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THE BOY RANCHERS AMONG THE INDIANS

OR

Trailing The Yaquis

By

WILLARD F. BAKER

Author of "The Boy Ranchers," "The Boy Ranchers In Camp," "The Boy Ranchers on The Trail," etc.

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THE BOY RANCHERS AMONG THE INDIANS

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THE BOY RANCHERS AMONG THE INDIANS

CHAPTER I

COMPANY COMING

High and clear the sweet, western wind brought over the rolling hills the sound of singing. At least it was singing of a sort, for there was a certain swing and rhythm accompanying the words. As the melody floated toward them, three young cowboys, seated at ease in their saddles, looked up and in the direction of the singer.

Thus the song.

"Oh, bury me out on th' lonesome prairie!
Put a stone under my haid!
Cover me up with a rope an' a saddle!
'Cause why? My true-love is daid * * * * *

It is impossible in cold print to indicate the mournful and long-drawn-out accent on the word "dead," to rhyme with head.

"Here comes Slim!" exclaimed one of the youthful cow punchers to his companions.

"As if we didn't know that, Dick!" laughed the slighter of two lads who, from their close resemblance, could be nothing less than brothers.

"His voice doesn't improve with age; does it, Nort?" asked Bud Merkel, smiling at his cousins, Norton and Richard Shannon.

"But he means well," declared Nort with a chuckle. "Oh, you Slim!" he shouted, as a tall lanky individual, mounted on a pony of like proportions, ambled into view, topping a slight rise of the trail. "Oh, you Slim!"

The older cowboy—a man, to be exact—who had been about to break forth into the second, or forty-second verse of his song (there being in all seventy-two stanzas, so it doesn't much matter which one is designated)—the older cowboy, I say, paused with his mouth open, and a blank look on his face. Then he grinned—that is the only word for it—and cried:

"Well, I'm a second cousin to a ham sandwich! Where'd you fellows come from?"

"We haven't come—we're just going!" laughed Bud. "We're going over to see Dad and the folks. How are they all?"

"Oh, they're sittin' pretty! Sittin' pretty!" affirmed Slim Degnan, with a mingled smile and grin. "How'd you fellows come out with your spring round-up?"

"Pretty fair," admitted Bud. "A few steers short of what we figured on, but that's nothing."

"I should say not!" chuckled Slim. "Your paw was a heap sight worse off'n that."

"Rustlers again?" asked Nort quickly, as he and his brother glanced at one another. They had not forgotten the stirring times when they were on the trail of the ruthless men who had raided Diamond X ranch, and their own cattle range.

"No, nothin' like that," answered Slim easily. "Just natural depravity, so to speak. Some of 'em ate loco weed and others jest got too tired of livin' I reckon. But we come out pretty fair. Just got th' last bunch shipped, an' I'm mighty glad of it."

"Same here!" spoke Dick. "That's why we came over here—on a sort of vacation."

"I reckon some other folks is headin' this way on th' same sort of ideas," remarked Slim Degnan, as he rolled a cigarette with one hand, a trick for which the boys had no use, though they could but admire the skill of the foreman.

"What do you mean?" asked Bud. "Is Dad going to take a vacation? If he does—"

"Don't worry, son! Don't worry!" laughed Slim, as he ignited a match by the simple process of scratching the head with his thumb nail. "Cattle will have to fetch a heap sight more'n they do now when he takes a few days off," declared the foreman. "What I meant was that some tenderfeet individuals are headin'—"

Slim did not finish the sentence for he was nearly thrown from his saddle (something most unusual with him) as his pony gave a sudden leap to one side, following a peculiar noise in a bunch of grass on which the animal almost stepped.

The noise was not unlike that made by a locust in a tree on a hot day, but there was in the vibrations a more sinister sound. And well did Slim's horse know what it indicated.

"A rattler!" yelled Bud, and close on the heels of his words followed action.

He whipped out his .45, there was a sliver of flame, a sharp crack at which the three steeds of the trio of youthful cowboys jumped slightly, and there writhed on the trail a venomous rattle-snake, its head now a shapeless mass where the bullet from Bud's gun had almost obliterated it.

"Whew! A big one!" exclaimed Slim, who had quickly gotten his pony under control again, and turned it back toward the scene of action. It spoke well for his ability that he had not lost his cigarette, and was puffing on it, though the sudden leap of his steed, to avoid a bite that probably would have meant death, had jarred the words from his mouth.

"First of the season," added Bud, slipping his gun back into the holster.

"Are they more poisonous then than at other times?" asked Nort.

"Guess there isn't much difference, son," affirmed Slim. "I don't want to be nipped by one at any time. Much obliged, Bud," he said, easily enough, though there was a world of meaning in his voice. "I shore plum would hate to have to shoot Pinto, and that's what I'd a done if that serpent had set its fangs in his leg."

"Why'd he shoot him?" asked Dick, for he and his brother, though far removed from the tenderfoot class, were not wise to all western ways yet.

"There isn't much chance for a horse after it's been bit deep by a rattler," Bud explained. "Of course I don't say every horse that's bitten will die, but it's harder to doctor them than it is a man. And Slim meant he wouldn't want to see Pinto suffer."

"You're right there, Bud!" drawled Slim Degnan. "They do say this new-fangled treatment is better'n whisky for snake bites, but I don't reckon I want to chance it."

"The permanganate of potash is almost a sure cure for the ordinary snake bite, if you use it in time," declared Bud. "But I don't know that it would work after a *fer de lance* set his fangs into you. Anyhow

I'm glad we haven't anything worse than rattlers and copperheads around here."

"They're bad enough!" affirmed Slim, as he gave a backward glance toward the still writhing form of the big rattler, which was now past all power of doing harm.

The incident seemed to cause the foreman to forget what he had been about to say when his horse shied, and the boy ranchers, by which title is indicated Bud, Nort and Dick, did not attach enough importance to it to cause them to question their companion. Yet what Slim had been about to say was destined to have a great influence on their lives in the immediate future, and was to cause them to ride forward into danger. But then danger was nothing new to them.

"Well, things are right peaceful since we got rid of Del Pinzo and his gang of greasers," observed Slim, as he rode on with the boys down the trail that led to Diamond X ranch, the property of Bud's father.

"But I'm always worrying for fear they'll come back, or we'll have some sort of trouble with our cattle," observed Dick. "It doesn't seem possible that over at our Happy Valley ranch we'll be let alone to do as we please."

"Don't cross a bridge until you hear the rattling of the planks!" paraphrased Nort to his brother. "We're all right so far."

"Yes, things are sittin' right pretty for the present," declared Slim. "Well, here we are," he added, as a turn of the trail brought them within sight of the corrals and other parts of Diamond X ranch. "And there's your folks," he added, as a woman and girl, standing in the yard of a red ranch house, began to wave their hands to the boys.

"I see Dad!" exclaimed End.

"Where?" asked Nort.

"Over by the pony corral, talking to Yellin' Kid. Looks like Kid just came in with the mail."

"He started after it when I rode out to look for a couple of strays," said Slim. "Beckon he jest come back. You boys'll hear more partic'lars now, I reckon."

"Particulars of what?" asked Nort. "Was that what you started to say when Bud shot the rattler?"

Slim did not answer, the reason being that a moment later he was surrounded by a knot of laughing, pushing, jostling and shouting cowboys, who seemed to want the foreman to settle some disputed point.

Bud and his two cousin chums rode on and greeted Mr. Merkel and his wife, who was "Ma" to every cowboy within fifty miles, and Nell, who was Bud's pretty sister.

"Hello, Dad! Hello, Uncle Henry!" was the greeting. "Hello, Sis!"

"Got any pie, Nell?" added Bud.

"For Nort and Dick—yes," the girl answered. "But you won't want pie when you hear—"

"Say, what's all this mysterious news?" broke out Bud. "First Slim starts to tell us and then—"

"Rosemary and Floyd are coming!" merrily cried Nell.

"Rosemary and Floyd?" questioned Bud.

"Your cousins, or, to be more exact, your second cousins," explained Mrs. Merkel. "We had a letter last week saying they might come on from California, and now your father has just had a special delivery letter, saying they're on their way. They'll be here any time."

"Company's coming! Company's coming!" joyously sang Nell, for she was delighted with the news.

"Rosemary and Floyd," repeated Bud, "I don't seem—"

"You haven't seen them in some years," his mother said. "But I'm sure you'll like them."

"Especially Rosemary," laughed Nort, and Nell stuck out her tongue at him.

"Well, I'm glad they didn't come until after the spring round-up," spoke Mr. Merkel, looking at a letter he held. "We'll have more time, now, to be with 'em and show 'em around. I wonder—"

But, as in the case of Slim, he did not finish what he started to say, for there came an interruption, in its way almost as sinister as the whirring of the rattle-snake's tail.

Toward the ranch buildings came the sound of rapidly galloping hoofs, and as they all looked in the direction of the sound they saw, riding in toward them, one of the cowboys.

"It's Old Billee Dobb!" exclaimed Yellin' Kid in a voice that was, as usual, unnecessarily loud. "Looks like rustlers were after him!"

But none rode in pursuit of the veteran cowpuncher, though he was spurring his steed to its utmost.

"They've broke out!" he yelled as soon as he was within hearing distance. "They've broke out! Scatter my watermelon seeds, but they've broke out!"

"What has?" demanded Mr. Merkel. "Our steers?"

"No! The Yaquis!"

"Indians!" snapped out Bud.

"That's them, son! They've broke out—left the reservation, and they're headed this way! Oh, rattle-snakes! Get your guns ready! The Yaquis have broke out!"

The boy ranchers looked at each other and it can not be denied that there was a joyous light in their eyes. Nell shrank closer to her father, and Mr. Merkel reached over and placed his hand in reassuring fashion on his wife's ample shoulder.

"Indians!" murmured Dick. "I wonder—"

"Sure we can help fight 'em!" exclaimed Nort, rightly guessing that this was his brother's question.

CHAPTER II

THE TELEGRAM

While the wind fluttered in his hand the letter from Rosemary, telling of her plans to visit Diamond X with her brother, and while Mr. Merkel looked anxiously at Billee Dobb on his panting steed, a far-off look was in the eyes of the ranchman. Bud thought he knew what his father's air portended, and he was eager to speak, but he, as well as the others, felt the tenseness of the situation, and waited for what might come next.

Nell was about to speak, to voice her gladness that a girl companion was to come to the ranch, when Mr. Merkel remarked:

"How come you heard all this, Bill—I mean about the Yaquis? None of it filtered here until you come up sweating lather!"

"I met one of the deputy sheriffs in town," explained the veteran cow puncher. "He'd just got a telegraph message tellin' him to be on the lookout, as the redskins might be headed this way."

"Whoop-ee!" yelled Bud, flapping his hat down on his pony's flank, thereby causing the animal to leap sideways. "Think of it! Indians! Whoop-ee!"

"It's dreadful!" murmured Ma Merkel. "I don't like to think about it!"

"But, Aunt, we have to think of it if the Yaquis are coming this way," spoke Nort. "We want to think of it to protect you and Nell!"

"That's right!" added Dick, while some of the cowboys grinned at the eagerness and impetuosity of the boys.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Mrs. Merkel, getting back her nerve. "Those Yaquis are nothing more than a lot of Greasers, anyhow. They'll turn home at the first sight of a few of the sheriff's posse. I don't believe I'll worry after all."

"That's right!" shouted Yellin' Kid. "No need to worry when the bunch from Happy Valley joins with the Diamond X outfit! We're a match for all the Yaquis that never washed!"

"Let's don't be too sure of that, boys," cautioned Mr. Merkel. "What more did you hear, Billee Dobb? Is it at all serious? How many of the imps broke loose?"

"That I don't know, there's enough of 'em to make the government take action. Some of the regular troops have received orders to move, and they're on their way now. If there were only a scattered few of the Yaquis, Uncle Sam wouldn't be so anxious. They've raided one Arizona town, I heard."

"They have!" cried Nort, Dick and Bud in a breath.

"Why this must have happened several days ago," exclaimed Mr. Merkel. "The Yaquis are quartered some distance from here, and news doesn't travel as fast as all that. How do you account for it, Billee?"

"Well, the fellow who told me got his information from one of those scavengers," explained Billee.

"*Scavengers!*" cried Bud.

"Yes, you know—one of them fellers that go up in flyin' machines," explained the old cow puncher.

"Oh, you mean *aviators!*" exploded Bud, trying not to laugh.

"Well, something like that, yes," admitted Billee. "Word of the rising of the Indians was sent out by wireless, and some of the flying machines were ordered to the border. One of 'em who was flying around here had tire trouble, or something like that, and had to come down. It was from him the boys back in town got some of the news, and the deputy sheriff gave out the rest.

"Oh, the Yaquis are risin' up all right, and they may come out here. I rode over like a prairie fire to let you folks know. We've had trouble enough here at Diamond X and I didn't want any more."

"Much obliged to you, Billee," said Mr. Merkel. "Did you happen to hear what town it was in Arizona that the Yaquis raided?"

"It was La—La—wait a minute now. It was one of those crazy Spanish names. I'll tell you—La—La—La Nogalique—that's it!"

"La Nogalique!" cried Mr. Merkel, and he looked at the letter from Rosemary.

"That's her!" affirmed the cowboy.

"Why—why!" exclaimed the ranchman, "that's the way they were coming—in their auto! La Nogalique! They might have been there—"

"Who were coming?" asked his wife quickly.

"Rosemary and Floyd; They'd be there just about—when was that raid, Billee Dobb?" cried Mr. Merkel.

"Last Friday!"

The ranchman whistled.

"That's bad!" he murmured. "Bad!"

"Would Rosemary and her brother have reached there by then?" asked Mrs. Merkel.

"Just about," her husband replied slowly. "Just about! This looks bad! Boys, we've got to do something! Those Yaquis may just be off on a little harmless jamboree, or they may be excited by a lot of their Medicine Men, or whatever they call 'em! Once let 'em get on the rampage, half Mexicans as they are, and we won't know what to expect! It looks bad! I'm glad the round-up is over. It gives us time. Boys, I think—"

But what he thought Mr. Merkel did not disclose—at least for the time being. The attention of all was again attracted by the sound of rapid hoofbeats, and, looking toward the trail that led to town, a horseman was seen riding toward Diamond X. By the manner of his approach it was easily assumed that he came on no ordinary errand.

"More news of the Indians, or I miss my guess!" murmured Bud.

And while the solitary horseman is rapidly approaching, I will endeavor to imitate his speed in acquainting my new readers with a little of the past history concerning the boy ranchers as they have played their parts in the previous books of this series.

The initial volume is entitled "The Boy Ranchers," and tells how Nort and Dick Shannon went to visit their cousin, Bud Merkel, on the ranch of the latter's father. This ranch, Diamond X, was in a western state, not far from the Mexican border. And, as you know, the Yaqui Indians were, in the main, a tribe of Mexican Redmen, who made their home partly in the Land of Montezuma and partly in Arizona, as best pleased them. Efforts were made by the Mexican Government to keep the Yaquis on a reservation, but the efforts were not always successful.

Mr. Merkel was a ranchman of experience, and planned to have his son follow in his footsteps. This Bud was eager to do, and when his cousins came he saw a chance for them to get into the cattle raising business on their own account.

This they did, but not before they had solved a strange mystery centering about Diamond X. As you may recall, the ranch was named after the brand used to mark its cattle—an X within a diamond outline.

The mystery solved, the boy ranchers turned their attention to other matters, and these are related in the second volume, "The Boy Ranchers In Camp." Mr. Merkel, by using an ancient underground water course beneath Snake Mountain, had brought much-needed moisture to a distant valley he owned, thus making it possible to use it as a place for raising cattle. This new ranch, variously called Happy Valley, Diamond X Second, and Buffalo Wallow, was given in charge of the boys to experiment with. They were allowed to raise cattle on their own responsibility. Without water Diamond X Second was out of the question. And the story in the second book has to do with the efforts of Del Pinzo, a dangerous character, and others, to drive away the boys. There was a fight over water rights, and another desperate fight, involving some strange ancient secrets.

The third book, "The Boy Ranchers on the Trail," deals with the boy ranchers after they have become full-fledged "cow punchers." So successful were they in Happy Valley that they incurred the enmity of Del Pinzo and his followers. Cattle rustlers stole many valuable steers from Bud and his cousins, and it was not until after a desperate encounter that the unscrupulous men were defeated.

