yourself an' your friends in a peck o' trouble," he told her.

"Listen, Hal-" she hesitated, stumbling a little over the speech she had been rehearsing. "There is something I want to say to you. You asked me to marry you. I told you that if you would wait a little while I thought that I could say yes. I can't say yes, Hal, ever, for I don't love you. I'm sorry, but the only fair thing to do was tell you."

He looked a bit crestfallen and disconcerted, for,

though he had realized that it would be poor policy to press his suit now that she was penniless, it injured his pride to be told that he could not have won her in any event, and suddenly came the realization that, money or no money, he wanted her very much. His infatuation for Lillian Manill was revealed in all its sordidness-it was not love. All the money in the world, all the clothes in New York, would not make Lillian Manill as desirable as Diana Henders.

Colby was a crude, uneducated man, yet he discerned in Diana Henders a certain quality, far beyond his powers of analysis, that placed her in a sphere to which Lillian Manill and her kind might never hope to aspire. He knew now that he wanted Diana Henders for herself and Lillian Manill for her money and for that coarse, feminine attraction that certain types of women have for coarse men.

He lived in a more or less lawless country and a more or less lawless age, so it was not strange that there should have crept into his mind the thought that he might possess them both. Naturally it would be only the part of good business to possess lawfully the one with the money. It was only the flash of a thought, though, and he quickly put it aside.

"I'm plumb sorry, DL," he said; "but of course you know your own business."

That was all he said, but he did a great deal of thinking and the more he thought the more he

thinking and the more he thought the more he realized how much he wanted her now that she seemed least accessible. His face wore an expression such as Diana Henders had never seen upon it before-he was not the laughing, good-natured Hal that she had liked very much and almost loved. There was something almost sinister about him, and she wondered if being disappointed in love had this effect upon men.

"How is everything at the ranch since I've been away?" she asked presently.

"So-so," he replied. "Some o' the hands want to quit. They're waitin' 'til you come, to git their checks."

"Who are they?"

"Pete, Shorty an' Idaho," he replied. "They'd a-ben the fust to be let out after the change come, anyhow, so it don't make no difference."

"You planned to stay on as foreman?" she asked.

"Shore! Why not? I got to work for someone, don't I?"

She made no reply and they rode on in silence toward the ranch. He had given up trying to dissuade her. Let them do their own dirty work, he thought. As they neared the ranch a horseman emerged from the yard and came toward them at a run amidst a cloud of dust that obscured the ranch

and ail else behind him. It was Texas Pete. He brought his horse to its haunches beside her and wheeled the animal about on its hind feet.

"I jest got in, Miss," he said, "an' Tom told me that you had sent word in that I was to meet you. I'm plumb sorry I was late."

Each man ignored the other as completely as though he had not existed.

"I understand you want to quit, Pete," said the girl; "you and Shorty and Idaho."

Pete looked down, shamefacedly. "We was a-aimin' to," he said.

"I wish you'd come up to the office and bring Shorty and Idaho with you when we get home," she said. "I want to talk with you."

"All right, Miss."

The three finished the ride in silence. Diana dismounted with them at the corral and leaving her horse for Pete to unsaddle walked toward the office. As she approached the doorway she saw that there were several people in the room and when she crossed the threshold found herself face to face with Corson, Lillian Manill and the two Wainrights. Corson nodded and he and the younger Wainright rose.

"Good evening, Miss Henders," said Corson;
"I am glad to see you."

"back safely, I see."

She ignored his greeting and stood for a moment silently eying them through narrowed lids. Her wide-brimmed sombrero sat straight and level above slightly contracted brows. A tendril of hair waved softly over one temple where it had escaped the stiff confinement of the heavy hat, but it did not tend to soften the light in those cold, steady eyes, reflecting the bitterness of her resentment toward these four.

About her hips a cartridge-filled belt supported a heavy gun-no toy such as women sometimes effect, but a .45, grim and suggestive. Its grip was shiny with usage and the blue was worn from the steel in places.

"I know little about law, Mr. Corson," she said, without prelude. "I have lived almost all my life a long way beyond either the protection or the menace of law. We do not bother much about it out here; but we understand moral rights perfectly. We know what justice is and we have our own ways of enforcing it. We have similar ways of protecting our just rights, as well.

"These means I intend to invoke against you, all of you, who have come here with the intention of robbing me of what is rightly mine. Though I owe you no consideration it is my duty to warn you that our methods in such matters are usually sudden and always unpleasant.

"I shall give you, Mr. Corson and Miss Manill, an hour to leave the premises-the buckboard will be ready then. Mr. Wainright and his son have five minutes, as they have no excuse whatsoever for being here. Now, go!"

Chapter XVI--COMMON CRIMINALS

AN AMUSED smile curled Mr. Corson's unpleasant mouth. Mr. Wainright, senior, bobbed to his feet, though through no belated urge of chivalry. Lillian Manill rose languidly, pretending to suppress a simulated yawn with the backs of her white fingers. Young Mr. Wainright shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other.

"I am afraid, Miss Henders," said Corson, "that you do not quite grasp the situation. You-"

"It is you who fail to grasp it, Mr. Corson," snapped Diana, "and please remember that you have only an hour in which to pack."

Corson dropped his suavity. "See here," he exclaimed, "I've fooled along with you as much as I'm going to. You're the one who's going to get off this place. You haven't a right on earth here. You don't own a stick or a stone, a hoof or a tail, the length or breadth of the Bar Y Now you go and you go quick or you'll land in jail, where you belong for the threats you've made. I imagine you'll learn

something about the law then."

"How come?" inquired a voice from the doorway and simultaneously three figures appeared upon the veranda. "You sent for us, Miss, and here we are," continued Texas Pete.

"An' I reckon we arriv about the right time fer the party," opined Shorty.

"I craves the first dance with that dude with the funny pants," said Idaho, staring at Corson.

"Boys," said Diana, "these people are trying to rob me of my ranch, the mine and all the cattle. I have given Mr. Corson and Miss Manill an hour to leave the premises. Idaho, I wish that you would see that they get away on time, and drive them, or better, have Willie drive them, to town. Mr. Wainright and his son had five minutes in which to leave, Shorty. They have wasted three of them. Can you help them to get away on schedule?"

"Whee!" wheed Shorty. "Watch my smoke-and their dust. Fan yerselves, gents," and he sprang into the room, circling the Wainrights to come upon them from the rear, true to the instincts of the cowman.

The elder Wainright had arguments upon his tongue-you could see them in his eye, paradoxical as it may sound-but he permitted them to expire, voiceless, and took to his heels, followed closely by his son. Jefferson Wainright, senior, had been run

off the Bar Y upon another occasion and he had not relished the experience. He moved now with great rapidity and singleness of purpose in the direction of the corrals, his son at his heels and Shorty inconveniently close behind.

To Mr. Wainright's partial relief Shorty had as yet indulged in no target practice, but it might come at any moment. Sympathetic perspiration streamed down the red face of Wainright, of Worcester blankets. He almost breathed a sigh of relief when he reached the corrals, but a sudden thought froze him with terror. They could not have more than a minute left. It would be impossible to hook up their team in that time. As he climbed through the bars he tried to explain that impossibility to Shorty.

"Ride 'em, then," admonished their escort.

"But we have no saddles," expostulated the younger Wainright.

"No," agreed Shorty, "you ain't got nothin' but a minute an' you won't have thet long. I commences shootin' when the minute's up-an' I ain't a-goin' to shoot fer fun. I ben a-waitin' fer this chanct fer months."

Frantically the elder Wainright dragged a reluctant broncho by the halter, got him outside the corral and struggled to clamber to his back. It was an utter failure. Then he seized the rope again and tugging and pulling started for the gate. His son, more successful, had succeeded in mounting the other

successful, had succeeded in mounting the other animal, and as he trotted past his father he whacked that gentleman's unwilling companion on the rump with the bight of his halter rope. The effects were thrilling and immediate. The broncho leaped forward, upset Mr. Wainright, galloped over him and dashed out the gate into the vast, unfenced immensity.

"Five seconds!" announced Shorty.

Mr. Wainright scrambled to his feet and started after the broncho. He passed through the Bar Y gate behind his son and heir with one second to spare. Disgusted, Shorty slipped his gun back into its holster.

"Now keep goin'," he told them, "an' don't never nary one of you come back."

"Gosh ding it!" he soliloquized as he walked back toward the office, "I wisht she'd only a-gave 'em four minutes."

He was suddenly confronted by Colby, running and out of wind. "What you ben loin'?" demanded the foreman. "I jest seen the tail end of it from the cook-house winder. Wot in 'ell do you mean by it, anyhow, eh?"

Shorty eyed him up and down insolently. "I ain't got no time fer you, Colby," he said. "I'm gettin' my orders from the boss. If she tells me to run any ornery critters offen the ranch I'm here to run 'em

off, sabe?"

"You mean Miss Henders told you to run the Wainrights off?" demanded Colby.

"I reckon you ain't deaf," and Shorty continued his way toward the office. Colby followed him. He found Texas Pete and Idaho standing in the room. Diana was seated in her father's easy chair.

"What's the meaning of this business, Di?" demanded Colby. "Did you tell Shorty to run the Wainrights off?"

"I ran them off, Hal," replied the girl. "I only asked Shorty to see that they went. I have told Mr. Corson and Miss Manill to go, too. Idaho will see that they get to town safely."

"You must be crazy!" exclaimed Colby. "They'll have the law on you."

"I am not crazy, Hal. I may have been a little blind, but I am far from crazy-my eyes are open now, open wide enough for me to be able to recognize my friends from my enemies."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, noting the directly personal insinuation.