Then, for a time, peace settled down over Diamond X and the boys' ranch. The spring round-up was over, and a successful year begun, when the ordinary course of events was interrupted in the manner I have set down in the beginning of this book—by news that the Yaquis had risen.

All eyes were turned on the solitary horseman, who rode fast on the heels of Billee Dobb. As this rider came nearer, it could be seen that a paper fluttered in his hand.

"Special delivery letter, maybe," ventured Dick.

"Maybe," admitted Bud.

"I—I have a feeling that it's bad news," murmured Mrs. Merkel to Nell.

"Maybe not," Bud's sister whispered. "It may be only a rush order for cattle to be shipped.

"All that were fit have been shipped," her mother said. "I'm afraid—I'm afraid—"

With a shower of gravel, scattered by the sliding feet of his hastily-reined pony, the man drew up in front of the group.

"Mr. Henry Merkel here?" he asked, crisply.

"Here," said Bud's father, quietly.

"Got a telegraph message for you. It's from La Nogalique!"

"La Nogalique!" murmured Mr. Merkel. "Oh, I hope Rosemary—"

With a rapid motion Mr. Merkel tore open the yellow envelope.

CHAPTER III

"GET HEADY, BOYS!"

Anxiously the boy ranchers and the others watched the face of the stockman as he read the message. It was rather lengthy, which accounted for the somewhat protracted time it took Mr. Merkel to get at the meaning of the words. But when he had read to the end he passed the missive to his wife, exclaiming, as he did so:

"Couldn't be much worse!"

"Are they killed?" cried Nell, clasping her hands.

"No, but maybe they'd better be," grimly answered her father.

"Rosemary and Floyd are carried off by the Yaquis!" he added.

"How do you know?"

"Does the message say so?"

"Which way did they go?"

These were the questions, fired in rapid succession, by Bud, Nort and Dick.

"That information's in the telegram," explained Mr. Merkel. "The message is to me from the Sheriff of La Nogalique, or at least from some one in his service, for it's signed with his name. I know him, slightly."

"Did he see Rosemary and Floyd carried off?" Dick wanted to know.

"Not exactly. But wait. I'll read it so you may all hear," said Mr. Merkel, taking the missive from his wife's trembling hand. "Old Hank Fowler didn't try to get it all in ten words so we have a pretty fair idea of what went on. Reckon he knew he didn't have to pay for that message. It come out of the county funds I take it. Listen to this, boys!"

Mr. Merkel read:

"I regret to inform you that some relatives of yours were carried off in the last raid of the Yaquis here. The Indians came over the border from Mexico and shot up this place (La Nogalique). I was away, but some of the boys give them a fight, and drove them off. But they took with them some guns, cattle, what money they could steal and a young lady and gentleman who claim to know you. The way it happened was this. This young lady, named Rosemary Boyd, and her brother Floyd, came here in an auto, from California. They give it out they were on their way to Diamond X. But they hadn't more than reached town than the Yaquis came in and shot things up.

"The Indians took this young couple, and it was owing to the pluck of the girl that we knew what happened."

"Good for Rosemary!" cried Nell. "How did it happen?"

"I'm coming to it," her father said, having paused to get his breath. It was dry work, talking so much and under the stress of excitement, and Nell had broken in on him.

"As the Indians were riding away, with this young lady and her brother," the message went on, "she managed to scribble something on a piece of paper she tore from a note book. She tossed it to one of the cowboys who was shot in fighting the Yaquis. He brought the girl's message to me after the fight, when I'd sent some of my men to trail the devils. This is what the message said, and I'm sending the actual message to you by mail. "Get word to my uncle, Henry Merkel, Diamond X Ranch, that Floyd and I are taken. Ask him to send help." That's what the message said and I'm doing as requested. I've sent all the help I can, but the Yaquis got the start on us, owing to the fact that I was out of town with a posse after rustlers. But we'll get that girl and boy back or bust every leg we've got, Mr. Merkel. And you can send on help if you want to and join us."

The lengthy message was signed with the name "Hank Fowler," and when the reading was finished, Mr. Merkel glanced around at his listeners.

"These young folks are some kin of yours, I take it?" asked Old Billee Dobb.

"Sure," assented the ranchman. "More of my wife's than mine, but it's all the same. They were coming here on a visit, coming all the way from California by auto. I thought it was rather risky when

they first wrote of it, but my wife says Rosemary is a good driver, and Floyd almost as good."

"Is he a Westerner?" asked Yellin' Kid.

"Not born and raised here," said Mr. Merkel, "but Floyd is no tenderfoot, and as for Rosemary—"

"She's a whole can of peaches! That's what she is!" cried Bud. "To have the nerve to stop and scribble a message to dad when the Yaquis had her and her brother. Clear grit I call that!"

"Sure thing!" assented Nort.

"Gee! I wish I'd been there!" sighed Dick.

"What! To be captured by the Indians and made into sausage meat?" joked Mr. Merkel, for at times they poked a bit of fun at Dick on account of his plumpness. Though, truth to tell, he was now not too stout, and the life of the west had greatly hardened him.

"They wouldn't have caught me without a fight!" he bruskiy declared.

"That's right! A fight!" cried Bud. "What are we going to do about this, Dad? We can't let our cousins be carried off this way; can we, fellows?" he demanded of his boy rancher companions.

"I should say not!" was the instant response, duet fashion.

"No, it wouldn't be right for us to sit back and do nothing," agreed Mr. Merkel. "There aren't any too many men available to help out the sheriff. We've got to do our share. Get ready boys!" and he looked at his son and nephews, his glance also roving over his own aggregation of cowboys, most of whom were now gathered in front of the main ranch building of Diamond X.

"Where are we going?" asked Dick.

"On the trail of the Yaquis!" answered his uncle. "We can spare most of the bunch, now that the round-up is over. You don't need many out at your ranch, Bud. Call in all you can spare, and we'll hit the trail!"

"Whoo-pee!" shouted Nort, whirling his horse about and setting it at a gallop down through the corrals.

"This is news!" yelled his brother, following the lead of Nort.

"I only hope we aren't too late!" remarked Bud, when his cousins came back to join him.

"Too late? What do you mean!" asked Nort.

"I mean to save Rosemary—and Floyd. Those Yaquis—they're regular devils when they get on the war path! Oh, I hope we aren't too late!"

It was a hope the others shared.

Rapid action replaced the comparative quiet that reigned during the reading of the telegram. Cowboys rode to and fro, and Bud and his cousins prepared to depart for Diamond X Second to arrange for taking the trail against the Yaquis.

As the boy ranchers rode off down the trail, promising to return as speedily as possible, to join with the bunch from Diamond X, their eager talk over the recent events was interrupted by the noise of shouting.

"What's that?" cried Dick, looking in the direction of the noise. It appeared to come from a swale, or depression among some small, rounded knolls.

"Sounds like a cattle stampede," remarked Bud, urging his pony forward.

"And yet it can't be that."

Nort and Dick followed as soon as they could swing their horses about. The sound of shouting and the thunder of the feet of many animals—horses or steers—came more plainly to the ears of the boy ranchers.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE TRAIL

With Bud in the advance, urging his pony to topmost speed, Nort and Dick followed. Bud shot along the trail, up one rise, down another, all the while coming nearer to the noise which increased in intensity. Clearly something was wrong either among a bunch of Diamond X cattle, or with some of the horses belonging to the ranch outfit. And that some human individual was concerned in the "fracas" was evident by the shouts and yells that, now and then, punctured the air.

"By the Great Horned Toad! Look at that!" cried Bud, when he was within viewing distance.

"He'll be killed!" added Nort.

"No, he's out of it now!" yelled Dick. "But maybe it's the end of him!"

As the three boy ranchers thus gave vent to their surprise, and almost while they were in the act of exclaiming, a ragged figure of a man had shot over a stout corral fence, and had fallen in a heap just on the other side and out of the reach of the teeth and hoofs of a number of half wild cow ponies. The thud of the animals' bodies, as they threw themselves against the fence, in the stoppage of their mad race to get the ragged man, could plainly be heard.

"Whew!" cried Bud, reigning his pony to a sliding stop, as he saw that, for the present at least, the man was safe, though his inert form might indicate serious injury. "That was a close call!"

"What was he doing in that corral?" asked Nort, and his hand, almost by instinct, slid to the handle of his .45 protruding from the holster.

"And who is he?" asked Dick, who had followed his brother's lead.

"That's what we've got to find out," said Bud, who, perhaps from longer association with western conditions, had manifested no inclination to draw his gun. "Guess he'll wait for us," he added, as he slid from the saddle, having ridden close to the prostrate form.

But, even as Bud spoke, and as Dick and Nort dismounted, the stranger rose to a sitting position, rubbed his hand across his forehead, tried to smile at the boys and then, in what would have been a jolly voice under other circumstances said:

"I'm supposed to ask 'Where am I?' I believe, but we'll pass that up, and I'll substitute 'what time is it?' Just as a variation you know," and he actually chuckled. "Not that it matters," he added, as he saw Bud fishing out a sturdy silver watch—the only kind it is safe to carry on a cattle range. "Doesn't matter in the least."

"Then why—" began Nort. But the stranger stopped him with a friendly gesture.

"Don't ask me that!" he begged, smiling broadly, as he scrambled to his feet, thereby disclosing the fact that he was even more ragged as to garments than at first appeared when he was lying down. "Don't ask me that. The question has been fired at me ever since I was old enough to decide whether I'd have butter on my bread or take it in the natural state. It was 'why did I do this'—'why didn't I do that' until, in very desperation I gave up trying to answer. I do now. I don't know why I ask the time. I really don't want to know. There are other questions more to the point. Don't trouble to answer. And please don't ask me 'why' this, that—or anything. Frankly I don't know, and I care less. I am here. Where I'll be to-morrow no one knows, and no one cares. It is my philosophy—the philosophy of a rolling stone. I assure you, gentlemen—"

This time it was Bud who interrupted. There was a look on the face and in the eyes of the young ranchman that his cousins could well interpret. It meant that fooling, nonsense or an evasion of the issue was at an end.

"Look here, stranger," said Bud, and, though his voice was stern it was not unfriendly. "Maybe you are a tenderfoot, but you don't look it, and I reckon you've been around here long enough to assimilate the fact that when a stranger is found among other men's horses that stranger is due to make an explanation."

"My boy, you are right!" laughed the ragged man. "Absolutely and tetotally right! Of course you recognize the fact that I am no longer '*among*' your horses. I *was*, but I am *not*. I came out, so to speak," and he indicated, by a tumbling motion of his hands, that he had leaped the fence to get away

from the half wild ponies.

"That's all right," spoke Bud, his voice still stern. His cousins were leaving this matter entirely to him. "That's all right. But you *were* among them, and it may be more to our good luck than our good management that you aren't astride one of them now, and riding off. What's your name and where are you from?"

These were vital, western questions.

"You are right in your surmise," said the man, limping toward the boys, and still smiling, which occupation he had not left off since arising to his feet. "If luck had been with me I would have ridden on one of your horses. Not off—far be it from me to do that. But I would have ridden to the nearest ranch, tried to get work and so have paid for the use of the animal.

"However, fate had other things in store for me. I never saw such wild animals! They came at me like so many fiends, and after trying in vain to quiet them, and I may say I have some skill with wild beasts, I thought discretion the better part of foolhardiness, and—made for the fence!"

He chuckled at the recollection.

"Then you weren't going to steal a horse?" asked Nort.

"Far from it, kind sir," and the man bowed with just the slightest suggestion of mockery, at which Bud frowned. "I am a lone traveler, and I sought help on my way—help for which I would have paid in work."

"Who are you?" snapped out Bud.

"I have told you my name," said the stranger, in gentle contrast to Bud's harsh tone. "Rolling Stone, at your service," and he bowed again, this time with no trace of mockery.

"Rolling Stone!" ejaculated Nort.

"That isn't a name," complained Bud, but his voice had lost some of its stern quality, and his lips trembled on the verge of a smile.

"I realize that it is more a state of being, or a quality," the man admitted. "But it happens to be a sort of paraphrase of my title. I am Roland Stone, at your service, but my taste, inclination and the action of disheartened friends has fastened the other appellation on me. Rolling Stone I am by name and by nature."

He said it in a way that left little room for doubt, and the boy ranchers seemed to realize this. They could understand how such a character could easily change Roland into "Rolling," if such was his nature. And "Stone" was a common enough name.

"All right, Mr. Rolling Stone," said Bud. "If that's your choice it still leaves the other question unanswered. Where are you from?"

"Everywhere and anywhere, which is to say nowhere," came the reply. "You need only to look at me to tell what I am—a happy-go-lucky individual, a tramp, a hobo, and yet I am willing to work when the spirit is on me. I never stole a dollar or a dollar's worth in all my life. I have harmed neither man, woman or child. I am my own worst enemy, and I am—frankly—hungry! If you will give me food I'll pay for it in work to the best of my ability—"

"You said you had some skill with wild animals," interrupted Bud. "Do you mean—"

"I don't mean *horses*, if you will excuse the interruption," the man said. "There is my one failing. I used to be with a circus, and the lion and I were good friends. Perhaps some taint of the wild beast odor clings to me, which causes horses to rear up and tear. Or else—"

"That didn't cause these ponies to act that way," laughed Bud, who, with his cousins, was rapidly forming a liking for the stranger. "They're half wild themselves. Just in off the range, and they haven't been broken yet. I doubt if Yellin' Kid would tackle one. It isn't anything to your discredit that you got out in a hurry. But you say you're hungry?"

That was an appeal which never went unheeded in the west.

"Mightily hungry, fair sir!" and, though Rolling Stone smiled, there was an appealing note in his voice. "The last meal I had for nothing was given me by Hank Fowler."

"Hank Fowler!" cried Bud.

"The sheriff?" added Nort.

"Who sent on to Mr. Merkel the message from Rosemary?" completed Dick.

"Rosemary—that's for remembrance," quoted Rolling Stone with a smile. "I know her not, and yet Hank Fowler is a sheriff to my certain knowledge."

"Do you mean the one from La Nogalique?" persisted Bud.

"That same. I appealed to him when I was down on my luck, as I nearly always am, and he befriended me. I have known him for years."

"Then there can't be much wrong with you," decided Bud. "If you want work, my father can fix you up. We'll need some extra hands if we pull out a lot to take the trail after the Yaquis. So—"

"Excuse me, young man. But did you say—*Yaquis*?" asked Rolling Stone, and there was a new and eager note in his voice.

"Yes," supplemented Nort. "The Yaquis—Indians you know—have gone wild again and they've raided a town and carried off some of our friends. We're going to—"

"You can't tell me anything about the Yaquis that I don't know, young man!" exclaimed Rolling Stone, and he seemed imbued with new life. "I know they're Indians, of a sort, though a very rotten sort. They killed my best friend years ago. I haven't heard anything about a raid lately. Been too lazy to look for news, I reckon. But if it's true that they're on the rampage, and you're on the trail after them let me, I beg of you, have a hand in it. I asked for *work* just now. Change that to a *fight* and I'm with you at the fall of the hat and until I drop! Let me come! Let me help pay back the debt I have against these infernal Yaquis. Will you?" he asked eagerly.

Bud looked at his cousins. Here was a new element. And with all his light manner, and ragged clothes, there was something very satisfying about Rolling Stone, as he asked to be called.

"We'll need all the help we can get," said Bud, slowly. "If Hank Fowler says you're all right, that goes with us. Sure it isn't Hank *Fisher* who vouches for you?" he asked sharply.

"Hank *Fisher*—I don't know the man," was the answer.

"You're better off not to," spoke Bud grimly, for Fisher was a ranchman of unsavory reputation, who was believed to have figured in more than one affair with the half breed Del Pinzo, to the discomfort of Diamond X.

"Hank Fowler, the sheriff, will tell you I'm straight," said Rolling Stone. "I don't say I haven't faults," he went on. "But when I say I'm my own worst enemy I've spilled an earful," and he laughed genially.

"We'll let it go at that," Bud answered. "If Mr. Fowler says you're on the level that's sufficient. And you can come with us."

"Thanks," was the laconic reply. "Will one of your ponies carry double?" and he looked over his shoulder at the corral.

"We won't ask you to ride one of those mustangs," laughed Bud. "And it's too much to double up. I'll go back and get one of dad's ponies. It isn't far. You stay here," he added to his cousins and Rolling Stone. "I'll be back soon."

Riding rapidly, Bud was quickly back at Diamond X. He told the story of the meeting with Rolling Stone. At first Mr. Merkel was a bit suspicious, but it happened that one of the cowboys had heard of Rolling Stone, and knew him to be what he laid claim to.

"I reckon he's all right," assented the ranchman. "Take him with you, Bud. You'll need help, and if he knows anything about the Yaquis he'll be of value."

"All right," remarked Bud. "He's on. What horse can I take for him?"

One was selected. Together the boy ranchers and Rolling Stone rode out to Happy Valley, for certain matters must be adjusted there before the start could be made after the Indians who had carried off Rosemary and Floyd.

Work went on at top speed, and a day later our young heroes, with Rolling Stone, better dressed, but the same unconventional spirit, started forth.

"On the trail!" grimly remarked Bud as they started to join forces with those from Diamond X.

"On the trail!" echoed Nort and Dick.

"And we can't meet with those Yaquis any too soon for me!" added Rolling Stone.

"You seem to have it in for them rather hard," observed Dick.

"It can't be any too hard," answered the man with a grim tightening of the muscles around his mouth. "When I think of all they did—"

He paused and gazed at the distant horizon. That there was a story connected with his hate of the Yaquis none of the boys doubted, and they were eager to hear it. But this was not the time and place. Too much remained to be done, and there was too little time in which to do it.

"I wonder when we'll meet up with the imps?" spoke Nort, as they ambled easily along.

"No telling," said Bud. "We've got things in shape back there so that we can remain away all summer if need be," and he glanced back toward their ranch which they had just left. "But I'd like to clean up this bunch of 'onery' Yaquis, and then get back on the job. Cattle raising is our business."

"But just now we're following a side line of rescuing Rosemary and Floyd," observed Nort. "And I think we can do it!"

Well it was that Fate veiled the Future.

CHAPTER V

ROSEMARY AND FLOYD

"Floyd, I don't like this a bit!"

"What's the matter, Rosemary?"

The young man driving the sturdy little sport model of a car brought the machine to a stop and glanced at the girl sitting beside him. There was a quizzical smile on his face, a good-natured smile, however.

"What don't you like, Rosemary?" he asked again, and there was not in his tone any air of bored fault-finding such as seems to come natural to some brothers in appealing from a decision of some sisters.

"I don't like the way this trail is shaping up, if you'll excuse my English," answered Rosemary Boyd.

"Your English is perfectly excusable, Rosemary," retorted Floyd. "In fact I rather like it. It is much better than this *trail*, to be frank."

"Are you sure we have come the right road?"

"As sure as I can be of anything in this doggoned country, where they haven't enough sign posts. I took the turns they told me to take in the last town we passed through, and all the land marks have run true to form so far."

"But we're a good ways from Uncle Henry's ranch yet; aren't we, Floyd?" and there crept into the voice of Rosemary an anxious note.

"Well, maybe we are, but what do we care for a few hundred miles?"

He laughed merrily, showing a set of white, even teeth, and his jollity was so catching that his sister had to join in.

"Well, I suppose it really doesn't make much difference," she said. "We're out for a lark and we've had it, so far. Only I don't seem to fancy sleeping out in the open again to-night. We were lost yesterday, you remember, and didn't make the town we expected to."

Floyd seemed to be waiting for something.

"Well?" he suggested. "Why don't you add that it was all my fault."

"I was going to leave that out," Rosemary said.

"But I'll admit it," acknowledged her brother. "I did pull a bloomer, as an Englishman would say, and I don't intend to do it again to-day. I admit I shouldn't have tried to do more than a day's trip yesterday. If I had taken your advice and stayed in the town where there was at least an apology for a hotel, you'd have had a better night's sleep."

"Well, I didn't mind being out in the open so much, after I got used to the howling of those wolves," Rosemary remarked.

"Coyotes—coyotes—not wolves, though they're off the same piece of goods," corrected Floyd.

"Well, never mind the lesson in natural history," laughed Rosemary. "The point at issue is that I don't like the sort of country we're getting into. It doesn't look to me as though this could ever lead us to Uncle Henry's ranch, and I'm anxious to get there. Bud's mother wrote that he and his cousins, Nort and Dick, had such exciting times, that I'm anxious to join them."

"So'm I," said Floyd. "And we'll get there."

"Not on this trail!" declared his sister, as her brother was about to start the car. "You're getting into a worse and wilder country all the while. I think we should have taken the left turn a ways back."

"The cow puncher we asked told us to take the *right* turn, and I did," retorted Floyd.

"Cow puncher!" exclaimed his sister scornfully, "He looked more like a renegade Mexican than a real American cowboy. And his accent was Spanish, too."

"Oh, well, lots of good American cowboys came from Mexican or Spanish people, and speak both languages," asserted Floyd. "Don't hold that against him."

"I don't," said Rosemary. "But I will hold it against him if he has put us on the wrong trail, and I'm beginning to believe that's what he did. And maybe purposely, Floyd."

"Purposely? What do you mean?"

"Well, you know what we were told when we started out to make this trip—that we had better take the most civilized and best traveled trails, as the Yaquis were reported to be on the verge of making an outbreak."

"Yes, and for that reason I kept well away from the border. But we aren't anywhere near the Yaquis country now."

"Aren't we?" asked Rosemary, with a strange quietness in her voice.

"No, of course not!" snapped Floyd. It was the first time, since brother and sister had started from California, to make a somewhat adventurous trip to their uncle's ranch that they had been near a "break" in their cordial relations. "The Yaquis are five hundred miles from here."

"I hope so, I surely do hope so!" murmured Rosemary, in such fervent tones that her brother felt an uneasy sense of fear creeping into his heart. For the first time he began to realize that perhaps they had done a foolhardy thing in making this trip alone. He slipped his hand into his pocket, making sure that his gun was in readiness. And it did not relieve his anxiety to note that Rosemary did the same.

Brother and sister were of the west. They were brave and bold and not afraid of danger when they had half a chance to meet it face to face. But they had heard much of the treacherous and mean nature of the Yaquis Indians. These were not like the early American tribes of redmen, who had something of a code of honor in their warfare, cruel and heartless as it seemed at times.

"Well, do you want to go back?" asked Floyd, as he slowly started the car.

Rosemary considered for a moment.

"Let's look at the map and go over what we were told along the route," she suggested.

Then followed a careful scanning of papers and drawings, with the result that Rosemary said:

"I guess we may as well go on. It's a long way back to the nearest town, and this map does seem to indicate that we are heading for La Nogalique."

"That's what I say!" chimed in Floyd. "I only hope La Nogalique is better than it sounds. If we can put up there for the night you'll get a little rest, and maybe I'll have this carburetor adjusted. I don't like the way it's acting."

"Oh, good, sweet, kind carburetor, don't go back on us now!" implored Rosemary, kissing her hand toward the engine of the car. "Be nice and I'll sprinkle you with violet talcum powder when we get to Uncle Henry's!"

"Don't be silly!" grunted Floyd.

"Let's go!" called his sister. "It's getting late, and according to this map it's ten miles yet to La Nogalique—which means twenty if we are going by past performances."

The car sped forward, the trail seeming to grow worse instead of better, as might be expected if they were approaching a town. Lurching from side to side, making sharp turns to avoid boulders and holes, Floyd guided the machine. Now and then Rosemary would glance at her brother, after a particularly vicious jolt, but she said nothing.

"A good sport!" Floyd mentally voted his sister.

They topped a steep rise, and as they started down the other slope, making a turn, Rosemary pointed ahead and exclaimed:

"There! Now we're all right! La Nogalique!"

Nestling in a small valley was a smaller town, its few buildings showing plainly in the last rays of the sun which would soon set behind the mountains and hills.

"Guess we're not so badly off after all!" exulted Floyd. "We'll sleep in real beds tonight!"

"And I take back what I—er—*thought* about you!" laughed his sister.

"Thanks for not *saying* it!" chuckled Floyd. "I admit I was guessing myself a while back, for that trail looked as though it was heading straight for no place in particular. But we're all right now."

However, as they descended the slope, approaching the town, it became a question in both the mind of sister and brother as to whether they were all right. When they came near enough to see and hear plainly it became evident that something unusual was going on in La Nogalique, if such was the village in view.

There was the popping of guns and intermittant shouts, while figures could be seen riding wildly to and fro amid the scattered buildings.

"Guess there's some sort of a celebration," commented Floyd.

"Probably some Mexicans have come over the border, and are celebrating a feast day," observed his sister. "This must be about the border line between the United States and Mexico."

"I reckon," conceded Floyd. "But say, I don't just like this! Look, those men are shooting at each other!"

He stopped the car and pointed to two groups of horsemen who, undoubtedly, were firing at each other with evil intent. For as Rosemary and Floyd looked, several men toppled from their saddles, and their steeds rushed wildly to and fro.

Then, as the travelers sat in the machine, looking down the last slope that led to the town, a solitary horseman came clattering up the rocky trail.

"Turn back! Turn back!" he shouted. "Don't go down there!"

He was attired as a cowboy and spoke good United States.

"What's the matter?" demanded Floyd, as he let the car roll to one side to give the horseman room to pass.

"Yaquis!" was the answer. "Them onery Mexican Indians have broke loose and are raiding the country. They've started in here at La Nogalique! I'm riding for the troops. Better turn back!"

"Oh, Floyd!" cried Rosemary, involuntarily.

"Don't go down there!" warned the horseman, as he spurred on, for he saw the car slipping down the slope.

"I don't intend to, if I can turn around and beat it up the hill," Floyd said. "The question is—can I?"

It was a question. The road was narrow, and the hill steep. If you have ever tried to turn a car around on a narrow, hilly road and crawl back up it, you will appreciate the position of Rosemary and her brother.

"If you can't make it in your car get out and hide!" advised the horseman, flinging this back over his shoulder as he rode on. "Those Yaquis are human devils!"

He was out of sight a moment later around a turn in the trail. Floyd speeded up the engine and began to guide the machine toward a place that looked wide enough to turn in. But that was the smallest part of the problem.

Just as he was making the turn there was a lurch to one side, and the right forward wheel sank into a ditch at the side of the road. The car settled so far over that Rosemary had to cling to Floyd to avoid sliding out, and she could not repress a scream.

"No going back now!" exclaimed Floyd grimly. "We're lucky if we can go ahead."

"Do something!" desperately cried Rosemary.

And then, with a suddenness that was nerve-racking, there swept around the bend in the road toward them a band of yelling Mexican Indians—the Yaquis!

CHAPTER VI

PRISONERS

Rosemary and Floyd knew something of the west. They had lived in California a number of years, and had traveled across the continent more than once—by auto on one occasion. So they were not at all disappointed when they saw the Yaquis did not measure up to the picturesque standard of Buffalo Bill's Indians.

In fact the first glimpse of the onrushing band of Yaquis would give one the impression that they were a lot of colored cowboys, in most ragged garments. But each one carried a gun or a revolver and the weapons were for use, and had been used, some with fatal effect.

Shouting and yelling, some firing their guns off in the air, beating coiled lassos against the heaving sides of their steeds, spurring the frantic animals, shouting in Spanish, all of them dusty, sweaty and dirty—the band was at once ridiculous and fearsome.

Up the trail they rushed, adding to their fierce yells as they caught sight of the auto in which sat Rosemary and Floyd. Probably the band of Yaquis had started off after the cowboy messenger who was riding to summon the United States troopers, and the finding of Rosemary and Floyd was but an accident.

But it was an accident likely to bode ill for our friends. The Indians (I call them that though they were really Mexicans) having sighted what was to them fair game, were turned from their original purpose of capturing the messenger.

Rosemary and Floyd caught a jumbled jargon of Spanish shouts, mingled with Mexican and American words, and then out of the ruck of riders a solitary horseman spurred toward them.

"He's the leader, I guess!" exclaimed Floyd, and Rosemary caught the gleam of his revolver in her brother's hand.

"Floyd! Don't!" she cried.

"Don't what?"

"Don't shoot? Oh, we haven't a chance! If we do kill—or wound a few—it will only make it worse for us. Don't shoot!"

Rosemary spoke only just in time, for Floyd was already raising the weapon to aim at the leader who had spurred out of the ruck of other yelling Yaquis.

And, as if this leader sensed what was about to happen, and had decided to administer a lesson, there was a sharp crack from his side. He had not raised his hand higher than his saddle pommel, but Floyd's hat spun from his head and went sailing to the ground. At the same time he heard a vicious "zing" which told of a bullet in flight.

"Floyd!" screamed Rosemary.

"I'm all right! He's bluffing!" her brother answered. But he did not shoot back.

This Yaqui, better dressed and mounted, but more evil in face than any of his band, smiled grimly as he jammed his gun back into the holster. And Floyd had the sense to return his weapon. As Rosemary had said, there was grave danger in firing, for at best only a few of the Yaquis could have been disposed of, and the others would have taken a terrible revenge.

Right up to the stalled car—stalled because it had lurched to one side in the ditch—rode the yelling Yaquis. Some of them got in the path of the evident leader, but he bumped them to one side with his horse—a more powerful animal than any ridden by his followers—shouting at them in vigorous Spanish as he knocked them out of his way.

"La Paz! La Paz!" is what Rosemary and Floyd heard shouted at the leader, and this they took to be his name, or, at least, his title. From then on they referred to him as "Paz," which was as good an appellation as any.

Up to the auto he rode, at breakneck speed, pulling his horse to a sliding stop, so that the animal almost sat down on its hind legs in an effort to avoid crashing into the car. To the credit of Rosemary be it said that she did not scream, nor did Floyd flinch, though it seemed, for a moment, that there would be a crash.

Then the Yaqui leader, with a grunt, and a wave of his begrimed hand—in which grime Rosemary noticed with a shudder, blood was mingled—indicated that the travelers were to alight.

"Nothing doing, Chief! That is if you are a chief!" boldly answered Floyd. "We're United States citizens, on United States soil, and we don't have to do what you tell us. Pull your freight—get your men out of the way and we'll mosey along. That is we will if I can get the car out of the ditch!"

The Yaqui grinned, but did not take his eyes from Rosemary or Floyd, and muttered:

"No *sabe!*"

"Oh, you *understand* all right—you don't want to, that's the trouble," exclaimed Floyd. "Come now, be a sport. I don't know what your fight is with the men down there," and he motioned to the town below, where sounds of fighting could still be heard, "but we haven't done anything. If some of your men will help me get out of this ditch I'll pay 'em."

Evidently "pay" was one word not only Paz, but some of his followers, understood, for there were grunts and eyes gleamed more brightly while some of the Indians started forward.

Paz shot out a few words at his men, and those who had had the boldness, to move forward pulled back their ponies. Evidently he had them well in hand.

Rapidly he uttered something in Spanish, at the same time again waving his hand to indicate to Floyd and Rosemary that they were to get out of the machine. Brother and sister knew enough of the language to understand what was said. It was the same request made in gestures.

"Shall I jump on him, Rose?" asked Floyd in a low voice. "I can just about make it from here, and I haven't forgotten my football tackle days. Shall I jump on him? Then maybe you can pop one or two, and we can start down in the car. Once we get into town the officials are bound to protect us."

"Don't, Floyd!" his sister advised in the same low tone. "We have no chance but to submit, and wait for help. I've heard of these Yaquis. There aren't enough men in La Nogalique to cope with them except

troopers come. And they're far enough off."

"Just give in, and hope for the best. But don't let them separate us—whatever—whatever you have to do."

There was a catch in the girl's voice, but this was the only evidence of fear she had shown. She was a true "sport."

"But what do you suppose their game is?" asked Floyd, and during this talk between brother and sister, the Yaqui leader, stood regarding them quizzically.

"I don't know," Rosemary answered. "This is just one of their periodical raids, I guess, and they have just added us to their list. But we'll have to do as they tell us—at least for the time being. Help me down, Floyd."

He assisted her out of the car. Paz, smiling—or perhaps grinning would be the better word—came toward them, and motioned with his hand toward the gun Floyd had put up.

"You don't get it,—Paz unless you want the business end!" snapped out Floyd, and his hand edged toward the weapon with no mistake in his meaning.