"I mean, Hal, that any of my men who would contemplate working for those people after they had robbed me can't work for me. Pete has your check. He is acting foreman until Bull returns." Her

chin went up proudly as she made the statement.

Colby was stunned. He took the check in silence and turned toward the door, where he stopped and faced her. "Bull won't never come back," he said, "less it's with a halter -round his neck."

The other three men looked toward Diana for an intimation of her wishes, but she only sat silently, tapping the toe of a spurred boot upon the Navajo rug at her feet. Colby turned once more and passed out into the gathering dusk.

A half-hour later Wild Bill, otherwise and quite generally known as Willie, jogged dustily townward with Maurice B. Corson, Lillian Manill and their baggage. Halfway there they overtook the Wainrights, the elder riding the single horse, which his son had given up to him, while the younger plodded along in the powdery dust. Corson told Willie to stop and take them both into the buckboard.

"Not on your life," said Willie. "I gits my orders from the boss an' she didn't say nothin' about pickin' up no dudes. Giddap!"

Later that evening a select gathering occupied a table at one side of Gum's bar-room. There were the Wainrights, Mr. Maurice B. Corson, Miss Lillian Manill, Hal Colby and Gum Smith. All but Gum seemed out of sorts, but then he was the only one of them who had not been run off a ranch.

"We have the law on our side, Mr. Sheriff," Corson was saying, "and all we ask is your official backing. I realize that the first thing to do is get rid of the ruffians in her employ and then we can easily bring her to terms. The worst of them is this man Bull, but now that he is practically an outlaw it should be comparatively easy to get him.

"I have arranged for an exceptionally large gold shipment from the mine on the next stage and I have taken pains not to keep the matter too secret. The news is almost certain to reach him through the usual channels and should serve as an exceptional bait to lure him into another attempted holdup of the stage.

"You can then be on hand, in hiding, with a posse and should you fail to get him alive it will be all the better for society at large if you get him dead. Do you understand me?"

"That ain't no way to go about it," interrupted Colby. "You can't hide nowhere within five miles o' the gap without them two hombres knowin' it. Now you just forget that scheme an' leave it to me. You an' your posse keep away from the gap. Just leave it to me." 7

"Ah think Hal's about right," agreed Gum Smith. "Yo-all doan' know them two. They shore is foxy. Why, jes look at all the times Ah've ben after 'em. Yo jes leave it to Hal here an' he shore'll git 'em."

"Ah think," said Corson, "and then you can get the

"All right, said Corson, and then we can get the other three later, some way. Lure them into town one by one an' well, I don't need to tell you gentlemen what's necessary. Only don't forget that they're worth a thousand dollars apiece to me-if they can't bother us any more."

Worn out by the excitement of the day Diana retired to her room shortly after the lonely evening meal. She had been keyed up to a high pitch of nervous excitement for hours and now that she had been relaxed the reaction came, leaving her tired and melancholy. She was almost too tired to undress and so she threw herself into an easy chair and sat with her head thrown back and her eyes closed.

The window of her room, overlooking the ranch yard toward the corrals, was wide open to the cooling summer air. The lamp burning on her reading table cast its golden light upon her loosened hair and regular profile.

Outside a figure moved cautiously around the house until it stood among the trees beneath the window-the figure of a man who, looking up, could just see the outlines of the girl's face above the sill. He watched her for a moment and then glanced carefully about as though to assure himself that there was none other near.

Presently, faintly, the notes of a meadow-lark rose softly upon the night air. Diana's eyes flashed open. She listened intently. A moment later the brief

sweet song was repeated. The girl rose to her feet, gathered her hair quickly into a knot at the back of her head, and ran down the stairway, along the hall, into the office. She walked quickly, her heart beating a trifle wildly, to the door. Without hesitation she opened it and stepped out into the night. Below her stood a tall man with broad shoulders.

"Bull!" she exclaimed, in a low whisper.

The man swept his broad sombrero from his head. "Good evening, Senorita!" he said. "It is not Senor Bull-it is Gregorio."

Diana Henders stepped back. She had removed her belt and gun. So sure she had been that it was Bull and such confidence she had in him that she had not given a thought to her unarmed condition. What better protection could any girl demand than just Bull!

"What do you want here, Gregorio?" she demanded.

The Mexican perceived the girl's surprise, saw her draw back, and grinned. It did not offend him that she might be afraid of him. He had become what he was by inspiring fear in others and he was rather proud of it-proud of being an outlaw, proud of being hunted by the gringos, whom he knew held his courage and his gun-hand, if not himself, in respect.

"Do not be afraid, Senorita," he said. "I was sent to you by Senor Bull, with a message." He held out a long, flat envelope. "You are to read it and hide it where the others will not find it. He says that you will know how to make use of it."

She took the proffered parcel. "Why did not Senor Bull come himself?" she asked.

"How should I know, Senorita?" he replied. "Perhaps he thought that you would not want The Black Coyote to come here. He knew that you recognized him today. He saw it in your eyes."

She was silent a moment as though weighing the wisdom of a reply to his statement, but she made none. "Is that all, Gregorio?" she asked.

"That is all, Senorita."

"Then thank you, and good-bye. Thank Senor Bull, too, and tell him that his job is waiting for him when he can come back."

Gregorio swept his hat low and turned back into the shadows. Diana entered the office and closed the door. Going directly to her room she took a chair beneath the reading-lamp and examined the outside of the envelope Gregorio had given her.

It was addressed to Maurice B. Corson! How had Bull come by it? But of course she knew-it was a piece of the mail that had come into his possession

through the robbing of the stage.

The girl shuddered and held it away from her. She saw that the envelope had been opened. Bull had done that. She sat looking at the thing for a long time. Could she bring herself to read the contents? It had not been meant for her-to read it, then, would be to put herself on a par with The Black Coyote. She would be as much a thief as he. The only right and proper thing to do was to get the letter into Corson's hands as quickly as possible-she could not be a party to Bull's crime.

She laid it, almost threw it, in fact, upon the table, as though it were an unclean thing, and sat for a long time in deep thought. Occasionally her eyes returned to the letter. The thing seemed to hold a malignant fascination for her. What was in it?

It must concern her, or Bull would not have sent it to her. She would send it to Corson the first thing in the morning. Bull would not ask her to read something that did not concern her. She rose and commenced to remove her clothing. Once or twice as she passed the table she stopped and looked at the envelope and at last, in her night robe, as she went to blow out the last lamp she stood for a full minute staring at the superscription. Again she argued that Bull would not have sent it to her had it been wrong for her to read it. Then she extinguished the light and got into bed.

For an hour Diana Henders tossed about, sleepless. The envelope upon the reading table

sheepskin. The envelope upon the reading was haunted her. It had no business there. It belonged to Maurice B. Corson. If it were to be found in her possession she could be held as guilty as the robber who took it from the United States mail pouch. They could send her to jail. Somehow that thought did not frighten her at all.

What was in it? It must be something concerning the property they were trying to steal from her. They were thieves. One was almost justified in taking any steps to frustrate their dishonest plans.

Suddenly she recalled what Mary Donovan had said: "You've got to fight the devil with fire!" .And then Diana Henders flung the covers from her and swung her feet to the floor. A moment later she had lighted the lamp. There was no more hesitation.

She took up the envelope and extracted its contents, which consisted of three papers. The first she examined was a brief letter of transmission noting the enclosures and signed by a clerk in Corson's office. The second was John Manill's will-the later will that Corson had told her did not exist. She read it through carefully. Word for word it was a duplicate of the last will her father had made, except for the substitution of Elias Henders' name as beneficiary. The clause leaving the property to their joint heirs in the event. of her father's prior death followed.

Suddenly Diana experienced a sensation of elation and freedom such as had not been hers since her

father's death. She could fight them now--she had something to fight with, and Lillian Manill could claim only what was legally hers.

An even division would entail unpleasant complications of administration, but at least they could not take tier share from her. They might sell theirs--they might and probably would sell it to the Wainrights, which would be horrible of course, but she would stand her ground and get her rights no matter who owned the other half.

She laid the will aside and picked up the third paper. It was a letter, in her uncle's familiar handwriting, addressed to her father:

Dear El:

In the event that I go first I want to ask you to look after Lillian for me at least until she is married. Since her mother's death she has no one but me and naturally I feel not only a certain responsibility for her but a real affection that is almost paternal, since she was but a year old when I married her mother. She has never known any other father, her own having been killed before she was born. Although she knows the truth concerning her parentage I think she looks upon me as a father and if I am unable to do so I know that you will provide for her. I did not mention her in my will because our understanding included only our legal heirs, or I should say heir, now since Diana is the only one left, and as she will inherit all our property eventually I know that you will see this must not be overlooked.

hope that you will pass this request on to her, which I shalt leave attached to my will.

Affectionately, JOHN.

Diana sat with staring eyes fixed upon the letter in her hand-and she had almost sent these papers back to Corson! She shuddered as she thought. of the narrow escape she had had. Why, they were no better than common criminals!

And she was sole heir to the Bar Y! She did not think of the gold mine, or the value of the great herds and the broad acres. She thought only of the Bar Y as something that she loved-as home.

Now no one could take it away from her, and yet she was not happy. There was a little rift within the lute-Bull was an outlaw! And who else was there than Bull upon whom she might depend for guidance and advice in the handling of her affairs?

He was a good cattleman-her father had always said that, and had had confidence in his judgment and ability. His one fault, they had thought, had been his drinking, and this she felt, intuitively, he had overcome. Of his loyalty there had never been any doubt until the whisperings of the ugly rumors that had connected him with the robberies of the stage. These she had consistently refused to believe-even to the point of denying the evidence of her own eyes; but Gregorio had definitely confounded the remnants of her hopes.

Yet still she thought of Bull as her sole resource--even now she had confidence in him. She could not fathom the mental processes that permitted her mind to dwell upon him without loathing or contempt--but, after all, was she being influenced by the dictates of her mind? She shrank from contemplation of the alternative, yet it persistently obtruded itself upon her reveries. If her mind refused to fly to the defense of Bull, then it must be her heart that championed him. What reason would not do, love had accomplished.

She flushed at the thought and tried to put it aside, for it was impossible. It could not be that she, Diana Henders, could love an outlaw and a criminal. No, she must put Bull out of her mind forever, and with this resolve mingling with her tears she fell asleep.

Chapter XVII--THE BLACK COYOTE

WITH the coming of morning Diana Henders' mind had, to some extent at least, emerged from the chaos of conflicting emotions that had obstructed reasonable consideration of her plans for the immediate future. It had been her intention to ride forthwith to Hendersville and confront Corson and Lillian with the proofs of their perfidy, but now saner reflection counseled more rational procedure. The law now was all upon her side, the proofs were all in her hands. It was beyond their power to harm her. She would continue in the even tenor of her

ways, directing the affairs of the ranch and mine, as though they did not exist. When they made a move she would be prepared to meet it.

She spent an hour before breakfast in the office writing diligently and then she sent for Texas Pete. When he arrived she handed him an envelope.

"Take this to Aldea, Pete," she said, "and mail it on the first eastbound train. I can't trust to the stage-it is held up too often-and, Pete, I am sending you because I know that I can trust you to get to Aldea as quickly as you can without letting anything interfere. It means a great deal to me, Pete."

"I'll git it there," said Texas Pete, and she knew that he would.

Ten minutes later she glanced through the doorway of the kitchen, where she was talking with Wong, and saw a cloud of dust streaking swiftly northward toward Hell's Bend Pass, across country in an airline. Roads and trails were not for such as Texas Pete when speed was paramount.

The day, occupied by the normal duties of the ranch, passed without unusual incident. There was no word from Corson. The next day came, brought Texas Pete back from Aldea, and went its way with the infinite procession of other yesterdays, and still no word from Corson. By this time Diana was about convinced that the New Yorker, appreciating what the theft of his letter must mean to him, had abandoned his scheme and that doubtless the stage

that arrived in Hendersville today would carry him and his accomplice back to Aldea and an eastbound train.

Her mind was occupied with such satisfactory imaginings that morning when the office doorway was darkened by the figure of a man. Looking up she saw Gum Smith standing with hat in hand.

"Mo'nin', Miss," he greeted her.

Diana nodded, wondering what Gum Smith could be doing on the Bar Y, a place where he had always been notoriously unwelcome.

"Ah've came on a mos' onpleasant duty, Miss," he explained. "As sheriff o' this yere county it is mah duty to serve yoall with notice to vacate this property by noon tomorrer, as the rightful an' lawful owners wishes to occupy same."

"You mean Mr. Corson and Miss Manill?" inquired Diana, sweetly.

"Yes, Miss, an' they hopes they won't be no trouble. They's willin' to do the right thing by yo, ef yo moves off peaceable-like an' pronto."

"Would you mind taking a note to Mr. Corson for me?" she asked. "I think I can convince him that he is making a mistake."

Gum Smith would be glad to accommodate her. He said so. but he also advised her. as "a friend of

her father," to make her preparations for early departure, since Mr. Corson's patience was exhausted and he had determined to take drastic action to possess himself of the ranch, as Miss Manill's agent.

When Mr. Maurice B. Corson read that note an hour later he swore in a most unseemly manner. He did not divulge its contents to the Wainrights, but he went into executive session with Gum Smith and Hal Colby from which he did not emerge for an hour. A short time later the sheriff, accompanied by a dozen deputies, rode out of Hendersville and some time thereafter Corson, Lillian Manill and the Wainrights drove off in the latter's buckboard which Diana had sent in to them the morning after their hasty departure from the Bar Y

The ranch was deserted that afternoon, except for a couple of laborers, the white cook at the cook-house and Wong at the residence. Texas Pete and his vaqueros were spread over a vast principality occupied with the various duties of their calling. Idaho had been left at home, in accordance with time-honored custom, to act as body guard for Diana should she wish to ride abroad, which she had wished to do, and they were both off to the southeast somewhere, in the direction of the Johnson Ranch.

It was a lazy afternoon. The air vibrated with heat. But in one corner of the kitchen, far from the stove, which was now out, there was a cool corner, or

rather, one less like inferno. Here stood a long table that had once graced the dining room, and upon it at full length, supine, lay Wong, asleep, his long pipe with its tiny brass bowl still clutched in one depending hand.

He was aroused by the sound of voices in the front of the house. He opened his eyes, sat up and listened. There was a woman's voice among those of men, but it was not the voice of "Missie Dli." Wong arose and walked toward the office. He stopped where he could observe the interior without being observed. His slanting, oriental eyes narrowed at what they saw. There were Corson and Miss Manill, the two Wainrights and Gum Smith. Corson was going through Elias Henders' desk as though it belonged to him. Presently, after having examined many papers, he evidently found what he wanted, for there was a look of relief upon his face as he stuffed them into an inside pocket of his coat after a superficial glance.

The elder Wainright was continually glancing through the doorway with an air of extreme nervousness. "You think it is perfectly safe, Sheriff?" he demanded.

"Of course it is, Wainright," snapped Corson. "We've got the law on our side, I tell you, and enough men out there to back it up. As soon as her men find we mean business they won't bother us as long as she isn't here to egg them on, and most of them would just as soon work for us anyway when

they find Colby is coming back as foreman-a lot of them are his friends."

"I don't see why Colby didn't come along with us now," grumbled Wainright.

"He wanted to wait until we were settled in our ownership and then we could hire whom we pleased as foreman," said Corson. "I see how he feels about it and it will help to make him stronger with the men and with the neighbors if he hasn't taken any part in the eviction. It'll be better for us in the long run, for we are going to need all the friends we can get in the county."

"I am afraid we are," agreed Wainright. "I hope you will fire that Texas Pete and the ones they call Shorty an' Idaho the very fast thing you do. I don't like 'em."

"That's about the first thing I intend doing as soon as they get in," replied Corson. "Just now we'd better look up that damned insolent Chink and tell him how many are going to be here for dinner, or supper, or whatever they call it out here."

Wong tiptoed silently and swiftly to the kitchen, where Lillian Manill found him a moment later and imparted her orders to him.

An hour later Texas Pete rode into the ranch yard with his men. He was met at the corrals by a fellow he recognized as an habitue of Gum's Place-one Ward, by name.

"Evenin'," said Ward.

"Evenin'," replied Texas Pete. "Wotinell are you doin' here, Ward?"

"They wants you, Shorty an' Idaho up to the office."

"Who wants us?"

"Miss Henders an' the people she's sold out to."

"Sold out, hell!" exclaimed Pete.

"Go on up an' ask 'em."

"I shore will. Come on Shorty. Idaho must be aroun' the bunk-house somewheres." The two men started for the office. At the bunk-house they looked for Idaho, but he was not there, so they went on without him. As they approached the house they saw three men lolling on the veranda outside the office door. They were not Bar Y men. Inside they saw Corson sitting at the desk. He motioned them to enter.

"Come in, boys," he said, pleasantly.

As they entered the three men behind them rose and drew their six-guns and at the same instant three others just within the office covered them with theirs.

"Put 'em up!" they were advised, and Texas Pete and Shorty, being men of discretion, put them up. While they had them up one of the gentlemen in their rear relieved them of their weapons.

"Now look here, boys," said Corson, not unpleasantly, "we have no quarrel with you and we don't want any, but you're rather quick with your guns and we took this means of insuring an amicable interview. Mr. Wainright, Miss Manill and I are now owners of the Bar Y Ranch. Miss Henders, realizing that she had no claim, has vacated the premises and turned them over to us. We shall not need your services any longer. We shall give you a month's wages and escort you as far as town, where your weapons will be turned over to you; but I want to warn you that you are not to return to the Bar Y. If you do I shall see that the law takes its full course with you."

"Where's Miss Henders?" demanded Texas Pete. "She has left the ranch," replied Corson. "I do not know her exact plans, but I think she went directly to Aldea to take the train for the East."

"I don't know her exact plans neither," said Texas Pete, "but I know you are a damn liar. You got the drop on me an' Shorty, an' we goes to town as you says, but if the rest that you have told us ain't straight we're comin' back agin. An' when we do it's a-goin' to be gosh-almighty onpleasant fer dudes in these parts. Sabe?"

"If you show your faces around here again you'll

be shot on sight," said Corson. "We've got the men and the money to run this ranch as we see fit, and we mean business. The old, disgraceful, lawless days are about over in this country, and there won't be any place for bad-men like you two."

"No, Pete," said Shorty, "we're did fer, our time's up, they ain't no more place fer us 'an a jackrabbit. We're a-goin' to hev a new brand o' bad-men now-the kind they raise in Noo York that wears funny pants an' robs orphans."

"Take them to town, boys," said Corson, addressing his own men, "and then come back here. You've all got jobs here on the Bar Y, and one of the first duties you have is to shoot bad-men on sight, if they show up around the ranch."

Texas Pete and Shorty turned and walked out with their escort, and shortly after, still under guard, were loping away in the direction of Hendersville.

The stage came down the pass with a load of passengers that day and among them was a lawyer from Aldea imported by Corson and Wainright to draw up the papers that would make one-third the Bar Y property Wainright's and place a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars in the hands of Corson and Lillian Manill.

At the mine it stopped and took on the messenger with the bullion. Then to the crack of Bill Gatlin's whip it lurched onward toward the gap, Bill was

discouraging to a tenderfoot who had remarked on the dry appearance of the country that he had seen, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, from the summit to the pass.