In an instant he was "covered" by the gun in the hand of the Indian, and Rosemary changed the scream she had started to utter to the advice:

"Give it up, Floyd! They haven't seen mine and don't know I have one. Maybe I can get by with it!"

Floyd almost sighed as he passed over his weapon, butt first, in the accepted style of surrendering. Paz grinned again, and motioned to his men to come up. One of them began loosening a lariat at his saddle horn.

"They're going to make prisoners of us," said Floyd.

"Never mind! There'll be some way out," whispered Rosemary.

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE MOUNTAINS

Disreputable ragamuffins as they appeared, the Yaquis were quick enough to put their captives in a position to render them almost helpless. Though the Mexican Indians do not seem to have the picturesqueness and skill of the outdoors possessed by the North American Indians, still they knew how to knot their lariats about Rosemary and Floyd, and so tie them on spare horses that it would have been no easy task to escape.

Aside from rude hands bundling her about, no insult was offered Rosemary; and though Floyd was not treated so gently he was not actually mistreated. Rosemary was not searched, and her automatic remained in a hidden pocket, where, if need be, she could quickly reach it.

Floyd's gun was taken away, and all the money he carried loose in his pockets. But he had been wise enough when starting out on this trip, to make a secret pocket in his vest, and this now held a goodly sum which the Indians overlooked. Of course a more careful search would reveal it, as it would Rosemary's gun.

Paz, speaking in Spanish, detailed several men to guard the prisoners and then, taking his place at the head of his band, he led them back down the trail.

"Say, what does this mean?" asked Floyd of his sister. "He's going right back down among men that ought to be our friends. If there are any town officials there, or a soldier or two, they ought to save us."

"I'm afraid there isn't, though," the girl answered. "If there had been the lone cowboy wouldn't have ridden for help. And the fighting is still going on."

The sound of shooting was resumed as she spoke, and shouts and yells came to Floyd's ears. He began to understand what had happened, his surmise being borne out, later, by the facts.

La Nogalique is a town in Arizona, just on the Mexican border. In fact so close is it that in places only a barbed wire fence separates the possessions of Uncle Sam from those of the Mexican republic. And outside of town even the wire fence "petered out," so there was nothing—no natural boundary—to tell where citizens were under the protection of the stars and stripes or under the domain of the descendants of Montezuma.

What had happened, just as Rosemary and Floyd suspected, was that the Yaquis—never very peaceable—had risen in one of their periodic raids. They frequently hold up the Southern Pacific trains, kill and rob the passengers and take what express matter they like.

This band, probably weary of making war on the none too resisting Mexican soldiery, had crossed the border, and "shot up" La Nogalique. When it was learned that one of the cowboys of the town had ridden to bring some United States troops from a nearby station, Paz, one of the leaders, had set out with his followers to capture the rider. They had come upon Rosemary and her brother with the result detailed.

"But why are they riding back into town with us?" Floyd wanted to know.

"Mexico is south of La Nogalique," answered Rosemary. "They have to ride through it to get back to Mexico, and they—they're taking us with them!"

There was a gasp in her voice.

"We've got to do something!" desperately cried Floyd. He strained at his bonds, but uselessly.

Paz turned and shouted something in anger, but Floyd gave him back fully as black a look as the one on the Yaqui leader's face. At least Floyd was going to maintain a bold front.

Down the slope and into the small town rode the Indians with their captives. Now the sound of shooting and shouting became louder. It was evident that some of the Americans were making a stand against the Indians. The Americans were firing from houses and other shelter, the Indians riding here and there, aiming whenever they saw anyone at whom to shoot. Several evidently dead bodies were in the streets, the proportion being about equal between the Americans and the Indians. Rosemary could not repress a shudder as she saw, in one doorway, a dead woman and a little girl.

How the fight started, whether it could have been avoided, and what the town officials had done or were doing, were only matters for surmise.

"There was a fight but I guess the Indians were too many for our fellows," grimly said Floyd, as his horse was led along. He had managed to keep close to Rosemary.

"It looks that way," the girl said. "Oh, Floyd! If we could only get word to our folks or Uncle Henry!"

"I don't see how we can," said Floyd. "When night comes maybe we can break away, but—"

He did not finish. It was a desperate hope as he and Rosemary well knew.

Suddenly, when the centre of the town was reached by the band having taken our friends captive, there was a burst of fire, mingled with shouts of defiance. Out of one of the buildings burst a band of American cowboys and others. They had gathered together to make a stand, and this was their chance.

Several of the Indians fell from their saddles, and others, though wounded, managed to retain their seats. Bullets flew about Rosemary and Floyd, fortunately not hitting them, but coming too close for comfort.

Paz and his followers were evidently taken by surprise, and for a moment did not return the fire. Then, as it increased the Indians turned and began fleeing up the trail they had just descended, taking Rosemary and Floyd with them. Evidently they not only thought there might be danger in making a stand against the intrepid Americans, but perhaps they reasoned that they had captives too valuable to risk losing in another pitched fight.

At any rate Paz gave the orders to retreat, and his men obeyed. Rosemary and Floyd saw what was happening. Helpless, they were carried away into the mountains.

True it was United States territory, but for all the good that did the captives, it might as well have been Mexico. There were no troops or other help at hand.

Paz rode on ahead, and directly behind him came his more trusted followers surrounding Rosemary and Floyd.

Suddenly Paz and his lieutenants (if such they might be called) in the lead, were thrown back in confusion as shots rang out, and Floyd and his sister had a glimpse of some cowboys riding down the trail, as if to give battle.

"Hurray! Now we're all right. This is a rescue! The troopers are coming!" shouted Floyd.

But though the valiant cowboys made a brave stand they were too few to cope with the Indians. It developed, later, that they were a stray band who had been told of the trouble by the lone cowboy who was riding after the troops. The band of punchers, resolving to do their best, had spurred to the fight, but were overwhelmed.

Two were killed and another wounded. And this youth—he was but that in years—managed to break through the first line of Indians like a football player with the ball smashing the interference of the opposing team.

Right to the side of Rosemary and Floyd he galloped, and then the girl had a flash of inspiration. Quickly she managed to take from her pocket a notebook, and, one of the ropes coming loose from her hand, she was able to scribble on a torn out page this message:

"Get word to my uncle, Henry Merkel, Diamond X Ranch, that Floyd and I are taken. Ask him to send help."

She rolled this into a ball, and as the cowboy lurched past her she thrust it into his hand.

"Ride! Ride away!" Rosemary fairly shouted in his ear, for there was so much noise of shooting and yelling that she had to cry loudly to make herself understood.

"I'm going to stay and fight!" cried the youth recklessly.

"You can't! They're too many! Ride and bring help! Deliver my message!" pleaded Rosemary. "It's the best way to help us!"

Then, as Paz, wild and furious, rode up with pistol aimed at the cowboy, the latter fired his last shot, full in the face of the Indian leader, wheeled his horse, and managed to dash away.

How Paz escaped no one knew, but the shot only grazed him, and with mutterings he threw aside his own empty weapon, and spurred after the bold cowboy. But the horse of Paz slipped, while the steed of the American, being more sure footed, carried him out of danger.

He vanished around a turn in the trail, and Paz swung back to his own men, several of whom had been wounded, and one killed by the bold, dashing American cowboys.

Then, when this little "fracas" was over, Rosemary and Floyd were again led forward, into the mountain fastness, prisoners of the Yaquis. While, miles away, the boy ranchers were totally unaware of the tragic happenings.

"What did you do, Rose?" asked Floyd, in a low voice, as the trail was resumed.

"I scribbled a note and sent it by that cowboy. He'll bring help if he can."

"Well, I hope he can. If they don't get him, or he doesn't lose your note."

But the message was delivered and was the means of spurring into action those at Diamond X ranch.

CHAPTER VIII

SHOOTING STARS

Contrary to what was usual when a band of cowboys, including Bud, Nort, and Dick, started off on the trail, there was very little singing, laughing and joking as they gave their ponies rein to begin pursuit after the kidnapping Yaquis. Even the lightest-spirited cowpuncher felt the gravity of the situation,

though, save for the three boy ranchers, none had ever seen Rosemary and Floyd. And it was so long ago that Bud, Nort and Dick had met these western cousins that they scarcely remembered them.

"But we'd hit the trail for the rescue whether they were our cousins or not!" declared Bud Merkel, as he kicked his heels against the flanks of his pony, and sent that steady-going animal forward with a rush.

"Whoa there, son, whoa there!" advised Snake Purdee who was in leadership of the party.

"That's right," chimed in Yellin' Kid, with his usual strident tones. "Take it easy, Bud, We've got a long, hard trail ahead of us, and we haven't any spare horses."

"I didn't intend to start a race," spoke Bud, as he slowed up and waited for Nort and Dick. "I was just wishing I could kick some of those greasy Mexican Indians, and it must have been a sort of reflex action on my part that gave Toot a tap in the ribs," and he patted his pony, no very handsome steed, but a sticker on a long trail. Bud had taught his pony to run out of the corral at the blowing of a horn, hence the name "Toot."

"I don't know anything about them there reflex actions," observed Yellin' Kid, "but I do know that this is no fishin' party! We've got hard work cut out for us if we're to trail them sneakin' Yaquis."

"You delivered an earful that time, my friend," stated Rolling Stone, with a grim smile. "I've had dealings with these imps and while they don't compare in bloodthirstiness with the worst of our former American Indians, they're bad enough. I know!"

He seemed to gaze afar, into the past, and the boy ranchers hoped he would some day tell the details of how he had come so to hate the Yaquis.

The trailing party, started into action by the receipt of the message so daringly written by Rosemary, consisted of fifteen cowboys, and in these I include our three heroes, who certainly are entitled to be classed with the others. For though not as old, they had had considerable experience now, and were able to rough it with the most veteran cow puncher.

In addition to Bud, Nort and Dick, there was Snake Purdee, who was in virtual charge, according to instructions from Bud's father. Yellin' Kid, Rolling Stone and several other cowboys made up the remainder of the party, which was well armed, and provisioned as fully as was practical. They expected to replenish their packs of food at various places, and if they passed beyond the pale of civilization they would live off the land, or do their best in this respect.

"It can't be any worse for us than for those Indians," Snake Purdee had said, when the talk was on the food question.

"Yes, but a white man can't live on what those heathen eat," remarked Rolling Stone. "They'll eat lizards and snakes, and think they're stopping at one of the best hotels, with bath an' everything. Or they can go without eating longer than any human beings I ever saw. In fact I don't believe they are human. They're imps, that's what they are—plain imps! If I had my way I'd—"

Rolling Stone gave a sudden jump, and a grunt, the reason for this action being that Snake Purdee had urged his steed to a place next to that of the speaker and had given him a jolting punch in the ribs.

"Wha-wha—" stuttered Rolling Stone.

In answer Snake pointed toward Bud and his cousins, on whose faces were looks of grave alarm as the new acquisition to their forces spoke thus of the fierce character of the Yaquis.

"Don't get 'em to worrying too much about that there young lady an' gent what these Indians have carried off," whispered Snake, and it was well it was he who spoke, and not Yellin' Kid, or our heroes would have sensed what was up. "Keep it dark," advised Snake. "Keep it dark! Don't take the heart out of 'em!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Rolling Stone. "I see!"

"Pity you wouldn't," snapped out the cowboy leader. "You got to have a little consideration for the young fellers!"

Rolling Stone nodded, and then, as if to make amends for what he had said, he added:

"Course I'm not saying *all* Yaquis are alike. There may be some half way, or maybe a quarter way decent. And maybe they've captured this young lady and gentleman just for ransom. In that case they'll take good care of 'em."

"Do you think so?" asked Bud, for, truth to tell, he had been greatly alarmed as he thought of the possible fate of Rosemary and her brother in the hands of the unprincipled Yaquis.

"Oh, sure!" asserted Rolling Stone, with more conviction than he felt. "They're after money, these Indians are, or what money will buy. And they like good U.S. money instead of Mex. dollars which are worth about fourteen and a half cents a pound just now. So it's to their interests to treat their captives well, so they'll bring a good price in the market."

"Good price?" exclaimed Nort. "Do they put them up at auction?"

"No, I didn't mean just that," Rolling Stone hastened to add. "I mean if they ask a ransom they're bound to keep the prisoners in good shape for if they don't produce 'em in that same fashion they're likely to slip up on the reward."

"Then they won't harm Rosemary or Floyd?" asked Dick, whose vivid imagination had pictured his cousins as being subject to the tortures of the burning stake.

"Well, of course they won't have feather beds to sleep on," spoke Rolling Stone slowly, "but I take it your cousins are used to roughing it, and it will be no worse than a scouting trip for them."

"Yes, I s'pose Floyd is used to camping out," admitted Bud. "But as for Rosemary—"

"Don't worry, son," advised Snake. "Rosemary is a western girl and you know what your sister is."

"That's right!" and Bud visibly brightened. "Nell could look after herself if given half a chance. And maybe we'll catch up to these Yaquis before very long."

"Sure we will!" asserted Snake, but he and the other cowboys, more experienced in matters of this sort than our heroes, felt that there was a grim terror between them and those whom they pursued.

However they had started, and were making as good time as possible. Messages had passed between Mr. Merkel and those in authority at La Nogalique, and the probable route of the kidnapping Yaquis was indicated as well as could be. This saved a long trip to the border in order to get on the trail of the Indians from the time they had taken Rosemary and Floyd.

Well armed, with righteous indignation burning in their hearts, used to roughing it, and with men who knew almost every foot of the country, the expedition from Diamond X was well equipped for the work in hand.

At first after they started out there was eager talk, and speculation as to where the Indians would be met with, and what the probable outcome would be of the fight that was sure to follow.

"Unless they run off when they see us and leave Rosemary and Floyd for us to bring back," spoke Dick, almost afraid lest this outcome should prevent a fight.

"Don't worry. They won't run! They'll stand and give us as good or as bad as we can send," declared Rolling Stone.

"We'll wipe out the band if we get half a chance!" declared Bud, and it was not said in a bloodthirsty or boastful spirit. It was calm retribution that actuated our friends.

Along the trail they traveled—a trail they were destined to follow for weary days and nights. This was only the beginning. They must make all the speed they could, and yet spare the horses all that was possible. There was a chance of getting new mounts at several places, but it was only a chance and could not be depended on. They must save what they had, both in the way of horseflesh and rations.

Night found them well on their way, and though the boys were eager to continue, Snake insisted on a halt being made not only for supper but to give men and horses a needed rest.

"The Indians will have to stop just as we do," said the older cowboy.
"They can't keep on continually; they have to stop and rest."

"Yes, I suppose so," granted Bud.

So the night camp was made, and when the horses had been turned out to graze, hobbled so they would not stray, and when the evening meal was over, the party sat about the fires, talking of but one topic—what would happen when they came up with the Yaquis.

As they were in friendly country, not after cattle rustlers and had no fear of Del Pinzo and his gang,

there was felt to be no need of standing guard. But for all this Bud, Nort and Dick were a bit restless, and did not sleep as soundly as the others.

In fact along toward morning, though while it was yet very dark, Nort, thinking he heard suspicious noises, unrolled from his blanket and stood up.

"What's the matter?" came in a hoarse whisper from his brother.

"I don't know," answered Nort, in the same hoarse tones. "I thought I heard something."

"So did I," and Dick scrambled out to stand beside his brother. "Are the horses all right?"

"I hope so. We're lost without them. Let's take a look and—"

Nort stopped suddenly and pointed to the northern sky. Above the horizon shone some red sparkles of light skimming and shimmering through the dark night.

"Shooting stars!" remarked Dick, in a whisper.

"Shooting nothing!" cried Nort, and his voice was loud. "Those are signals from the Yaquis! Snake! Wake up! We're right close to the Indians!" he yelled.

CHAPTER IX

A LONE INDIAN

Less noise than that which issued from the excited throat of Nort would have been sufficient to arouse a larger camp than that of the cowboys on the trail of the Yaquis. Instantly every man in the party, not forgetting Bud who had been sleeping as soundly as any, was on the alert, gun in hand, rubbing the sleep from his eyes with the other fist.

"What's up?" snarled Snake. He always did hate to rouse suddenly.

"Look!" cried Nort, pointing to the north, where, now and then, a shimmering light cut the blackness of the sky. "Dick says they're shooting stars, but I say Indian signals."

"They aren't shooting stars, that's sure!" declared Rolling Stone. "I've slept in the open too often, counting those same shooting stars, to be mistaken. They're signals of some kind!"