"I should hate to be caught out there alone," said the young man. "I'm afraid I'd starve to death."

"Why that wouldn't be nothin'," observed Bill. "That wouldn't be nothin' at all. Why back in the seventies when I was ridin' fer the Lazy H outfit in Montana I was chasin' a critter one day when my pony stepped in a badger hole an' after turnin' three complete somersaults lights plumb on his feet an' starts across country scared stiff, which would a'ben all right ef it hadn't a'ben that the last somersault shuck me clean outen the saddle, an' by cracky it was jest my durn luck that my foot caught in the stirrup an' that ornery critter up an' drags me. He was so sceart that he never much more'n slowed up fer three days. Yes-, sir, he drug me fer three days an' nights, an' all I hed to eat was when he drug me through a strawberry patch an' all I hed to drink was when he drug me through a river. No, sir, after that it wouldn't seem bad at all to be left out nowheres in no country."

The tenderfoot looked at Bill with deep and reverent awe, but he said nothing. The stage bumped over the uneven road, lurching drunkenly around curves. A masked man waited silently behind the boulders at the south end of the gap. He appeared nervous, turning often to glance back into the channel from which he had emerged a few

the chaparral from which he had emerged a few moments before. "I wonder where in hell Gregorio is," he muttered, half aloud, "he told me last night that he would be here before me."

The stage drew nearer. Bill Gatlin reined his team to a walk at the first deep chuck-hole at the entrance to the gap. The horses moved slowly, picking their way and sometimes stumbling in the deep dust-filled cavities that made this short stretch of scarce fifty yards the most notorious piece of road within a hundred miles.

The lone highwayman could wait no longer for his accomplice--he must essay the thing alone. He stepped forward to intercept the slow-moving stage and as he did so a noise behind him attracted his attention, and a single backward glance revealed to him a masked man and the familiar habiliments of Gregorio. He breathed a quick sigh of relief, motioned to his accomplice to hurry, and moved forward with the second man now close at his heels.

Bill Gatlin and the messenger were not surprised when the two men stepped into the middle of the gap and held them up. They would have been surprised under ordinary circumstances, but today they had been forewarned that there would doubtless be an attempted holdup on account of the unusually valuable gold shipment, which was being used as a lure to trap The Black Coyote, and they had been warned to offer no resistance since Hal Colby had agreed to take the notorious robber if

the matter was left entirely in his hands without any interference whatsoever. All of which pleased Bill Gatlin and the messenger immensely, since it relieved them both of most of the danger and all the responsibility. Not only did Bill Gatlin show no surprise at the appearance of the two masked figures, but, as a matter of fact, he was already stopping his team as they appeared, and had his hands in the air almost as soon as the command left the lips of the foremost of them. As usual the Mexican kept the driver and messenger covered while The Black Coyote approached the stage to obtain the gold, but this time the second robber followed his principal more closely than had formerly been his custom. The Coyote menaced the passengers with his weapons, seeing that they kept their hands elevated, and then with Gregorio on the watch behind him he slipped both his guns back into their holsters and reached up to take the bags of gold away from the messenger.

He had placed one foot on the hub of the front wheel to raise himself to a height that would enable him to reach the precious pouches when his confederate stepped quickly toward him, shoved the muzzles of his guns into The Black Coyote's back, and ordered him to put up his hands.

"Step down and put 'em up," he said. "You're through."

"Durn my hide!" exclaimed Bill Gatlin. "Hays pretty cute. I thought he was Gregorio all the time. He's

got Bull to rights this time."

The Black Coyote stepped back from the stage with a growl. "You dirty greaser, you," he cried. "I'll get you for this, Gregorio."

The latter nodded to the messenger. "Get down and get his guns," he said, and when the man had done so, "Now yank off his mask."

The messenger jerked the black silk handkerchief from the face of The Black Coyote with a single quick movement, and then stepped back suddenly, his eyes wide with surprise. "Colby!" he ejaculated.

Bill Gatlin almost swallowed his quid of tobacco. "Well I'll be hornswaggled!" he exclaimed, and then to the second robber, "an' you was Gregorio all the time an' I mistook you fer Colby. The joke sure is on me, an' the drinks too."

"They are," agreed the second robber. He shoved one of his guns into his holster and removed his own mask. .

"Well now I will be hornswaggled," murmured Bill Gatlin-"ef it ain't Bull!"

"Keep him covered," said Bull to the messenger, "while I get our horses."

Colby glared sullenly at Bull as the latter walked back up the road to get the horses, but he said nothing. He was still half-dazed from the surprise of

seeing Bull disguised as Gregorio, for even to the latter's guns Bull wore the entire outfit of the Mexican, and when Bull returned, riding Gregorio's and leading Colby's animal, The Black Coyote eyed him as though he still doubted his identity.

Bull drew rein beside him and nodded toward Colby's horse. "Climb aboard," he said. Colby mounted and Bull tossed the noose of his reata around his prisoner's neck, drawing up the slack until the honda touched the collar of the man's shirt.

"Pull yer freight, Colby," said Bull, and the two started off down the road toward Hendersville. A moment later the stage passed them.

"Want me to stay along with you in case you need any help?" called Bill Gatlin.

"I won't want no help," said Bull.

As the stage grew away from them, concealing itself in its own dust, a swarthy rider galloped up to Bull and Colby, reining in a blazed-face chestnut beside them. It was Gregorio. Colby glared at the Mexican.

"You-you-" he shouted.

"Shut up, Colby," Bull interrupted him. "You got what was comin' to you. It'll learn you not to ditch a pal."

Gregorio had dismounted and was stripping his

outer garments and Bull followed his example. As they exchanged clothing and horses they joked together over the days work, which they considered good. Gregorio swung himself into his saddle first.

"A Dios, Senor Bull!" he cried with a wave of his hand. "Perhaps in a few days Gregorio comes out of the hills, eh?"

"I'll fix that up when I git through with this business, Gregorio," replied the American. "In the meantime just lay low."

"And I will work with you for the Bar Y Rancho?" inquired the Mexican.

"If I do, Gregorio. So-long!"

"A Dios, Senor!" and Gregorio wheeled his pony back toward the hills.

"Thet greaser's whiter'n some white men," said Bull.

When he trotted into Hendersville a few minutes behind the stage he found that already the news had spread and a crowd, gathered about the stage in front of The Donovan House, surrounded him and his prisoner.

"Durn his hide!" exclaimed one who had been foremost among the posse that had ridden forth to hang Bull only a short time before, "I knew right along 'twarn't Bull. I anus said they was something shady

about that there Colby feller."

Bull had but just drawn rein when. Texas Pete and Shorty rode up, safely delivered in town by their escort and having reclaimed their guns which had been emptied of cartridges and dropped in the road at the edge, of town while the escort galloped quickly out of range toward the Bar I'.

Texas Pete had no time for questions. His quick eyes took in the scene at a glance and possibly he guessed the explanation, or caught it from the comments of the crowd, but another and more important matter occupied his thoughts as he forced his pony to Bull's side.

"Have you saw anything of Miss Di?" he asked. "Is she here in town?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"She ain't on the Bar Y Corson says she's sold out an' left fer Aldea," replied Texas Pete.

"Corson's a liar," snapped Bull. He turned toward the veranda Of The Donovan House where he espied the proprietress. "Mrs. Donovan!" he called to her, "is Miss Henders in town?"

"She is not, Bull," replied Mary Donovan.

Bull turned his eyes toward the crowd until they alighted upon a man he knew bore a decent reputation--one who was not affiliated with Gum

Smith or his gang.

"Thompson," he called, "you take Colby an' keep him 'til I git back. Don't let Gum Smith git his hands on him, an' shoot Colby if he makes any funny plays. Git down offen your horse, Colby. Take him, Thompson. Come on boys!" and with Texas Pete and Shorty at his pony's heels he started on a run for the Bar Y As they raced along, now neck and neck, Texas Pete jerked his head back in the general direction of Hendersville. "What was it all about?" he inquired.

"I jest runded up The Black Coyote," replied Bull.

"Colby?"

Bull nodded. "I ben suspicionin' him," he said, "fer a long time back, but I couldn't never call the turn on him. Then I runs onto Gregorio while I'm hidin' out up Coyote Canyon. Him an' Colby ben workin' together all along, but it seems lately the greaser's found out Colbys plannin' on doublecrossin' him an' goin' south with all the swag. This was to be his last job, an' Colby fixed it someway to have a big shipment of gold today, so Gregorio an' me fixes it an' swaps clothes an' horses an' I takes the greaser's place. Colby never got onto it at all. He thinks I was the greaser plumb up to the minute I yanks off the mask."

"I thought Gregorio didn't have no use fer you, Bull," said Shorty.

"I done him a good turn a spell back." That was all he said about the fight with the Apaches in Cottonwood Canyon, where he had risked his life to save the Mexican's.

They rode on in silence for a while. The ranch buildings, nestling among the trees, were visible in the distance when Texas Pete called attention to a speck among the sagebrush far to the southeast. To an untrained eye it was scarcely appreciable.

"There's a saddled cayuse," he said. "What fer is it doin' out yender?"

Bull strained his eyes in the direction of the animal. "Looks like the L-O sorrel Idaho used to ride," he said.

"Idaho was left home with Miss Di," said Pete.

As one man the three reined toward the distant pony and with loosened reins tore over the powdery earth, bounding in and out and over the brush like so many nimble-footed jack-rabbits. Blazes, outdistancing the other ponies, reached the L-O sorrel first. Bull threw himself from his saddle and kneeled beside the prostrate form of a man, half hidden in the brush. It was Idaho. As Bull lifted his head he opened his eyes. He looked at Bull in a bewildered way for a moment, the expression of his face denoting a concentrated effort to recall his mental faculties. Then Texas Pete and Shorty reined in beside him in a cloud of dust and profanity.