"But not Indians' signals," asserted Yellin' Kid.

"Whose then?" Nort wanted to know, satisfied that he had not awakened the camp in vain.

"They're rockets—or some sort of fire works," went on Dick. "First I thought they were shooting stars, but I can see now that they aren't. They're sky rockets or Roman candles."

"That's right," agreed Snake. "And no Yaquis will fool with such infernal machines as them."

"Unless your cousins had some," suggested Yellin' Kid looking toward Bud and his chums. Some one had thrown an armful of greasewood on the fire, and it blazed up brightly, disclosing the countenances of the Indian trailers.

"What would Rosemary and Floyd be doing with fireworks?" asked Bud.

"I didn't know but what they might be bringing some to Diamond X for a celebration, and the Indians, having laid hands on the rockets as well as on your cousins, might be setting 'em off—setting off the rockets I mean—for a celebration over their victory," observed Yellin' Kid, somewhat out of breath after this long oration.

"Nonsense!" asserted Snake. "The Indians wouldn't set off the rockets on purpose. They'd be afraid. Though of course they may have done so by accident."

"I don't believe Rosemary or Floyd would be bringing us fireworks," remarked Bud. "They're too old for such kid stuff."

"That's what I thought," said Snake.

"But who is shooting off the rockets?" asked Nort, as another brilliant burst of fire, not unlike shooting stars, illuminated the dark northern sky.

"Troopers," said the old cowboy.

"Troopers?" question Dick.

"Yes. United States cavalry. There are several companies stationed out here, and they may be on a practice march, or having a sham battle, as they sometimes do. These are signals from one post to another."

"Or maybe a signal about the Indians," suggested Bud.

"Yes," agreed Snake. "It may be the troopers are after the Yaquis. I sure hope so, for the imps are going to be hard enough to nab once they get up in the foothills and mountains. We'll need the help of the troopers for sure!"

"Isn't there some way we could let them know we're coming?" asked Dick.

"Not very handy," the cowboy leader answered. "We haven't any fireworks, and shooting off our guns would only waste good bullets that we may need later. Besides, those shooting stars are farther off than they look. We couldn't make our guns heard, and the flashes would be so low down they couldn't be seen. All we can do is to wait until morning. We're traveling in that direction anyhow, and we may come up with the regulars."

"With their help we'll make short work of the Yaquis!" boasted Nort.

"Don't be so sure of that," warned Rolling Stone. "The Indians, while nothing like the American redmen, are cute and foxy enough in their own way. They probably know of nooks and hiding places in the mountains where they could lay up for weeks, and almost next door to a troop of soldiers, without getting located. It's going to be largely a matter of luck if we nab 'em!"

"Well, here's hoping," voiced Bud, as he turned toward the fire.

It was chilly out in the open at that hour of the morning. For though the days are very hot, it began to get cool very often as soon as the sun went down, and the air kept getting cooler until the golden rays again warmed the earth. So one and all sought the genial blaze, to thaw out a little before again rolling in blankets to wait for sunrise.

Aside from the alarm over the shooting stars, nothing else disturbed the camp that night, and all were gladly astir with daybreak. The fire was started into new life, and soon coffee was boiling over the coals, while mingled with its odor was the appetizing smell of crisp bacon.

"Let me make the flapjacks," begged Rolling Stone. "I used to be a great hand for them, and I still have some small skill."

He would need to have, for not a member of the party but what could turn a neatly browned cake high in the air, catching it unerringly as it came down, to be cooked on the other side. Even Nort and Dick had become quite adept at this.

But the skill of even Snake Purdee had to take a back seat in the face of the performance of Rolling Stone. Not only were his cakes better in taste, and more delicately browned, but he showed almost uncanny skill in tossing them high in the air, and catching them in the pan as they came down. Not once did a cake "slop over"—that is descend half within and half without the pan. Each one fell true and in the middle of the skillet, there to be held over the coals again until crisp and brown.

"You're a wonder—that's what you are!" affirmed Yellin' Kid in his usual hearty tones, as he passed his tin plate for more.

"It's a gift—that's all! Just a gift!" modestly admitted the self-constituted "flapjacketer," as he laughingly dubbed himself.

Smart was the word and smart was the action when breakfast was ended. The horses had made their meal during the night, and were ready for their riders who were soon in the saddle, riding toward the north—the north in which direction the Yaquis had vanished with their captives—the north where the mysterious signal lights had been seen.

Through the day rode the posse of self-constituted seekers after the captives. They could not hope,

for some time yet, to come upon actual traces of the Yaquis. But they felt that they were heading in the proper direction.

It was towards the close of the afternoon, when they were beginning to seek for a suitable camping place, with water, that Nort, who had ridden on a little in advance, came to a halt at the top of a rise. His halt was caused by the appearance of a solitary horseman, coming toward him. And it needed but a second look, through that clear atmosphere, to disclose that the rider was not an American cowboy.

"What's wrong, Nort?" called Bud, for he had sensed something unusual in his cousin's attitude.

"An Indian!" was the answer. "A lone Indian!"

The others rode hastily up the slope. The solitary horseman was coming rapidly on. He seemed to have no fear of thus riding into the midst of his enemies.

"Got his nerve with him, anyhow!" mused Snake, as he looked to his gun.

"Maybe he's come to say the Yaquis will surrender and give up Rosemary and Floyd," suggested Dick. "Maybe they know we're on their trail."

CHAPTER X

SHOTS FROM AMBUSH

The boy ranchers were very free with their surmises as to what might portend the oncoming of the lone Indian. Youth is ever thus, eager to guess instead of waiting for certainties. The older cowboys—Yellin' Kid, Snake, Rolling Stone and those who made up the rescue party—remained in silent contemplation of the approaching figure.

"He rides doggoned funny," observed Snake.

"Like a bag of oats," added Rolling Stone. "Looks like he'd fall off any minute."

"Say!" began Bud eagerly, and then he stopped, as if he had thought better.

"What's the matter?" asked Nort.

"Don't you know somebody who rides just like that?" Bud inquired. "Some one we all know?"

Nort and Dick uttered exclamations. Bud's words were all that was needed to set in motion a slumbering train of thought.

"Looks to me like he was hurt," affirmed Yellin' Kid. "Can't be one of the Yaquis. They wouldn't be this near. And if they was they'd be too big cowards to ride right for us this way."

"This isn't any unfriendly Indian!" declared Bud. "He knows us—and we know him!"

"How come?" demanded Snake, half incredulously.

"Can't you see?" cried Bud. "It's our own Indian—Buck Tooth!"

"Wow!" shouted Yellin' Kid. "So it is! But I'd never have known him. He's all togged out—got his war paint on!"

And, in very truth, Buck Tooth—for he it was—had donned a strange garb. Wearing some of the clothing of civilization, he had ornamented himself with dangling bits of cow-hide, with parts of tails dangling from it. He carried behind him a collection of pans and camp paraphernalia that rattled and banged about him as he rode forward. He had stuck some feathers in his coarse black hair and he was a somewhat laughable mixture of an American and Mexican Indian on the warpath.

"Ugh!" grunted Buck Tooth when he came within speaking distance. Not that he ever spoke much, but this was his greeting.

"What'd you come away from the ranch for?" demanded Bud, for Buck Tooth was a valued hand on a

cattle place, and he had been left with the somewhat small force to take charge of Happy Valley when the others had started after the Yaquis. "What you doing here?" Bud wanted to know.

"Me after 'em too—Yaquis!" grunted the Indian. "Me catchum an' shootum same like um shoot me!"

As he spoke, or, rather, grunted this out, he pointed to his left shoulder. It was bound about with bloody rags, and in spite of his stoicism the Indian winced as he moved in the saddle.

"Did the Yaquis shoot you?" cried Nort.

"Sure! I come after you—no could stay when fight to be done—and Yaquis what you call plug me! But I plug one, two, three 'fore I quit!"

"Where was this?"

"Was there a fight?"

"Lead us there!"

"When did it happen?"

These were only a few of the questions hurled at Buck Tooth, whose name was obviously well earned once you had looked at him. The old native seemed stunned by the volley of interrogations, and sat stolidly in his saddle while more were shot at him.

"Ugh!" he grunted in answer. "Fight yistidy—back there," and he waved a dirty hand in the direction whence he had come.

"Sure they were Yaquis?" asked Snake.

"Sure; Me know—Me Yaqui once!"

"That's right!" fairly shouted Bud. "I forgot, for the time being, that Buck Tooth is a sort of Yaqui Indian. But how comes it they fired on one of their own tribe?" he asked.

"Bad Yaquis—no good!" was the answer.

"That's right—they sure are bad!" declared Rolling Stone. "I've had dealings with 'em!"

"Did you see anything of their prisoners—young lady and young man?" asked Snake. "Say, you'd better talk with him—you can sling his lingo better than I can," and the cowboy appealed to Bud.

Thereupon the boy rancher talked to Buck Tooth in a way he knew his Indian helper could understand, and Buck Tooth answered in like strain. The Indian had been at Happy Valley ever since that venture had been under way, and in that time Bud and the old native had come to understand one another very well. Buck Tooth, it will be remembered, was of aid to Bud and his cousins when the fight over the water rights and the dam was under way, and the Indian helped fight Del Pinzo's gang.

"It's this way," Bud translated to the others, having finished questioning the Indian. "He got sort of lonesome after we left the ranch, and though I told him he must stay, he hiked off on his own hook to join us. He took a roundabout trail so he wouldn't meet up with us too soon and get sent back.

"Then, it appears, yesterday, he ran into a bunch of Yaquis, and they fired at him. He got in among some rocks and fired back, and he says he did for two or three. Maybe he wounded 'em, or maybe he made 'em candidates for the Happy Hunting Grounds. Anyhow, after the fight he managed to get on our trail, and here he is."

"But did he see anything of Rosemary and Floyd?" asked Nort.

"Not a sign. He says these Yaquis didn't have any captives," Bud answered.

"How do you account for that?" Dick wanted to know, while rather a grim silence fell on the others.

"Well, this may have been another party of Indians. Very likely was," Bud declared.

"That's right!" chimed in Snake. "The ones that captured Rosemary and Floyd could hardly have gotten so far north as the ones were that gave Buck Tooth that little reminder in the shoulder."

This opinion, coming from one who could reason out the matter, made everyone feel less

apprehensive.

"There must be two or three bodies of these Yaquis," went on Snake Purdee. "They always split up after a raid. One party has Rosemary and Floyd, and another engaged in a little set-to with Buck Tooth. Being one of them he knew their fighting tricks and he left his marks on 'em."

"It's queer one Indian would turn against the others of the same tribe," spoke Nort.

"No, not in Buck Tooth's case," declared Bud. "He's a good Indian, if ever there was one. And, as he says, these Yaquis may be a lot of half-breeds, or a part of the tribe that is outlawed from the others. I'm not standing up for the Yaquis," he hastened to add, "for I know they've done a lot of dirty work. But this bunch may be worse than the others. Anyhow Buck Tooth says so. And I'm glad he's with us. I felt sorry after I left him back at the ranch."

"Yes, he'll be of service I reckon," asserted Snake, and Yellin' Kid nodded in agreement.

The Indian's wound, which he had not troubled himself to dress, was looked after with rough and ready, but effective cowboy skill and then, a good camping place near a water hole having been reached, saddles were taken off the weary steeds who began to roll about in welcome relief.

The fires were made, grub cooked and as night settled down all prepared for much-needed rest.

"Well, another day or two and we ought to catch up to 'em," observed Bud, as he prepared to turn in with the others.

"That's right," agreed Yellin' Kid. "They can't have traveled any faster than we did, and we took a shorter trail."

The night passed without any incidents of moment, though Nort nearly gave a needless alarm when he sprang up, declaring that he was being "roped" in the darkness.

But a light revealed that only a harmless snake was crawling over his neck, an unpleasant enough sensation as you doubtless will admit, but one not necessarily disastrous.

"Burr-r-r-r!" shuddered Nort, when he saw that it was a snake, and not a lariat that had rasped him. "I'd almost rather it was a lasso! I hate snakes!"

Then sleep was resumed.

The gray, cold and somewhat cheerless dawn was breaking over the temporary camp when, as Buck Tooth toddled over to replenish the fire for breakfast, there came sharp cracks of rifles from the surrounding rocks and scrub underbrush, and the old Indian fell.

"Yaquis!" yelled Nort, springing for his gun.

"Ambushed!" cried Bud.

"Steady, everybody!" shouted Yellin' Kid and his strenuous voice, rumbling and echoing through the silent morning, seemed to calm them all. "Get down on your faces! Drop!" commanded the cowboy, while puffs of smoke, flashes of fire and nerve-racking reports told that the attack from ambush was in some force.

CHAPTER XI

THE SURPRISE

Camp had been made by the boy ranchers and their friends in a little glade, amid rocks and stunted brush, a natural fortification as it were, with only one side open. And it was from this one side that the shots from the ambushers were pouring in.

Though Yellin' Kid and Snake Purdee had said nothing to the boys about it, the place had been purposely selected with an eye to its possible defense.

"You can't tell what will happen in this country," Snake had said to Yellin' Kid, and the latter agreed, lowering his voice, for once at least, so Bud and his cousins could not hear.

"We've got to be on our guard," Snake had added, and so, while Bud, Nort and Dick would have been willing to slump down almost anywhere, and camp as soon as they found water, this secluded site was selected.

The wisdom of this was now apparent, since, had there been no natural shelter available, several casualties might have resulted from the opening of a fusillade at dawn.

As it was, however, so quickly had the cowboys (and with them I now include Buck Tooth) taken to shelter, that, aside from a few minor wounds on the part of two or three, no one was badly hit.

"What's it all about?" called Bud from behind his sheltering stone to Snake. Bud's gun was hot, for he had emptied the magazine, and with little effect, as was afterward learned.

"Who's attacking us?" added Nort. He, as had Dick, had also fired rapidly and with equal non-effect.

"Search me," succinctly replied Snake. "All I know is that there's somebody out there anxious to fill us full of lead—more anxious than I am to be filled," he added grimly. "Lay low everybody!" he shouted, as another burst of firing succeeded the calm that had followed the first attack.

Bullets "zinged" in amid the rocks, striking the hard stone with vicious "pings!" and leaving grim, gray marks on the boulders; marks that would have brought spots of vital redness had they found a human target.

Bud refilled the magazine of his gun, and started a return fire when Snake threw a piece of stone that fell near the boy rancher, thus attracting his attention. There was little use in shouting above the din. A voice could be heard only in the lulls of shooting.

"What's the matter?" yelled Bud, scarcely making himself heard.

Snake motioned for him to cease firing, an example followed by Nort and Dick. As for the older cowboys they had wisely withheld their fire.

Explanation was made by Snake a moment later when he crawled over to Bud, keeping well hidden amid the rocks, and speaking in his ear, though yelling at the top of his voice as he did so, said:

"What's the use of shootin' when you can't see your mark? Save your powder and lead!"

It was good advice. Bud could not help but laugh at the conclusion of Snake's advice. For the cowboy had started to give it in tones that Yellin' Kid might have been proud to own. This was necessary because those in ambush were firing in full force it seemed. But they stopped suddenly, in the midst of Snake's remarks, so that the end of the cowboy's advice fell amid a silence, and, being delivered at full power must have been heard by the enemy.

Bud's laughter at this little incident was echoed by the others, and, for the moment, relieved the grim tension. But its grip tightened on all of them a moment later, as a bullet, viciously "zinging" its way amid the rocks, clipped a little from the lobe of the ear of one of the cowboys.

He uttered an exclamation, partly of disgust at his own carelessness in exposing himself, and Snake yelled:

"I told you to keep down, you tenderfoot!"

It was the harshest expression that could have been used.

Following that single shot, after the fusillade that had been in play during Snake's advice to Bud, silence fell, and Snake and Yellin' Kid at once began to make preparations for what might be a prolonged fight. The two veteran cowboys in virtual charge of the relief expedition managed to crawl together to the shelter of a big rock, and there held a consultation, the while cautioning the others to remain behind the protection of boulders they had picked out after the first rush.

Fortunately the horses had all been well picketed in a glade back of the rocky fastness in which our friends had made fires and slept for the night, so the outfit from Diamond X was between its steeds and the enemy. The horses, though at first startled by the firing, had soon settled down to a quiet cropping of such scanty herbage as grew in that desolate place. The animals were accustomed to the noise of guns, which formed an important part of every roundup, and, fortunately none had strayed.