"Where's the boss?" demanded Pete.

"What you loafin' out here fer?" inquired Shorty.

Slowly Idaho sat up, assisted by Bull. He looked at the reins looped about his wrist. He felt of his side and brought his hand away covered with blood.

"I done the best I could," he said, "but they was too many of them."

"Where's the boss, you ornery side-winder?" yelled Texas Pete. "Who's 'them'? What hev they done with her?"

"They was all masked," said Idaho. "I didn't know no more after they creased me. I dunno what they done with her. Help me aboard thet cayuse, you bow-legged flannel mouth, an' we'll pull our freight an' find her, 'stid o' sittin' round here listenin' to your yap,"

Pete, who had dismounted, helped Idaho, almost tenderly, into the saddle.

"You better beat it fer town," he said. "You ain't much good nohow an' with a .45 between your ribs you ain't no good whatsumever."

"Shut up!" Idaho admonished him. "If I was perforated like a salt cellar I'd be wuth two o' you." He reeled a little in the saddle, but shook himself

and straightened up. It was evident that he was weak from shock and loss of blood, and that he was suffering pain beside.

"You'd better go back, Idaho," said Bull. "You ain't in no shape to ride at all an' I reckon we got some hard ridin' ahead o' us."

"Go back, you damn fool," said Texas Pete, who, under the cloak of rough and almost brutal badinage, had sought to hide his real concern for his friend's welfare.

"Go chase yerselves," replied Idaho. "I'm goin' with you."

They wasted no more time in argument, but started a wide circle, looking for the tracks of the abductors. They found sufficient evidence to convince them that there had been upward of a dozen horsemen concerned in the work, which corroborated Idaho's statement, and that approximately half of these had ridden directly in the direction of the Bar Y, while the others had taken a southerly route. It was the latter trail they elected to follow after Bull discovered upon it the imprint of an iron shoe, and as Captain, being tender in front, had recently had his forefeet shod it was safe to assume that they had taken Diana Renders this way.

They rode fast, for dusk was already on them, and when, a short time later, it became too dark to distinguish the trail from the saddle they were often

compelled to stop and dismount, and, upon several occasions, strike matches to make sure that they were still on the right track. Their progress was, therefore, necessarily slow. Toward midnight they lost the trail completely. It was there they left Idaho, too weak from loss of blood to continue.

Chapter XVIII--THROUGH THE NIGHT

IN a back room of The Chicago Saloon Thompson sat guard over Hal Colby, who was neatly and securely trussed and tied to a chair, in which he sat. In The Donovan House the guests were seated at dinner when Gum Smith entered and took his accustomed place. He had just come from the Bar Y and as the streets of Hendersville had happened to be deserted at the meal hour he had met no one.

"Lo, Gum," greeted Bill Gatlin. "I reckon you hearn we got The Black Coyote."

"Ah hain't see no one sence Ah reached town," replied Smith, "but Ah knowed Colby'd git the critter," yet withall he looked a bit mystified and uneasy. "Whar be he?" he asked.

"He's safe in The Chicago," said Wildcat Bob.

"Ah reckon Ah'd better git him over to the jail," said Gum Smith.

"I reckon you'll leave him at The Chicago," replied Wildcat. "Do you know who he is?"

"Bull, o' course."

"Bull, hell-it's Colby."

Gum Smith paled, just a trifle. "They must be some mistake," he said, weakly. "Who got him?"

"Bull got him an' they ain't no mistake," said Bill Gatlin. "I knew all along 'twarn't Bull."

"Well," said Gum Smith, "The Chicago Saloon ain't no place fer a dangerous prisoner. Soon's Ah've et my victuals Ah'll take him over to the jail whar he'll be safe."

"I tells you you'll leave him at The Chicago," said Wildcat Bob.

"Ah'm sheriff o' this yere county," bawled Gum Smith, "an' nobody don't want to interfere with me in the dis=charge o' mah duties. Do yo-all hear me, Wildcat Bob?"

"I hears you, but jest like a jack-ass brayin' it don't make no impression on my onderstandin'," replied Wildcat, embellishing his remarks with lurid and descriptive profanity. He finished his meal first and went out. When Gum Smith left The Donovan House he repaired at once to his own saloon. Here he deputized a half a dozen loafers, gave each of them several drinks, and led them to The Chicago

them several drinks, and led them to the Chicago Saloon, where he demanded of the proprietor that he turn over to him, forthwith, the person of Hal Colby, otherwise known as The Black Coyote.

"He's in the back room yonder," replied the owner of The Chicago Saloon. "Ef you craves him, go git him I don't want him."

In front of the door to the back room sat Wildcat Bob. His elbows were resting on his knees and from each hand dangled a .45.

"In the name o' the lawr," piped Gum Smith in his high voice, "Ah demands the pusson o' one Hal Colby."

"Git the hell outen here, you blankety, blank, blank, blank!" screamed Wildcat Bob.

"Yo-all better listen to reason, Wildcat Bob," yelled the sheriff, "or Ah'll have the lawr on yo."

Wildcat Bob, raising his voice yet higher again than that of his ancient enemy bawled out an incoherent volley of blasphemous and obscene invective. Gum Smith turned and whispered to one of his followers, who withdrew from the room with two others. Presently Gum Smith stepped to one side of the room and, pointing at the little old man sitting before the locked door, called to his remaining deputies: "Take him, men-do yore duty!"

One of the men stepped forward. Wildcat Bob

whirled a gun about his forefinger and without taking aim shot the fellow's hat from his head. The three stepped back. Almost simultaneously there came the sound of the crashing of glass from the interior of the room where Colby was confined, the voice of Thompson raised in protest, and then shots. Wildcat Bob leaped to his feet and reached for the knob of the door. As he did so his back was toward the barroom for an instant and in that instant Gum Smith raised his six-shooter and fired. Without a word Wildcat Bob crumpled to the floor and lay there motionless.

Smith and his men leaped for the door. It was locked, and being a strong door, withstood their combined efforts for several minutes. When at last it gave before their assault and they stepped across the threshold they saw only the body of Thompson sprawled upon the floor in a pool of blood. The Black Coyote was gone.

Surrounded by masked men, her escort shot from his horse, Diana Henders realized only too well the gravity of her situation and though she recognized no individual among those who had lain in ambush for her she guessed well enough that they had acted under orders from Corson. Her note to him, revealing the fact that she knew the entire truth concerning his duplicity and was in possession of the papers that proved it beyond peradventure of a doubt, had, she guessed, prompted the desperate adventure in which he pitted all against all. So suddenly had the masked riders come upon them from the back of a driveway that they had had them

from the bed of a dry wash that they had had them covered before they could draw, yet Idaho, true to the unwritten code of his calling and his time, had invited death by drawing in the face of their levelled guns in defense of a woman. Had he been alone, or with another man, his hands had gone up the moment he had realized that the odds were all against him, and one of them had gone up, but it had carried a six-gun with it, and he had been shot out of the saddle for his chivalry, and left for dead upon the parched ground as his assailants galloped off toward the south with Diana.

Night fell and yet the men kept on, two riding ahead of Diana Henders and four behind. They rode rapidly, not sparing their horses, and from both their haste and the direction of their way the girl guessed that they were making a try for the border. Once in the mountains they were forced to a slower gait, and around nine o'clock they halted for a brief rest where there was water for both the horses and their riders.

At first Diana had attempted to question them relative to their intentions, but they would not tell her where they were taking her and at last silenced her with oaths and threats. Nor did they remove their masks until darkness equally as well hid their features from her. This and their almost unbroken silence convinced her that her abductors were men who feared recognition and therefore must have been recruited in the neighborhood.

A shrewd guess suggested that an habitue of

At the time, the men suggested that the men of Gum's Place-Liquors and Cigars-would have recognized them all. The abduction had therefore been engineered or at least connived in by the sheriff, and this line of reasoning but corroborated what was already a foregone conclusion that it had been done at Corson's behest.

What their purpose was with her she could not guess. It might be a plan to remove her temporarily to some hidden spot where she might not further interfere with the plans of the New Yorker, or it might easily have a more sinister purpose. She knew that Corson would never be safe in possession of the Bar Y property while she lived and she did not believe that he was fool enough not to appreciate that fact; but would he dare to have her done away with? She wondered.

It was after midnight when they crossed the summit, at a point where there appeared not the slightest vestige of a trail, and dropped down a dangerous and rocky declivity into a wooded canyon. A dozen times the girl's life was in jeopardy-her only safeguard the agility and sure-footedness of Captain. A half-hour later the canyon widened into a little pocket in the mountains and here they stopped again. Through the gloom of the deep gorge her eyes finally distinguished the outlines of a small cabin.

The men dismounted. "Get down," said one of them to Diana, and when she had done so the fellow took her by the arm, with a gruff, "Come

along!" and led her toward the shack. He pushed open the door and told her to enter. Following behind her, he struck a match, revealing a single room, rudely furnished with a table, a few benches and a couple of cots, all constructed in rustic fashion from branches of the trees which grew about the place. On the table was a candle holder and a candle, which the man lighted. At one end of the room was a blackened fireplace above which a long shelf supported a few small boxes and cans. On pegs, flanking the fireplace, were crude cooking utensils—a frying pan, a stew pan and a coffee pot, while a larger kettle, for heating water, squatted in the ashes of the dirty hearth.

The other men came in presently. All were masked again. One of them took the kettle and went out, returning shortly with water. Another brought wood and then a third set about preparing a meal. They had brought some flour and bacon with them. There were baking powder, salt, pepper and sugar in the cans upon the mantel shelf, together with one of coffee and another of tea.