I say fortunately with good reason, for in that wild country a man without a horse was worse off than one without a country, all patriotic reasons aside, of course. It was impossible for a man on foot to successfully make his way from water hole to water hole, and an automobile would have been worse than useless. Therefore it was with a feeling of thankfulness that Bud and his friends realized the

horses were safe—at least for the time being.

"Fellows, listen to me," Snake said in a low, clear voice, after he and the Kid had talked in half whispers for a time. "We've got to do something, and maybe prepare for quite a fight. Now those whose names I call come with me. The others stay here with the Kid."

Thereupon Snake named half the force, including in it the three boy ranchers, to their great delight. For they rightly guessed this was to be a skirmish party, to sally out and see who were the attackers—perhaps to wipe them out.

"Crawl over to the left and wait for me," went on Snake. "Don't move until you can have shelter all the way. The firing's coming from only one direction as yet—guard against that. Get together and wait for me."

Sharp are the wits of those who live in the west, especially in the cattle country where snap judgment is often needed. Thus it took but a moment for Snake's plan to make itself plain to Bud and the others.

One by one they crawled, or ran half crouched, from their original places of safety to the angle where a great rock, jutting out from the side of the glen in which they had camped, offered shelter for all. There they stood, with ready guns, waiting for the next move in the grim game.

Snake had remained in consultation with Yellin' Kid until now, and then, seeing his force waiting for him, the veteran cowboy made a dash to join them.

I call it a dash, but Snake was not foolhardy, and the advice he gave he took himself. Advantaging himself of every natural cover, the leader of the second party dodged this way and that, stooping over half double, until he was within ten feet of the shelter. Then since along the route where he came from, there was an open, unprotected space, he tried to cross this in two jumps.

He succeeded, but as he landed, and half fell amid his comrades, a gun barked, somewhere out in the ambush, and by the convulsive movement of his body Snake gave evidence of having been hit.

"Are you hurt?" cried Bud, as he caught the reeling cowboy.

"Guess not—much!" grunted Snake, but his voice was labored.

"Where was it?" snapped out one of the cowboys. "Let's have a look."

"Here!" Snake placed his hand over his heart. The boy ranchers gasped—they knew what it meant to lose one of their leaders at a time like this.

In an instant Snake's coat was flung open, and his shirt half torn to expose his chest. And then there fell out, from next his skin on which it had made an ugly bruise, a partly flattened bullet.

"Whew!" whistled Nort.

"Close call, that!" added Dick.

"Doggone!" voiced Snake, as he reached his hand to the inside pocket of his vest. "They spilled half of it!"

"What?" asked Bud, relief showing itself in his voice.

"My tobacco!" answered Snake. "I had some packed away there to keep it moist—some new kind of plug chewin' I got last week. Doggoned if they ain't put a bullet clean through it!"

"And lucky for you they did," grunted Tar Soap Mullin, who had earned this name from the kind of lather he used in shampooing himself every Saturday night. "If that bullet hadn't happened to hit your plug it would have plugged you."

And this was evident when Snake took out the tobacco in question. The lead missile had struck the hard and pressed cake of tobacco, striking a tin tag fastened to it, and thus the force of the bullet had been neutralized, giving Snake no more than a severe shock and bruise.

"Well, it might have been worse," the cowboy grimly said, as he tucked back his shirt, and put the tobacco in another pocket. "Now we got to get busy! This is getting serious!" Bud and his chums thought he might have said it was serious from the start, as indeed it was.

"What I picked you fellows out for," went on Snake, "is to take a sort of scurry out there and see who's doin' all this shootin'." He clipped letters off his words in his haste. "We're goin' out there an' see

if we can take 'em in the rear, while Yellin' Kid holds their attention in front."

"Do you reckon they're Yaquis?" asked Tar Soap.

"Might be, then ag'in might not. If they aren't I don't see why in the name of all the rattlers of Forked Rover [Transcriber's note: River?] they're pickin' on us."

The method of procedure was simple and quickly agreed upon. Snake was to lead the boy ranchers and his half of the party, by as safe and devious a route as possible, out of the natural fort, to try and take the enemy in the rear. If they could be placed between two fires—that of Snake's party and of Yellin' Kid's—a surrender might be compelled.

"And don't take too many chances," advised Snake, as the sally forth was started. "Watch yourselves."

They all knew enough to do this.

"When do we start?" asked Bud in a low voice, as Snake seemed to be delaying for some reason.

"Soon as the Kid and his lads start firing," was the answer. "They're to hold the Indians' attention in front while we come at 'em from the flank and rear. Get ready—it may come at any moment now!"

It did, a second or two later—the signal. Amid a burst of shots from Yellin' Kid and his force, Snake led the way with his men, all of them crouching down to keep as much as possible behind the rocks.

"Don't shoot until you see something to shoot at," Snake had ordered. "Save your lead."

Bud, Nort and Dick were together, leaping, crawling, crouching and stumbling. Suddenly Dick, who had gone a little ahead of his two chums, looked through an opening of the rocks. What he saw caused him to gasp in surprise, and as he pointed he cried:

"Del Pinzo! Del Pinzo and his crowd! It isn't the Yaquis at all! It's Del Pinzo!"

CHAPTER XII

FORWARD AGAIN

Time was when the mention of Del Pinzo's name would have brought forth a yell of anger from the cowboys of Diamond X ranch. He was an enemy at once to be feared and loathed, for he did not fight fair, and he was of the detested, half-breed Mexican type.

But now, when the cry of Dick apprised the others of the presence of this ruthless cattle rustler, thief and all-around bad man, there was no answering shout. One reason for this was that caution was necessary, so that the presence of the skirmishing party be not disclosed, and another was that the information that it was Del Pinzo, and presumably his gang who had ambushed our friends, came as a great surprise.

"Del Pinzo?" half gasped Snake Purdee as he ran to Dick's side.

"Yes, there he is! See!"

The boy rancher pointed to a figure standing near a stunted bush.

There was no doubt about it—Del Pinzo it was, and at his usual business, firing on some one, for he had a rifle raised, in the act of taking aim.

"I'll spoil one shot for him, anyhow," announced Snake.

He whipped out his .45, there was a sharp crack, and the gun of the Mexican half breed dropped to the ground, discharging as it fell, but harmlessly. And then the outlaw, with a yell of rage, gripped his right hand in his left. For Snake had fired at the man's trigger member, thus disabling him for the time.

And, as he turned, and beheld who had thus "winged" him, Del Pinzo gave another cry—as filled with surprise as had been the exclamation of Dick on beholding the Mexican renegade who, it was supposed,

was safely locked up in penalty for many crimes.

"That your bunch down there?" called Del Pinzo to Snake, and he waved his uninjured hand toward the camp amid the rocks.

"You said something, Del Pinzo," grimly answered the cowboy. "What you all up to now? Be careful—I have you covered!" he warned. "And if your men want to bask in the sweet sunshine of your presence from now on, tell 'em to chuck down their guns. Also, up with your hands!"

There was a stinging menace in the tones that Del Pinzo knew well enough to obey. His hands, one dripping blood, were raised over his head, and he called something in Spanish to his followers, as yet unseen by the boy ranchers and their friends.

Instantly the scattered firing on the part of the outlaws ceased, and, catching this air of silence, Yellin' Kid gave an order that silenced his guns.

"Now, what's the game?" demanded Snake, holding the whip hand as it were. "What do you mean by firing on us?"

"I did not know it was you," declared the half breed. "We set out to look for the Yaquis—"

"The Yaquis?" interrupted Snake.

"Sure! They have risen, it is said, and I and my men are on their trail!"

This was news indeed—another surprise, in fact. That Del Pinzo was speaking the truth could scarcely be believed. In the first place this was almost an unknown accomplishment with him, and in the second place the Yaquis were of his own kind—reckless outlaws who would stop at nothing to get booty, either in cattle or money. It was more likely that Del Pinzo and his gang were seeking an opportunity to join forces with the band of up-rising Yaquis.

"Oh, you're after the Yaquis; are you!" asked Snake.

"Sure, senior Purdee!" Del Pinzo spoke fairly good English, and he could be polite when it suited him. "We saw that some one was encamped in the rocks, and I took them for the Yaquis. So we opened fire—it is with sadness that I know now it was your friends whom I shot at."

"Um! Maybe so—maybe not," grimly retorted the cowboy. "Anyhow it's us, and it seems to be you. I thought you were somewhere else," he added referring to the fact that Del Pinzo had been arrested. It was not the first time the half breed had been in the toils of the law, following cattle raids on Diamond X or other ranches.

In the previous books of this series I have related some of Del Pinzo's outrages. He was concerned in the water fight that so nearly ended disastrously for Bud and his cousins.

"Oh, I get out!" said Del Pinzo, easily, and with a shrug of his shoulders which might mean that coming forth from a jail was nothing in his life.

"So I see," observed Snake with a grin. "By hook or crook, I reckon. Well, I don't know as we have anything against you and your bunch just at present. If you're after the Yaquis you're on the same errand as us. But, if you'll excuse me sayin' so, I'd rather travel my own road."

This was a delicate hint to which Del Pinzo was not oblivious.

"Surely, senior," he answered, grinning. "You go your way and I go mine. Only let the fighting cease. As you say—there is nothing against me—now."

"Which isn't saying that there won't be, or hasn't been," spoke Snake. "File out your men—without guns, you understand!" he snapped. "And then you can hit your own trail. Looks like there'd been a mistake all round. We thought you the Yaquis."

"Oh, Senior Purdee!" There was false injury in the tones.

"And I'm not so sure but what it will turn out that way in the end," added the cowboy grimly. "However, we'll give the benefit of the doubt for the time being. File out!"

Del Pinzo gave an order, and his band of disreputable half breeds like himself, including several Indians, though not of the Yaquis tribe, marched out, hands above their heads, while Snake and his men, the boy ranchers in the van, watched.

"Is that all?" asked Snake, when the outlaws stood in a row amid the rocks. He was taking no chances on leaving a hidden, lurking foe to fire behind their backs.

"All, Senor Purdee. Shall we go?"

"When I tell you to, yes. Now, Del Pinzo, you know I don't trust you, and there's no use soft soaping the situation. I wouldn't trust you with a Mexican dollar. So here's what you've got to do.

"March over there," and he indicated a bunch of scrub about half a mile away. "Stay there until we get breakfast and are on our way. When we're far enough off I'll fire a shot, and that'll mean you can come over here again, get your horses and guns, and take after the Yaquis, if it suits you."

"We want to drive the Indians back," declared Del Pinzo.

"Yes, I reckon they're picking on your preserves, that's the reason," said Snake. "Well, this is a free country. As long as you're out of jail—though how you beat it I can't guess—you can do as you please, I s'pose—as long as it doesn't interfere with us.

"So hit any trail you like as long as it isn't ours. Now remember—don't make a break for your horses and guns until I fire a shot."

"So be it, Senor. And one thing more?"

"What is it?"

"May I put down my hands? I am wounded—"

"Oh, put 'em down? I didn't more than graze you to keep you from shooting one of our men. Put 'em down!"

With a sigh of relief the outlaw lowered his hands, an example followed by his men, all of whom were unarmed. They marched behind their leader to the place designated, and for the first time Snake breathed easily.

"How do you reckon he got here?" asked Bud, when hurried preparations were under way for breakfast.

"Give it up," answered Snake, who had sent some men to collect the guns and horses of the Del Pinzo gang.

"He may have bribed his way out of jail, or have broken out, and we'll have to let that go until later. He may really be trying to drive back the Yaquis, for fear they'll steal things that he has an eye to himself. Or he may be lying—I think most likely the last. Anyhow he happened to strike this place the same time as we did, and either knowing who we were, or not knowing, and that part has me guessing, he tried to pick us off. However we'll give him the slip this time."

"I don't see how, if you leave him his horses and guns," put in Yellin' Kid.

"Well, he and his men can't do much riding on horses without saddles and bridles," said Snake, "and as for the guns—well, I'll leave them for him at the first ranch I come to."

"You mean you're going to take his guns with you?" asked Bud.

"Surest thing you ever said, son. Think I'd trust him with any shooting irons behind me. And we'll just strip his horses, too. We can pack along his saddles and bridles. If they want to ride bare back that's up to them."

And this was the plan followed. There were several pack animals in the outfit from the Diamond X, and on these the saddles and bridles from the outlaws' horses were packed. Then the guns were collected from the ambush, and taken along when the start was made after breakfast.

"Hit the trail!" cried Snake, when preparations were complete.

Off in the distance, hungrily waiting for the signal that would let them return, stood Del Pinzo and his gang. Their food was not disturbed. They had the means for making breakfast.

Off rode Snake and his followers. At a distance of little more than half a mile from the scene of the fighting, on a rising hill, the cowboy stopped.

"Here's where we let 'em go back and eat," he said grimly.

He raised his gun and fired a shot. Instantly the gang, with Del Pinzo in the lead, rushed for the place where their property had been left.

"We spiked their guns, I think," chuckled Bud, as he rode beside his cousins.

"I guess yes!" laughed Nort.

Forward they rode once more—on the trail of the Yaquis. As they dipped down into a little valley there came to their ears faint yells of rage.

"They've found their saddles gone!" said Nort.

Again came a shout.

"They've missed their bridles!" said Dick.

A louder yell!

"No guns!" shouted Bud. "Oh, this is one time we put it all over Del Pinzo!"

Forward rode the outfit from Diamond X.

CHAPTER XIII

WEARY CAPTIVES

"Rosemary, are you able to stand it?" Floyd put this question to his sister as the weary captives were urged along the trail by the Yaquis.

"We've just *got* to stand it, Floyd," was the brave answer. "Help must come to us, and we must bear up until it does come."

"Oh, I can stand it all right—I really don't mind. But for you—it must be terrible! And the worst of it is I can't do a thing to help you."

"Not now, no, Floyd," Rosemary answered, with a brave attempt at a smile. "But we must watch our chance. These Mexican Indians aren't like our own—or like our own used to be. They aren't half as smart. We ought to be able to escape from them if we get half a chance."

"Well, maybe, Rosemary. But they're bad enough if they aren't smart."

Floyd spoke with all the evidence on his side. For a more disreputable, unsavory, desperate and wicked band of men it would be almost impossible to find. Repulsive in face, dirty, tattered and torn, wearing all sorts of cast off garments, a few in blankets, astride bony and broken horses, most of them, but each one armed with gun, revolver or knife, it was a crew of pirates, cut-throats, highwaymen to be carefully shunned.

"Well, I'm glad to see you keeping your courage up, Rosemary," remarked her brother, trying to ease himself in the saddle. It was not very feasible, as the captives were partly tied to prevent their escape, and they could not shift about as they pleased.

"Oh, we have to make the best of it, Floyd," his sister told him. "They haven't treated us roughly yet."

"No, and I wonder at it."

"It's because they have taken us for a ransom, I'm sure. They know if they don't hand us over in good shape there will be no ransom money for them."

"Who do you think they count on getting it from?"

"Our relatives, of course. Or maybe they think Uncle Sam will intervene on our behalf."

"I wish to goodness he would—that he'd send a band of U.S. regulars after this bunch of pirates."

Golly! How the Yaquis would scatter; eh, Rosemary?"

"Maybe we'll see that soon, Floyd. And maybe the boys from the Diamond X will come to our rescue. You know Bud's mother wrote that he and his two eastern cousins had a ranch of their own now. My message ought to reach some one."

"I hope it does, Rosemary. But who's this coming up?"

The talk of brother and sister had attracted the attention of the Indians, and there had been muttered comments. Following this one of the knot of guards around the two captives had spurred ahead to where Paz rode. Then back with the messenger came riding an Indian better mounted and equipped than most of the members of the band.

He forced his horse between the steeds of Rosemary and Floyd, and gave each of them a grin he may have intended to be friendly.

"What's the idea—Mike?" asked Floyd.

"Mike? Why do you call him that?" asked Rosemary.

"Because he looks friendly enough to be an Irishman," was the answer. "See, he has a turned up nose, I verily believe he has Irish blood in him. Let's call him Mike."

"Mike" grinned, though doubtless he understood nothing of what was said.

"He does look Irish," agreed Rosemary. "But I don't see how."

The explanation probably was that some wandering, adventuring Irishman had married an Indian woman. The Yaquis, like many other Indian or native tribes often intermarried. In fact it was this that in a measure led to their downfall. For they lost the ideals of their race, disease crept in and to-day many a band of what was once a noble people is but a dragged-out remnant, steeped in crime.

The Yaquis were once among the best of the Mexican Indian tribes. Though not large in numbers they were clean-living and of high character. The Spanish conquest of Mexico marked the beginning of the end for them, as it did many another Mexican race.

There was once a great civilization existing in the narrow strip of land connecting North and South America. Now only the faintest traces remain.

Once the Indian tribes flourished, they may even have had a written language, of which now only a few idiograms remain. The men and women were skilled in basketry, pottery and the making of gold and silver ornaments.

But they fell upon evil days, or evil days came to them, it matters little which, and they began to go down. Today there are only a few thousands of the Yaquis left, and they have degenerated into train robbers along the Southern Pacific line. They live like beasts, they have mingled with negroes, degenerate Spaniards and Mexicans until it is almost an insult to apply the name "Indian" to them.

And it was a band of such natives as this that had captured Rosemary and Floyd. Kept as much as possible to the confines of what might be termed, unofficially, a reservation, the Yaquis occasionally broke through the line of Mexican soldier guards and went on a rampage, often crossing the border into Arizona, as happened in the spring of 1921, when several Americans were killed in a border town.

It was an uprising of this same nature which had spelled trouble for Rosemary and her brother. They had happened along at the wrong time, as it were.

Tired and weary, in body and spirit, the captives were urged forward. "Mike" as our friends had dubbed him, seemed good natured enough, for he kept a perpetual grin on his face. His mission seemed to be to ride between Rosemary and Floyd, and prevent any collusion to escape.

However there was no time or chance to think of that now. The cavalcade filed along a narrow, rocky gorge, from which there was no side trail. Paz and some of his more intimate followers rode in the van, and the rear guard was made up of ragged Indians—with apologies for using the name.

Rosemary and Floyd would not have had a chance had they been able to turn their horses and make a bolt for it. So they must ride on. They were too weary to talk now, they could only hope for the best. When would the rescuers come?

A halt was made at noon, and some coarse food was passed to the captives. Rosemary shuddered at it and turned away.

"You must eat," Floyd told her. "Got to keep up your strength you know."

And she managed to choke down a few mouthfuls.

The afternoon passed wearily. They were going deeper into the mountains it seemed. There appeared to be some dispute between Paz on one side and a few of his followers on the other. And it seemed to have to do with a place to camp for the night. The men wanted to stop while the sun was yet in sight, but Paz insisted on going on until it was below the jagged peaks. Then he indicated a place where camp was to be made.

Mike slid off his horse, and, loosening the ropes, indicated that Rosemary and Floyd were to do the same. So cramped and stiff was Rosemary that she fell in a heap as she slid from the saddle. With a cry Floyd sprang to her aid, only to be thrust back by Mike.

"What do you mean?" yelled the boy. "I want to help my sister—you—you—"

He was spluttering with rage as he raised his hand, and looked about for a rock with which to attack the Indian.

"Don't—Floyd!" called Rosemary calmly. "I am all right—just numb, that's all! Don't get into a fight. They may separate us!"

Indeed that did seem to be the orders given by Paz, who rode up a moment later. For Mike took Rosemary by the arm, and was leading her away, while another Indian, dirty, greasy and with an evil grin on his fat face, thrust Floyd to one side.

"Stop!" suddenly cried Rosemary. She swung free of Mike's grasp, and in an instant that individual was looking straight into the muzzle of a small but very serviceable automatic.

CHAPTER XIV

SURROUNDED

Bubbling over with mirth, at the manner in which they had gotten the best of Del Pinzo and his gang, the outfit from Diamond X rode on the trail again, once more intent on trailing the Yaquis that had captured Floyd and Rosemary. And if Bud, Nort and Dick could, at that moment, or thereabouts, have seen Rosemary boldly defying the evil-faced Mike with her automatic, their admiration for the girl would have been manifested by yells of approval.

But Bud and his chums, with their cowboy friends, were all unaware of what was happening farther on in the desolate mountain whither the Indians had led their captives. If they had been they probably would not have ridden on in such comparative leisure. For they did not rush at headlong pace, knowing they had a long, long trail ahead of them, and must conserve not only their strength, but, what was more important, that of their horses.

Without horses it would have been impossible to have gone on for more than a short distance in that wild country. As I have explained motor cars, even the marvelous little Ford, would have been out of the question, so rough was the trail, so winding amid rocks, now down in some narrow defile, hardly wide enough for a single rider, and again ascending some slope tangled with brush and dead trees.

Knowing themselves to be thus dependent on their horses our heroes saved their steeds all they could. It was for this reason that, much as they hated Del Pinzo and his gang, they would not deprive these outlaws of what was a means of life—their horses.

"But they won't ride after us, and I don't believe they'll give us any more trouble," chuckled Bud, as he visioned the outlaws, used to their comfortable if clumsy saddles, riding bareback. To a horseman this is the limit of torture, for the horses of the west are no circus animals, with broad, flat backs. Instead, they generally have a ridge of bone on which it is almost impossible to ride, even when a blanket or two is strapped on in place of a saddle. Only an Indian can manage to ride along with but a blanket for a seat.

"Yes, we put one over on them all right," agreed Dick.

"The only thing about it is that they held us up," remarked Nort.
"We're several hours behind our schedule now."

"It can't be helped," spoke Bud, looking at a deep scratch on his hand—a scratch caused by a glancing bullet. "We can't really do anything toward rescuing Rosemary and Floyd until we strike the trail of the Yaquis, and it's mostly guess work until then."

"But when we do locate them!" exclaimed Nort, as he gripped the handle of his gun, "we'll let 'em see what a mistake they made!"

"You got rid of a mouthful that time, son," observed Yellin' Kid. And then, lifting his voice he roared out:

"As I was ridin' on the trail,
My true love for to see.
I met a four-legged grizzly bear,
An' th' grizzly he met me!

"'Oh kind Mr. Bear,' I gently called,
'Move on!' but he shook his head.
So then I ups with my .45
An' fills him full of lead!"

Having gotten this out of his "system," Yellin' Kid seemed to feel better. He smiled genially at the boy ranchers, and flapping his hat down on the side of his pony sent the animal ahead in a cloud of dust to join some of his companions in the lead.

Thus, making merry as possible under the circumstances, the outfit from Diamond X resumed the trail, the more experienced cowboys looking here and there for any "sign" that would indicate the presence or the passage of the Yaquis.

As a matter of fact Snake Purdee did not expect to "meet up" with any of the Indians for some time. He and Rolling Stone had talked the matter over, and Rolling Stone had given the benefit of his experience in trailing Yaquis.

"With them," said the new acquisition to Diamond X, "it's a sort of a flash in the pan. They get excited for some reason or other, have a war dance, a pow wow or some ceremony, and before they know it some crazy leader has taken the trail with some of his friends, and they're bent on shooting up some Mexican or American town, getting strong drink when they can, and stealing everything they can lay their dirty paws on.

"That's when they're in the first rush of excitement, and I take it that it was on a time like this the Yaquis took Miss Rosemary and Floyd. Why they did this, instead of shooting 'em, as they generally do, I can't make out. The Yaquis don't ordinarily use those methods."

"Unless they took my cousins to hold for ransom," suggested Bud.

"Well, of course that's possible, but I didn't know the Yaquis were that smart," answered Rolling Stone. "Still, some new leader may have gotten together a band, or it may be some half breed, or even some renegade American is at the bottom of this. I can understand a chap like that holding prisoners for ransom.

"But what I started to say was that once the first wild outburst is over, the Yaquis will keep mighty quiet. They won't go about with a brass band, advertising their hiding places."

"You mean it won't be easy to find them?" asked Nort.

"That's it, son. They're going to be mighty cute and foxy, and while a Yaqui isn't in it with our old time American Indians in the matter of covering a trail, still we aren't going to have any walkover. We've got our work cut out for us."

"I believe you!" shouted Yellin' Kid. "But we'll get the devils sooner or later."

"The sooner the better," said Rolling Stone quietly, and there was in his very quietness a menace which the boys understood very well. Every hour that Rosemary and Floyd remained in the hands of the Yaquis meant an ever increasing danger. And once the mad frenzy of the Indians wore off and they began to realize what they had done, anticipating the consequences once they were captured with the prisoners in their possession, there was hardly a question of what they would do to Rosemary and

Floyd. The captives would be killed to get them out of the way.

It was this that urged the rescue party ahead with all the speed possible, and consistent with preserving their horses' power to travel.

In spite of wounds, and some were seriously hurt (one dying later) there was no sign of gloom in the midst of the party of which the boy ranchers formed an important element. Some of the cowboys sang, and Yellin' Kid intoned another verse or two of the many songs with which he seemed plentifully provided.

Coming to a deep ravine, along which the trail led into the mountains, where it was reported the Yaquis had headed, Snake Purdee called a halt.

"What's the matter now?" asked Rolling Stone.

"Do you see anything?" asked Bud, for he noticed the veteran cowboy looking down into the black depths.

"No," answered Snake slowly, "but it strikes me this is a good place to get rid of the saddles and truck we took off Del Pinzo. No use carting the duffle along. It's no good to us and it only tires our pack mules. Heave it down this gully, boys and we'll ride lighter."

This was soon done, and the baggage animals, at least, went forward with easier burdens. The trail became more rough as it led upward, but Snake explained that they would cross one range of the mountain, and come to a level plain which must be traversed before the second range would be reached.

"And we'll either come across the Yaquis in the plain, or as we go up the second mountain," said the cowboy. "That will be about their limit I fancy."

They camped that night on the downward slope of the first mountain, having crossed the ridge through a narrow pass, not easy to negotiate. There was a more tense feeling when this night camp was made than at any time before.

"For it seems now, somehow," explained Bud, "that we're within striking distance of the Yaquis. We're trailing 'em close!"

"The closer the better—so, we can get a few shots at 'em!" declared Nort.

"Will they really make a stand and fight?" asked Dick.

"I don't know," Bud replied. "I never—"

"They'll fight all right!" interrupted Rolling Stone. "They'll fight now just through fear of being captured. The first hot impulses that caused them to run wild are cooling off. They'll be worse to tackle now than when they first took the war path, for they will be cool and calculating, while before they were hot headed, and anyone who used half his brains could best 'em. Yes, we aren't going to have a picnic."

"Well, we didn't come for that," said Dick grimly.

He and his companion boy ranchers were willing to endure all the hardships and dangers with the more seasoned cowboys, and Bud and Nort who, until within a comparatively recent time were unused to western ways, were now accounted as capable of Bud, than which there was no higher praise.

There was evident in the manner in which campfires were built, and a system of sentinel guards posted, that the older men realized the nearness of danger. The cowboys had dropped their half bantering manner, and sat grim-lipped and thoughtful of eye about the blaze. This change in their manners affected our youthful heroes who looked at one another somewhat apprehensively, and more than once let their hands stray to their weapons.

But the night passed without untoward incident, if we except a false alarm given by Bud when he was standing guard. He had been pacing backward and forward for some hours, and it was almost time for his relief, when he saw, peering over the top of a rock, what he took to be the feathered headdress of an Indian. Forgetting, for the moment that the Yaquis did not adopt the picturesque adornments of the American redmen, Bud fired, at the same time letting out a yell.

Of course, this roused the whole camp, and you can appreciate Bud's chagrin when his "Indian" proved to be nothing more than a waving branch of a bush topping a rock. The waving leaves had

looked like feathers in the starlight, by which alone Bud had seen them.

"Well, I wasn't taking any chances," he said, when the cause of his alarm was ascertained.

"That's right," Yellin' Kid assured him.

Morning saw the party in saddle again, and as better time could be made on the down trail, they reached the intervening plain of the valley, between the two mountain ranges well before noon.

A halt was made for "grub," and it was after this meal, when they were about to proceed again, that an astounding discovery was made. Dick gave the alarm. He had gone off a little way to get his pony, which had strayed, when he saw, on the far horizon, a band of horsemen. They were too distant to be made out clearly, but against the intensely blue sky Dick saw waving lances, and he at once shouted:

"Indians!"

This was enough to focus all eyes, first on him and then on the approaching band. The waving lances could plainly be seen now.

"And look there!" cried Nort, as he pointed to the North, a direction exactly opposite to that whence the horsemen discovered by Dick were approaching.

"More Indians!" shouted Yellin' Kid.

Snake Purdee leaped to a high rock and with rapid gaze swept the horizon.

"They're coming from all directions," he said grimly, as he leaped down and began a rapid survey of their position, with a view to its defence. "We're being surrounded!"

And this was so. From all points there rode in on the outfit from Diamond X an ever narrowing circle of horsemen, many of whom carried lances which pointed toward the zenith.

"They aren't Yaquis," exclaimed Rolling Stone. "Those Mexican Indians don't carry lances. They must have met up with a band from some American reservation and have gotten them to go on the warpath. This looks bad!"

CHAPTER XV

WITH THE TROOPERS

With a skill and foresight which never seemed to leave them, the leaders of the rescue expedition had selected the place for the dinner stop with a view to its possible defense in case of emergency. This was part and parcel of life in the west, especially when on an expedition of this character.

In consequence there were several natural places of refuge and hiding, behind which a fight could be conducted. And as soon as it was ascertained that a body of horseman—hostile it seemed they must be—were riding against them, the first thought was how best a fight could be conducted.

"Get in the horses!" commanded Rolling Stone. "They'll shoot them off first crack out of the box, for they'll know we're done for without our animals."

As the rescuers had been about to move when the approaching party was discovered, and as some of the cowboys actually had their horses in hand, the securing of the remainder of the steeds was a work of no great moment.

At one edge of the roughly outlined circle in which the noon camp had been pitched, was a group of big rocks, that would make a natural stable and hiding place for the horses. The animals were led into this little corral, and made fast there by lariats. As much of the baggage as possible was piled in with the horses.

This much done by Bud and his friends it was necessary to look to themselves, for the strange horsemen were slowly but surely coming on, and it was beyond question that they had entirely surrounded our heroes. From all points of the compass, a thin line it is true, but one in which there were no breaks, in came the attackers.

"We've got to form a circle ourselves," said Snake grimly. "Get down as low as you can, boys, each one behind a rock, and with one at your back if you can make it. They won't rush us at first. They'll try to pick us off until they find out how many of us there are."

Quickly the others followed his advice. It was an admirable place to defend, and other things being equal could be held by a small band against a large body. But the factors of food and water would enter into the fight, and though the camp was watered by a little stream, everyone from Diamond X knew the first act of the attackers would be to go higher up and cut off the supply of fluid. In this hot summer season men and beasts could only last a short time without water.

Then, having seen to it that the boy ranchers and the others were in as good a position of defense as possible, Snake Purdee picked out his own little niche and laid out on the ground in front of him his supply of cartridges.

Each man—and by "man" I include the boy ranchers—had a rifle and a revolver, or, rather, automatic, each weapon using cartridges of the same caliber. Thus only one sort of ammunition had to be packed, and there was greater efficiency afforded.

"Get ready," called Yellin' Kid in as low a voice as he ever used. "They've come to a stop for a talk, and they'll begin shooting soon I reckon."

The feet of the steeds ridden by the advancing horsemen had raised a cloud of dust which hung about them like a hazy curtain, preventing a clear view. In fact, after the first glimpse of the riders they had only been seen as dim figures approaching through this haze of dust.

But now, as they had stopped, as Yellin' Kid had said, the dust began to drift away, and, for the first time our friends had a comparatively clear view of those surrounding them.

It was Bud who first gave the good news. Looking intently at a horseman nearest him, the boy suddenly leaped to his feet and gave a shout that could be none other than joyous in its meaning.

"Get down, you idiot!" cried Snake. "Do you want a bullet through you?"

But the lad continued to shout and yell, waving his hat, and there was no fusillade of shots from the ring of horsemen. Then, for the first time Bud made himself understandable, for he shouted:

"They aren't Indians! They aren't Indians! They're United States Troopers! Hooray! Now we've got our help!"

"Troopers?" repeated Snake, for a cloud of dust had blown about him, greatly obscuring his vision.

"Troopers—sure!" yelled Nort, now seeing what Bud had beheld.