The aroma of cooking food awoke Diana to a realization of the fact that she was hungry. Her situation, while grave, had not as yet reached a point that she might consider dangerous. The attitude of the men had been determined, albeit somewhat nervous, yet never at any time actually menacing. What they had done had evidently been accomplished under orders from some person or persons who were taking no active part in the actual

abduction—who were not even present when the thing was done nor now that they had reached this hiding place in the mountains.

Diana Henders was more or less familiar with these southern hills and she knew that she never had been in this spot before. What an ideal place it would be to commit and effectually hide all traces of a crime! She put such unpleasant thoughts from her and turned her attention to the bacon sizzling upon the hearth the while it filled the room with its delicious aroma. She was given a portion of the food and, seated upon one of the rude cots, devoured it ravenously. Her fears, of what ever magnitude they might be, had not spoiled her appetite, nor did she show in any other outward manner that she was afraid, either of her abductors or contemplation of the fate that awaited her.

The meal over, one of the men arose and left the cabin. From the monosyllabic conversation that ensued she gathered that he had been sent back along their route to a point where he could act as sentinel and thus safeguard them from surprise. They did not appear to expect pursuit, but took this precaution. evidently, in accordance with orders previously received, or a plan prearranged.

After the meal the men smoked for a while and then, one by one, lay down upon the rough boards to sleep, so disposing themselves that the girl could not approach either the door or the single window without disturbing one or more of them. The last

man blew out the candle before he lay down. Diana Renders stretched herself at length upon the rough branches that formed the bottom of one of the cots and tried to sleep. How long she lay awake she did not know, but eventually she fell into a light slumber, from which she was awakened about three in the morning by the sound of horses' feet on the ground outside the cabin. Then she heard men's voices, speaking in subdued tones. A sudden premonition seized her-rescue was at hand! She heard the door open and immediately two of the men upon the floor awoke and sat up.

"Who's that?" demanded one.

"Me," replied one of the newcomers. "The rest o' you fellers wake up-we got to get outta here." He stepped to the table, struck a match and lighted the candle. In its first flare Diana recognized his figure as that of the man who had gone out after the meal to act as guard along the trail-the man with him was Hal Colby.

"Put out that light, you damn fool!" cried one of the awakened sleepers. "Do you want this girl to reco'nize us all?" The light went out, quickly. Hal Colby stepped across the room to her side.

"Everything's all right, Di," he said. "I've come for you."

The other man was speaking to his fellows. "They's someone on our trail-Colby passed them on the cut-off. He'd ben ridin' behind 'em fer an hour. He

out on the ground. "Come! Come! Come!" he said. "We gotta git out." Hastily the men rose and sought their horses. Colby took Diana by the arm.

"Come!" he said. "I'll get you out o' here."

"Why should I want to get out when someone is coming to take me away from these men?" she demanded.

"But I'm here-I'll take you out, Di. Come, we must hurry."

She shook her head. "No! I shall stay here."

"They won't let you-they'll take you along. You had better come with me. I am your friend."

"You cannot be a friend of theirs and mine, both."

He took her by the arm again. "Come! This is no time for fooling."

She struggled to free herself and when he attempted to drag her forcibly she struck him in the face with a clenched fist.

"You-!" he cried, applying a vile epithet to her. "You'll come, damn you," and he picked her up and carried her out into the waning night.

Most of the men had found their horses and mounted. "Where's her horse?" demanded Colby of one of them, and when it was led forward he threw

her roughly into the saddle and with her own reata he bound her there. Then he mounted his own animal and, leading hers, started down the rough and wooded gorge, toward the south.

A few miles away three men drew rein upon a ridge. "We've lost the damn trail agin," muttered Texas Pete, sourly.

Bull sat erect upon Blazes, his head thrown far back, his nostrils dilated.

"What you lookin' up yender fer?" demanded Shorty. "The trail thet bunch o' short-horn's on don't lead to heavin."

"Smell it?" asked Bull.

"What?"

"Wood smoke! They's a east wind. Come on!" He rode blindly through the darkness, trusting to the instinct and the eyesight of his horse, toward the east and the fire from which that tenuous suggestion of wood smoke emanated. Where there was fire there should be a man-thus reasoned Bull.

A half-hour later the three slid and rolled with their horses down the steep side of a gorge into a cup-like opening in the hills and before them, in the growing dawn, they saw a mean, weatherworn shack. From the crumbling chimney a thin wisp of smoke arose into the still air, to be wafted gently westward after it had topped the summit of the

canyon walls. They hid their horses among the trees and the under-brush and crept stealthily toward the building from three sides. Bull was the first to come into the open and as he did so he stood erect and sprang toward the doorway of the building, bursting into the interior with two guns ready-in his hands. The place was empty. Embers smouldered upon the dirty hearth. A greasy frying pan lay upon the floor at one side, a kettle half filled with warm water upon the other. There was the odor of cigarette smoke in the air of the single room.

"They ben here, but they's gone," said Bull as his two friends joined him.

"They ain't ben gone long," said Shorty.

They found the trail leading down the canyon and followed it, while a few miles ahead Colby and Diana with the six masked men debouched upon the wide fiat at the foot of the hills. Here they halted.

"One o' you fellers swap horses with the girl," commanded Colby, "and then you all circle back to the west an' north an' hit the high spots fer Hendersville. Here, Griff, you take her horse."

"How come?" demanded Griff.

"Why to lead the folks back at Hendersville offen the trail, o' course," replied Colby. "You'll tell 'em you found her horse tother side o' the West Ranch an' they'll look there 'til the covey comes home."

an they'll look there an the cows comes home.

Griff, satisfied with this explanation, dismounted and took Diana's horse, after which she was bound to the one he had quitted.

"Now beat it!" said Colby. "I'll take care o' the girl," and he started off toward the south, while the others turned westward.

"I reckon I fooled 'em," remarked Colby when the others were out of hearing.

Diana made no reply.

"Them three hombres is trailin' you, Di," he continued, "an they'll be jest wise enough to foller Captain's tracks. I reckon I fooled 'em fine. Griff never would o' swapped ef he'd a-knowed what my reason was."

Diana said nothing. She did not even look at him. They rode on in silence then for some time.

"Look here, Di," he exclaimed finally. "You might as well come down offen your high horse. You're mine now an' I'm agoin' to keep you-as long as I want you. I'm rich now. I'll git all the money I wants from Lillian, but you're the one I love-you're the one I want and you're the one I'm a-goin' to have. After I gits all o' Lillian's money I'll quit her an' you an' me'll do some travelin', but in the meantime I gotta marry her to git the money. Sabe?"

"Curl!" muttered Diana, shuddering.

"Well, ef you wants to belong to a cur, call me one," he said, laughing. "cause you're goin' to belong to me after today. You won't never want to go back then. You thought you'd turn me down, did you? You wanted that dirty damn bandit, didn't cha? Well, you won't never git him. If he isn't follerin' you with the three thets behind us he won't never catch up to us this side o' the border, an' after that he couldn't never find us in a hundred years. If he is with them he'll foller the Captain's hoof prints until he catches up with 'em an' then that bunch o' bad-uns'll shoot him full o' holes. I guess maybe I wasn't foolin' the whole bunch on 'em, eh?"

Diana Henders looked her unutterable contempt and loathing. Colby fell silent after a bit, seeing that it was impossible to draw the girl into conversation. Thus they continued on for miles. Suddenly, from far away toward the north, came, just barely audible to their ears, faintly the sound of distant firearms.

Bull and his pals had come upon the six. There had been no preliminary-no questions asked. The three had but put spurs to their horses and overtaken the fleeing abductors, who, their work done, had no desire to enter into an argument with anyone. The moment he thought that he was within safe range Bull had opened with a single gun, and at the first shot a man had tumbled from his saddle. It was a running fight from then on until but a single one of the six remained. Holding one hand far above his

head he reined in his jaded mount, at the same time letting his gun fall to the ground. Bull drew up beside him.

"Where's Miss Henders?" he demanded.

"I don't know nothin' about her-I ain't seen her."

"You lie," said Bull, in a low voice. "You're riding her horse now. Where is she? I'll give you five seconds to answer before I send you to hell."

"Colby taken her-south-toward the border," cried Griff, and Bull wondered, for he had left the man safely in Hendersville.

"You take thet horse home, Griff," said Bull, "to the Bar Y. Ef you've lied to me about Miss Henders, or ef thet horse ain't in a Bar Y corral when I gets back, I bore you. Sabe?"

Griff nodded.

"Now beat it," said Bull, and reined about toward the south.

Again the hard, pitiless grind commenced. Beneath a scorching sun, over blistering alkali flats, the three urged their weary horses on.

"You gotta make it, Blazes. You gotta make it," whispered Bull in the ear of the pony. "She cain't be much ahead, an' there ain't nothin' can step away from me an' you, Blazes, forever. We'll catch up

with 'em some day."

Chapter XIX--"TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME!"

IT was ten o'clock that morning before Bull, Texas Pete and Shorty picked up Colby's trail and by that time the man and his unwilling companion were a good four hours ahead of them. On tired horses, through the heat of a blazing Arizona day, it seemed hopeless to expect to overhaul their quarry before night had fallen and by that time Colby would have crossed the border. Not however that that meant much to the three who pursued him, to whom international boundary lines were of no more practical import than parallels of latitude or isothermal lines.

Before noon they were obliged to stop and rest their horses at a water hole that afforded a brackish but refreshing drink for the three jaded animals. In the mud at the border they saw the fresh tracks of Colby's pony and Diana's. It was evident that they had stopped here for a considerable time, which, in truth, they had, so positive was Colby that he had thrown their pursuers off the track, leading them into a gun fight with a superior force that might reasonably have been expected to have accounted for them to the last man.

Five minutes was all the rest that the pursuers allowed their horses. Once again they were in the

saddle. "Looke yender!" exclaimed Texas Pete, pointing toward the south. "Ef it ain't rainin' there I'm a siwash."

"It's about a month too early for the rains," said Bull, "but it shore is rainin'-rainin' like hell. Look at thet lightnin'. Say, if they ain't crossed Salee's Flats yet they won't never git acrost, not while thet rain lasts."

"N' if they has crossed we won't never catch 'em," said Shorty.

"I'll catch 'em ef I hev to ride plumb to hell an' it takes me a hundred years," said Bull.

The rain struck Colby and Diana at the northern edge of the Flats. It came in driving sheets and sometimes in solid masses that almost crushed them. It came with deafening reverberations of Titanic thunder and vivid, almost terrifying, displays of lightning. It was bad where they were, but Colby knew from experience of the country that in the low hills at the upper end of the Flats it was infinitely worse—that there had been a cloudburst. He put spurs to his horse and dragging Diana's into a gallop urged them both to greater speed, knowing that if he did not cross the wash in the center of the Flats within a few minutes he might not cross it again for days. When they reached it three feet of turbid water tumbled madly down the narrow bed between the precipitous clay walls. The man found a steep path that stock had made for crossing when the bed of the wash was dry and urged his horse

the bed of the wash was dry and urged his horse downward. The force of the current almost swept the animal from its feet, but with wide-spread legs it stemmed the torrent, while Colby, taking a few turns of the lead rope around his horn, dragged Diana's pony through in safety after him. At the top of the bank the man turned and looked toward the north and then down at the rising flood.

"If this rain holds out they won't nothin' more cross here fer a spell," he said, smiling. "In ten minutes she'll be plumb full. We kin take it easier now."

He started off again, but now at a walk, for he knew that there was no longer need for haste, if there had been before, which he had doubted. The horses, cooled and refreshed by the rain, would have been equal to a spurt now, but none was necessary, and so they came after a mile to the dim outlines of an adobe house showing through the driving downpour, directly ahead. Colby rode close to the door, and leaning from his saddle, pounded upon it. There was no reply.

"I reckon we'll stop here a while," he said, dismounting.

He opened the door and looked in. The place was deserted. In rear of it was an open shed for stock and to this they rode. Colby helped Diana from her horse, removed the saddles and bridles from the animals and tied them beneath the shed, then he led the girl to the house, her arms still bound by the reata. There was no chance that she could escape

now; so the man removed her bonds.

"We'll rest here a few hours an' give the horses a chance, then we'll hit the trail. We gotta find a place where we kin feed, my belly's wrapped around my back-bone. Let's be friends, Di. You might as well make the best of it. You cain't blame a feller fer lovin' you, an' I ain't so bad-you might a-done a lot worse." He came toward her and raised his hand as though to place it on her arm.

"Don't touch me!" She drew back with an appreciable shudder or revulsion.

He laughed. "You'll feel better after a while," he said. "We're both too dog tired to be very good company. I'm goin' to get in a little sleep. You'd better do the same; but I'll have to tie you up again unless you'll promise not to try to escape."

She made no reply. "All right," he said, "ef you'd rather be tied." He came then and tied her hands behind her. Keeping one end of the rope in his own hand he lay down upon the dirt floor and was soon asleep. Diana sat with her back against the wall listening to the rain beating upon the roof and driving against the walls. The roof leaked badly in several places and the water that came through formed puddles on the floor which joined together into a little rivulet that wound to the doorway and disappeared beneath the door.

How hopeless! Diana stifled a sob. She was tired and hungry and weak from exhaustion. The fightful

and hungry and weak from exhaustion. The inglorious rain had cut off the frail vestige of a chance of rescue that there had been before. By now no man or beast could cross Salee's Flats. She knew one man who would try had he known of her predicament, but how was he to know of it—a hunted fugitive hiding in the mountains far to the north.

Realizing the necessity for haste if they were to cross the Flats before the wash became an impassable torrent, the three pursuers drove their tired horses onward at the top of their diminished speed. The race became at once a test for the survival of the fittest, and Blazes forged steadily farther and farther, ahead of the ponies. Long before Bull reached the Flats the rain was upon him, refreshing both horse and man, and Blazes, as though imbued with new life, increased the distance between himself and the two ponies now far behind. The driving rain was rapidly obliterating the trail that the man followed, yet he managed to cling to it to the very brink of the wash—to the very point where Colby and Diana had crossed, and there Bull drew rein to look down, scowling, upon a seething barrier of yellow water. Twenty feet wide it was and ten feet deep, swirling and boiling like a cauldron of hell. He eyed the greasy, muddy footing of the bank. Had it been firm and dry he had put Blazes to it for a jump, but he knew that it could not be done, nor could he swim the horse. Even could the animal have made the crossing it could not have clambered out upon the top of that perpendicular, constantly

caving wall, with the mighty current always dragging at it. But Bull was not hopeless-he was merely devising ways and means. Not an instant had he considered the possibility of giving up the pursuit, or even of delaying it by waiting for the waters to recede. Taking his rope in hand he dismounted and stepped close to the brink of the torrent, upon both sides of which grew numerous clumps of grease-wood. He seemed already to have formed a plan, for he drew one of his six-guns and hurled it across the wash. He followed it with the second gun and then with his heavy belt of cartridges. Then came his boots, one by one.

Shaking down the honda he swung a noose at the end of his rope, which, opening up, described a circle that seemed to revolve about his head at an angle of forty-five degrees with the ground, like a rakish halo just for an instant, and then it rose and sailed gracefully across the new-born river to drop around a clump of grease-wood upon the opposite bank.

"Come here!" said Bull to Blazes, and the horse stepped- to his side, close to the water's edge. "Stand!" commanded Bull, knowing that Blazes would stand where he was for hours, if necessary, until his master gave a new order.

Bull drew in his rope until it became taut and then he dragged heavily upon the grease-wood across the channel. It held despite his most strenuous efforts. He tied the loose end about his waist, stepped to the edge of the water and leaned in

stepped to the edge of the water and knaped in.

Hal Colby awoke and looked about him. His eyes fell upon the girl sitting with her back against the wall across the room.

"Feelin' better?" he asked. "I am. Nothin' like sleep, onless it be grub."

She did not reply. He rose to his feet and approached her. "You're shore a sullen little devil, but I'll take that out o' youa little lovin'll do that. Git up an' kiss me!"

"You unspeakable-THING! It would be an insult to a cur to call you that."

Colby laughed good-naturedly. "Ef you'd ruther have a bandit, I might turn one," he said, and again he laughed, this time at his own joke.

"If you are trying to suggest that I would prefer Bull, you are right. You may thank God that he is not here-but he will come-and you will pay."

"Well, you ain't got up and kissed me yet," said Colby. "Do you want me to yank you up? You got a lot to learn an' I'm the hombre what can learn you. I've hed a lot o' experience-I've tamed 'em before, as good as you. Tamed 'em an' made 'em like it. If it cain't be did one way it can another. Sometimes a quirt helps." He struck his chaps with the lash of the one he carried. "Git up, you!" He seized her by the arm and jerked her roughly to her feet. Again she

struck him, and this time the man struck back-a stinging blow across her shoulders with the quirt. "I'll learn you!" he cried.

She tried to free herself, striking him repeatedly, but he held her off and lashed her cruelly, nor did he appear to care where the quirt fell.

The tumbling waters, engulfing Bull, rolled him over and over before, half-drowned, his powerful strokes succeeded in raising his head above the surface. He had had no conception of the tremendous strength of the current. He was but a bobbing bit of flotsam upon its surface. He could not stem it. He was helpless. The rope about his waist suddenly tautened and he was again dragged beneath the surface. He grasped it with his hands and tried to pull himself in toward shore, but the giant waters held him in their grip, dragging him downward, stronger by far than the strength of many men.

Suddenly the muddy flood spewed him to the surface once more-this time against the bank to which the opposite end of his rope was fastened and was dragging heavily upon its precarious anchor. He clutched at the slippery, red mud, clawing frantically for a hand-hold. The waters leaped upon him and beat him down, but still he fought on valiantly, not for his life but for the girl he loved, and at last he won, dragging himself slowly out upon the bank. Almost exhausted he rose, staggering, to his feet and looked back across the torrent at Blazes

"It ain't no use, boy," he said, with a shake of his head. "I was a-goin' to rope you an' drag you across, but it cain't be did. Now I reckon I'll hev to hoof it."

He sat down in the mud and pulled on his boots, gathered up his guns and belt, coiled his rope and turned his face southward. "Ef it takes a hundred years an' I hev to foller him plumb to hell," he muttered, "I'll git him!"

Still spent and blowing from his tremendous exertions against the flood, he staggered on through the sticky clay and the blinding rain, his head bent down against the storm. It was hard work, but never once did a thought of surrender enter his mind. He would find a ranch house somewhere and get a horse—he might even come upon some range stock. He had his lariat and there was a bare chance that he might get close enough to an animal to rope it. But he must have a horse! He felt helpless—entirely impotent—without one.

Imagine yourself thrust into a cold and unfriendly world, if you are a man, without a pocket knife, a bunch of keys, a handkerchief, money, or a pair of shoes and you will be able to appreciate how a cowboy feels without a horse.

Thus, buffeted by the storm, he shouldered on until suddenly there loomed almost directly in his path the outlines of an adobe house. Fortune smiled

upon him! Here he would find a horse! He stepped to the door and was about to knock when he heard the voice of a woman crying out in protestation and pain. Then he flung the door wide and stepped into the interior. Colby, holding Diana's wrist, was twisting it in an excess of rage, for she had struck him and repulsed him until the last vestige of his thin veneer of manhood had fallen from him, leaving exposed the raw, primordial beast.

He saw Bull the instant that the latter opened the door and swinging the girl in front of him reached for a gun. Diana, too, saw the figure in the doorway. A great wave of joy swept through her, and then she saw Colby's gun flash from its holster and knew that Bull could not shoot because of fear of hitting her; but she did not know Bull as well as she thought she knew him, and similarly was Colby deceived, for the man in the doorway fired from the hip the instant that Colby's gun was raised. The weapon fell from nerveless fingers, the grasp upon Diana's wrist relaxed, and Hal Colby pitched forward upon his face, a bullet hole between his eyes.

Diana swayed for an instant, dazed by the wonder of her deliverance, and then as Bull stepped toward her she went to meet him and put her arms about his neck.

"Bull!" It was half a sob. The man took her in his arms.

"Diana!" The word carried all the reverence of a

Diana: The word carried all the reverence of a benediction.

Raising her face from his shoulder she pushed him away a little. "Bull," she said, "once you told me that you loved me. Tell me so again."

"Love' don't tell half of it, girl," he said, his voice husky with emotion.

"Oh, Bull," she cried, "I have been such a fool. I love you! I have always loved you, but I did not know it until that night-the night they came after you at the West Ranch."

"But you couldn't love me, Diana, thinkin' I was The Black Coyote!"

"I don't care, Bull, what you are. All I care or know is that you are my man. We will go away together and start over again-will you, Bull, for my sake?"

And then he told her that he didn't have to go away-told her who The Black Coyote had been.

"Why, he even planted one o' the bullion sacks under my bed-roll at The West Ranch to prove I was the right hombre," said Bull. "Saw a sack o' dust I brung from Idaho, an' he tried to make 'em think it was yours. He used to send me off alone the days he was a-goin' to hold up the stage, so's when the time was ripe he could throw suspicion on me. He shore was a clever feller, Hal was."

"But the day Mack was wounded?" she asked. "We saw you coming in from the north and there was blood on your shirt."

"I got in a brush with Apaches up Cottonwood, me an' Gregorio, an' I got scratched. 'Twasn't nothin'."

"And to think that all the time he was professing friendship for you he was trying to make me believe that you were The Black Coyote.," cried Diana. "He was worse than Mr. Corson and I thought him about the wickedest man I had ever known."

"We gotta think about gittin' back an' havin' a friendly pow-wow with thet there Corson gent," said Bull. "By golly, the sun's out! Everything's happy, Diana, now thet you're safe."

They walked to the doorway. The rain had stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and now the fierce sun blazed down upon the steaming mud.

"Where's your horses?" asked Bull.

"In a shed behind the house."

"Good! We'll start along. They's a bridge twentyfive miles below here ef I ain't mistaken. I think I know this here shack. I was down this way two year ago."

"But what about him?" She nodded back toward the body of Colby.

the body of Corby.

"He kin rot here fer all I care," said Bull, bitterly-"a-hurtin' you! God, I wisht he had nine lives like a cat, so's I could kill him a few more times."

She closed the door behind them. "We'll have to notify Gum Smith, so they can send down and bury him."

"Gum Smith won't never get the chanct," he said.

They walked to the shed and he saddled the two horses, rested now and refreshed a little by the past hours of relief from -the heat, and after they had mounted and ridden halfway to the wash they saw the figures of two men upon the opposite bank.

"Texas Pete and Shorty," he told her. They recognized the girl and Bull and whooped and shouted in the exuberance of youth and joy.

It was a hard ride to the bridge through the heavy mud, but it was made at last and then the four joined upon the same side and set out toward home, picking up Idaho en route, still weak, but able to sit on a horse.

It was two days later before they rode into the Bar Y ranch yard, where they were met with wild acclaim by Willie, Wong .and the men's cook.

"Where's Corson?" demanded Bull.

"The whole bunch has gone to town to close the

deal. They was some hitch the other day. Wong said he heard 'em talkin'. Corson wouldn't take nothin' but gold an' Wainright had to send up to Aldea fer it. They say it's comin' in on today's stage."

"I'm goin' to town," announced Bull.

"So am I," said Diana.

"We'll all go," said Shorty.

"Git us up some fresh horses, Willie," said Texas Pete. Then he turned to Diana. "You ain't said yit that I ain't foreman no more." They both smiled.

"Not yet, Pete. I'll have to talk it over with Bull," said Diana.

Remounted, they galloped off toward Hendersville-all but Idaho. Him they left behind, much to his disgust, for he needed rest.

They reached town half an hour after the stage had pulled in and, entering The Donovan House, found Corson, Lillian Manill, the two Wainrights, together with the attorney from Aldea and Gum Smith.

At sight of Bull, Gum Smith leaped to his feet. "Yo-all's undeh arrest!" he squealed.

"What fer?" asked Bull.

"Fer robbin' the United States Mail, that's what

fer."

"Hold your horses, Gum," admonished Bull, "I - ain't quite ready fer you yet. I craves conversation with these here dudes fust." He turned to the elder Wainright. "You was honin' to pay a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars to this here dude fer the Bar Y?"

"Tain't none o' yore business," snapped Wainright.

Bull laid a hand upon the -butt of one of his guns. "Does I hev to run you out o' Hendersville to git a civil answer?" he demanded.

Wainright paled. "I've paid already, an' the Bar Y's mine," he answered surlily.

"You've ben stung. Them two's crooks. The girl ain't no relation to Miss Henders' uncle an' we got the papers to prove it. We got the will, too, thet this skunk tried to git hold of an' destroy. Leastwise Miss Henders had 'em, but she sent 'em to Kansas City before Corson could git holt of 'em. Texas Pete, here, took 'em to Aldea. That's why you didn't find 'em in the office, Corson, when you robbed the safe. Wong saw you and told us about it just before we left the ranch today. All you got was the copies she made. I don't wonder you wanted gold from Wainright."

"He's lyin'," cried Corson to Wainright. "Do you believe what a fellow like he is says? Why, he'll be in a federal penitentiary inside another month for

robbering the mail. There isn't a jury on earth would take his word for anything."

"I ain't there yit an' no more I don't expect to be," said Bull.

"Yo-all's undeh arrest, jes the same, right now," cried Gum Smith, "an Ah warns yo to come along peacable-like with me."

"Now I'm comin' to you, Gum," said Bull. "You better beat it, Gum. You ain't wuth shootin', with cartridges the price they be," he continued. "Gregorio had told me the whole story. He's goin' straight now an' wants to square himself. He's writ out an' signed a confession that's goin' to make this climate bad fer your rheumatism."

"Gregorio's a dirty, lyin' greaser," screamed

Gum. "They won't no one bulieve him neither. They ain't no one got. the goods on me."

"No," said Bull, "but you have. Nearly every ounce of thet gold-except what you an' Colby spent an' what little you giv Gregorio's buried underneath the floor of the back room o' your saloon, an' me an' Pete an' Shorty's right here to see thet no hombre don't git it what don't belong to it."

Gum Smith paled. "Tain't so! It's a damn lie"

"Thet's the second time I ben called a liar in five minutes " said Bull "I ain't did nothin' 'cause thet's

ladies present, but I'm goin' to send 'em outen the room in a minute an' then we'll talk about thet-ef you're still here. I'd advise you not to be, though. Wainright, I seen your buckboard tied out in front here. By crowdin' it'll hold five--meanin' you, thet ornery lookin' dude son o' yourn, Corson, Miss Manill an' Gum. You all be in it an' hittin' the trail north fer tother side o' the hill inside o' five minutes or me an' the boys is goin' to start shootin'. On the way, Wainright, you an' Corson kin settle thet little matter o' the hundred an' twenty-five thousand. Ef you kin git it back from him 'tain't nothin' to me, but ef you don't you deserve to lose it, fer you're jest as big a thief as he is, only not quite so bright in the head. Now git, an' git damn pronto!" His voice had suddenly changed from mocking irony to grim earnestness. It was a savage voice that uttered the final command. Gum Smith was the first out of the room. He was followed by the others. "See 'em to the edge of town, boys, an' see that they don't linger," said Bull to Shorty an' Texas Pete.

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Shorty. "Lead me to them funny pants!"

Bull turned to the attorney from Aldea. "I ain't got no proof thet you were in on this deal," he said; "so you kin wait an' go in on the stage tomorrer."

"Thanks," said the attorney. "No, I thought it a perfectly legitimate transaction; but I am glad they called me down, for now perhaps I can transact some real business for some other clients of mine. I

had not been aware that the Bar Y was for sale, or I had been over here before. I represent a large syndicate of eastern packers whom I know would be interested in this property, and if Miss Henders will make me a proposition I shall be glad to transmit it to them-you will find them very different people to deal with than these others seem to have been."

"I thank you," said Diana, "but the Bar Y is not for sale. We are going to run the ranch together, aren't we, Bull?"

"You bet we are," he replied.

Mary Donovan burst from an inner room at the moment. "Bliss me heart!" she exclaimed. "An' I niver knew you was here 'til this very minute, an' I heard what yese jest said, Diana Henders, an' I'm not after bein' such a fool that I don't know what yese means. It makes me happy, God bless ye! I must be after runnin' in an' tellin' me ould man-he'll be that glad, he will."

"Your old man!" exclaimed Diana.

"Sure now," said Mary Donovan, blushing, "didn't yese know 'at me and Bob was married the day before yesterday? Shure they had to shoot him before I c'd git him. He niver was much, an' havin' a bullet hole clean through him don't make him no better, but thin he's a man, an' a poor one's better than none at all."

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