And a moment later it was clear to all of the surrounded band that the horsemen were, indeed, mounted men of Uncle Sam's cavalry—a company of lancers, a type of the armed force that has gone out of existence now, but one which was very effective in some Indian fights.

A bugle rang out clear and sweet from somewhere in that surrounding circle of troopers, and instantly the outer edges of the ring began closing in. Then our friends, knowing their fright had been without foundation, rose up from their hiding places and, standing together, with Snake at their head as commander, waited for what was to come next.

It was not long in manifesting itself. A trooper, evidently an orderly from a group of officers in front of our friends, rode up, waved his hand in place of a salute when he saw he had to deal with one of his own kind, and asked:

"Who are you and what are you doing?"

"We're from Diamond X ranch," replied Snake, "and we're on the trail of the Yaquis who have captured some of our friends!"

"Oh, the Yaquis!" exclaimed the trooper, in evident surprise. "Why, we're after the same bloody beggars! Glad to have met you. We seem to be off the trail for some reason. Captain Marshal will want to speak to you. Better come with me."

"Wait 'til I get my horse," murmured Snake, for, like all westerners, he hated to take more than a few steps out of the saddle.

A moment later he was riding toward the officers of Uncle Sam's troopers, while the remainder of the lancers riding in, mingled with the small force from Diamond X.

"It's good to see you fellows!" chuckled Bud as the bronze-faced soldiers gathered around the boy ranchers.

"We were just about to open fire on you," said one of the lancers, and Nort and Dick noticed that in addition to the steel-tipped weapon each trooper carried a carbine and wore a revolver in his belt. The lances were, in reality, more for show than for actual use, though in charging the hostile Indians the spears had served many a useful purpose.

"Glad you didn't," said Yellin' Kid. "There'd have been trouble, for we were all primed for you," and he waved his hand toward the rocks amid which some cowboys were just arising, picking up the ammunition they had spread out for quick use.

"We thought you were Yaquis, and we had orders to shoot to kill," explained another trooper.

"And we took you for Indians—not exactly Yaquis, for they don't carry lances," said Dick. "I'm glad it was a mistake all around."

"But say, do you fellows know anything about these dirty Mexicans who have crossed the border?" asked a third trooper, a lieutenant from his stripes, it would appear. "I won't call 'em Indians, though I reckon they are, of a sort. But where are they? We got orders to take after 'em, but we can't get sight of so much as a dirty blanket."

"Well, we think we're on their trail," Bud answered, "though maybe we are as far off as you are. Anyhow—"

But he did not complete the sentence. From the distance a single shot rang out, and as all turned they saw, standing on the sharp horizon line, a solitary figure, from near which arose a thin wisp of smoke.

CHAPTER XVI

INDIAN "SIGN"

"What's that?" cried Snake, turning from where he had been talking with Captain Marshall. "Real Indians this time?"

"Nothing to worry about," answered the commander of the troopers with a smile. "That's one of my scouts, and he's evidently found something."

"Found something?" questioned the veteran cowboy.

"Indian sign, most likely. I sent several men out, just before we sighted your party and took you for the Yaquis. I told my men, if they discovered anything, to get within sight of us and fire one shot. Then they were to stay on the spot until we came to investigate, and that's what we'll do now."

"Do you think it's the trail of the Yaquis he has discovered?" asked Nort, waving his hand toward the solitary horseman.

"It may be—I rather hope so, for we haven't had any luck thus far in locating the beggars. When we sighted you we thought we were in for a fight, but it didn't happen," the captain added, his voice quite rueful.

"I notice you came along all primed for business!" chuckled Yellin' Kid.

"But we were ready for you—in case you had turned out to be those Mexican imps!" added Rolling Stone.

"Yes, you seemed to have picked out a good spot," complimented the cavalry captain. "We were just talking among ourselves that we were going to have trouble in getting you out, when we saw one of you wave a hat and then we knew it was all right. In a way we were glad, for this fighting is nasty business at best, though we don't pass any of it up when it comes our way," he added with an air of pride in his troop.

"You weren't any gladder to find out there was a mistake than we were," said Dick. "You soldiers

looked like a lot of Indians with lances and scalps dangling from them." Indeed the lances of the troopers were decorated with wisps from the tails of horses, and, at a distance, might have resembled grewsome human scalps.

"There are few Indians, now-a-days who use lances," said Captain Marshall. "They went out of date about the time Fenimore Cooper wrote about Leather Stocking. The Indians didn't keep to their bows and arrows, or lances, once they could get guns and powder. I don't know much about the Yaquis, but I fancy they did the same—discarded their lances, if they ever used any, and their bows, for guns."

"Another thing," added Lieutenant Snow, who was next in command to his captain, "scalps were too precious a trophy to dangle from the point of a lance. Some Indians may have tied strands of human hair on their lances, but I doubt if they used scalps. The scalps were hung at the belt of the man who took them, to be afterward displayed in his tepee. But I don't believe the Mexican Indians followed that practice, though of course I'm not certain about it."

"The modern Yaquis are mean enough to do anything," said Rolling Stone. "What the old timers did doesn't matter now. It's what these of today do. And I reckon ye've heard how a party of 'em has taken prisoners some of their friends," and he waved his hand toward the outfit from Diamond X, of which he was not yet a full-fledged member.

"Yes, we heard about the uprising," admitted Captain Marshall. "We had orders to take the trail, and we've been on it since. Well, as long as you are ready, we may as well trot over and see what the scout has to report. I hope he can put us on the real trail."

The bugle sounded, the troopers formed, and with the boy ranchers and their friends falling in the rear, an unofficial part of the company of regulars, the cavalcade set forth again.

On the way Snake Purdee, who rode beside Captain Marshall, told such details as he possessed about the capture of Rosemary and Floyd. The officer had heard pretty much the same story, for it had been wired to distant points on the theory that the Yaquis would scatter, and there was no telling in which direction they would travel.

"So Del Pinzo is on the rampage again; is he?" asked the Captain, as they neared the lone scout, who was patiently waiting to impart such information as he had.

"Well, he won't rampage an awful lot until he gets a new outfit!" chuckled Yellin' Kid, who had ridden up to be on hand when the scout was reached.

"What do you mean? Did you shoot him up?" asked the cavalry captain. "If you did you ought to get a medal of honor, for of all the rascals in this section he's the worst."

"We shot him and his followers up a bit," admitted Snake, "but we didn't damage 'em as we ought. However we took their horse furniture and guns away and left 'em their animals. It'll be a few days before they get active again."

"Good!" exclaimed Captain Marshall. "And now we'll hear what Kelly has to report."

The scout saluted as his commanding officer rode up, and the others, realizing that there was a certain need of reserve in this first interview, held back until the captain should signify that he was ready to talk to them. For a time Captain Marshall and Private Kelly talked in low tones, the scout frequently leaning over to point to something on the ground, the captain gazing intently where his trooper indicated. Finally the commander waved his hand to invite his fellow officers and troopers, as well as the members of Diamond X, to approach.

"Kelly has found it," said the captain. "Plenty of Indian sign, which shows the Yaquis, or some of them at least, passed this way. Here's the trail, and we'll follow it. Do you want to come with us?" he asked of Snake Purdee.

"Well, we'd like to, if it isn't asking too much. Our main object is to get within shooting distance of these Yaquis, and save this Rosemary girl and her brother."

"Precisely our object," the captain said. "And as long as we have the same business I think we can do better together than if we separate. Your men will undoubtedly be of service to us if the trail gets fainter, and there's no telling how many are in this band, so the more guns we have the better."

"My idea," agreed the leader from Diamond X. "And now let's have a look at this Indian sign. Rolling Stone here claims to know a lot about the Yaquis, and he may be able to put us wise to some of their wrinkles. Come here, Stone!" he invited.

In order not to obliterate the faint marks in the soil which indicated the passage of a body of horsemen, the troopers, with Bud and his friends, had halted some distance away from the lone scout. The latter had remained a little way off the trail, so his own horse's feet would not mingle with those of the enemy.

For some time the older cowboys, Rolling Stone, Captain Marshall and a few of his men who had fought Indians years back, gazed at the Indian "sign" as it is called. In this sense the word means the evidences left by a passing body of Indians, the casual and accidental record of passage. The word is also used to indicate arbitrary marks and symbols made by one body of Indians to leave a message for some body of following savages. This sign language is very difficult for a person not accustomed to it to read, though it can not be said that the degenerate Yaquis had the art down as fine as had our own American Indians of two or three generations ago.

"Well, they've been along here, and they're headed that way," said Rolling Stone, thus confirming the opinion of the older troopers.

"Then the thing to do is to follow them," said the Captain. "Give the signal, bugler!" he called.

Once more the clear notes rang out, and the party started off after the Yaquis.

Nort and Dick, riding beside Bud, toward the rear of the cavalcade, looked down to see what the "sign" consisted of. Aside from some hoof marks in the earth they saw nothing.

"They might have been made by our own ponies," observed Nort.

"Yes, but they weren't," Bud declared.

"How can they tell?" asked Dick.

"Oh, I don't know exactly, but there are dozens of little points that an Indian trailer looks for," Bud answered. "He can tell whether the horses trotted or walked. He can tell whether the man who rode him was a tenderfoot or a cowpuncher. And of course it's easy enough to tell in which direction a horse is going."

"Unless they put the shoes on backwards," said Nort.

"There isn't much of that done," said Bud. "And, as a matter of fact, as you know, they don't shoe many horses out here. They let 'em run barefoot. Anyhow, it looks as though we really were on the trail of the Yaquis at last."

"I hope so!" agreed Nort and Dick.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ALARM

While the boy ranchers and their friends from Diamond X had joined forces with Uncle Sam's troopers and were warm on the trail of the Yaquis, the squalid, degenerate and vicious band that had captured Rosemary and Floyd still retained possession of their captives. Though disheartened and apprehensive, Rosemary and her brother had made up their minds to one thing—they would not be separated—come what might.

For his sister's sake Floyd had firmly decided that if they attempted to take Rosemary off by herself he would, at any cost, make an effort to follow, even if it resulted in his death at the hands of the Indians.

As for Rosemary, she had but one thought—to remain near her brother at any cost. And as she had so far managed to conceal from the Yaquis the fact that she possessed her efficient automatic, and a supply of ammunition, she felt a sense of security that otherwise would not have been with her. She, too, resolved on desperate measures before she would let them separate her and Floyd.

So when Mike, as the one who carried out the orders of his villainous chief Paz, tried to take Rosemary off by herself, probably to break her spirit and induce her to send a letter to her friends

asking that ransom money be forwarded—when Mike tried to do this he received one of the surprises of his miserable life as he found himself looking into the muzzle of Rosemary's gun.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian.

"I don't know exactly what that means," said Rosemary coolly, as she held the gun with steady hand so that it "covered" Mike, "but my brother and I are going to stay together. If you try to separate us I'll shoot as many of you as I can, and I'm a pretty good shot," she added grimly. "Then I'll shoot myself and him before I'll let you try any of your tricks on us!"

She spoke with such fierce earnestness that, though all of her words may not have been intelligible to her captors, they at least understood her intent.

Paz gave a grunt, half of admiration and half of anger at this unexpected change in his plans. Rosemary suddenly wheeled, facing him. She swung her weapon to cover the evil rascal.

There was a spurt of flame, a puff of smoke and before the crack of the report snapped out the dirty, greasy hat of Paz went spinning from his head.

A cry of dismay arose from the followers of the Yaqui chief and mingled with his own grunt of rage. With a yell Mike reached for his gun, but with a gesture his chief stopped him, saying something in their own tongue.

It was, undoubtedly, a command to refrain from shooting down the captives, which was the evident intent of Mike. And of course that could easily have been done, for the Yaquis were well armed with rifles and revolvers they had stolen in their raid. They were not the best shots in the world, but an infuriated band of them firing on a weary boy and girl, would have made short work of their lives.

"That wasn't a miss!" said Rosemary with a laugh, as she still held her gun to cover the leader. "I just wanted to shoot off your hat. I could have aimed lower down if I had wanted to. That was just to show you I know how to shoot!"

"Ugh!" grunted Paz, and there was open admiration on his rascally face. He talked rapidly to Mike and some of the latter's companions who had gathered around, and there was no further attempt to take Floyd away from Rosemary.

The latter, however, was on her guard, for she feared they would rush her, and try to take away her weapon, the unexpected display of which, as much as her cleverness in shooting away the hat of Paz, had held the Indians at bay for the necessary reaction to take place.

"Yo' all right!" grunted Paz with another grin, while one of his followers picked up the hat, looking curiously at the bullet hole through it: "Yo' smart gal!"

"Sure did have your nerve with you!" complimented Floyd, as he stood beside his sister. "I wish I had my gun!"

"It's probably just as well you didn't have," she said with a smile—rather a wan and weary one it must be admitted.

"Why?" demanded Floyd. "I'm as good a shot as you are."

"I know it. But in matters of this kind ruffians will stand for more from a girl or woman than they would from a man. If you had drawn a gun they probably would have shot you down without a moment's hesitation. But when I pulled mine it took them off their feet, so to speak."

"I wish it would take off a lot of their ugly heads, and their dirty bodies, too!" grunted Floyd. "Say, Rose, what are we going to do? This is a terrible pickle to be in."

"It's better to be in a pickle, for that's a sort of preservative, Floyd," she joked, though how she had the heart to do this she herself scarcely realized. "As long as they keep us in pickle there's some hope," she went on, with a tired little laugh. "But when they take us out—well, I'll be glad to have my gun," she added grimly.

She still held the weapon, but it was evident that she was not going to be obliged to use it again at once, either for intimidation or actual defence. Paz waved to her to put it away, and she did, slipping it into a pocket of her skirt.

It was a pocket she had had made for just such a purpose as carrying a gun where the ordinary observer would not see it. And if you have ever hunted for a pocket in your mother's or sister's skirt, and given up in disgust, you will understand that the subterfuge of Rosemary was not as simple as at

first appears. Of course she realized that if they had been desperately bent on finding her weapon the Yaquis could have taken it from her. But they evidently did not dream that she had one. And, now, when she had given a demonstration of how quickly she could draw and use it, they would be a bit careful of how they approached her.

Floyd's weapon, of course had been taken from him almost at once. He had been taken unawares or this might not have been the case. But it was probably better, under the circumstances, that he had no gun. Or, as Rosemary had said, he might have rashly fired and the answering shots from the Indians might have killed both of the captives.

"Go on!" Paz said to Rosemary, indicating that she and her brother might remain together.

She had brought about what she intended.

The captives were led farther in among the rocks to a sort of natural cave, and there they were left, some food having been tossed down where they could reach it. It was the most primitive sort of a prison, so simple, in fact, that after a while Floyd said:

"What's to hinder us walking away from here, Rosemary? They aren't watching us, and if we pack some of this grub—rotten as it is—maybe we can get away, and reach Diamond X ranch."

"I'm afraid we'd have small chance of that," Rosemary answered wearily. "What I'm in hopes of is that some one will come to the rescue. I'm sure my note will bring us help."

"Yes, but *when*?" asked Floyd, a bit fretfully. "It may be too late. I'm going to see if we can't get away. Stay here and I'll crawl up to the top of the rock and see what the situation is."

"I think you'll find it isn't as easy as it looks," said his sister.

Nor was it. In the first place the climb up the jagged rocks was wearisome, but Floyd managed it. But when he was at the top, and looked over to see if there was a trail of escape, he was unpleasantly surprised by a piece of stone hitting him sharply on the head.

At first he thought it was a fragment of rock dropping from above, perhaps dislodged by his exertions. But there was no rock over his head. He was at the highest peak in that immediate vicinity.

Then the lad's eyes roved about and he saw, sitting in a natural niche of the stone, not far from him, a greasy Indian, who held his hand poised to toss another stone at Floyd.

The Indian grinned and motioned to the captive to go back. Then Floyd understood. This Indian was a sentry, placed on guard to prevent the captives leaving.

"Well?" questioned Rosemary, as Floyd slid back to where she was spreading out some blankets that had been tossed in with their food.

"No go," was the discouraged answer. "They've got us hemmed in."

"We'll just have to wait—that's all," said the girl. "I don't believe they'll do us any real harm now. They probably want money for letting us go. I expect they'll be having us write notes, soon, to Uncle Henry, asking him to forward ten thousand dollars, or some amount like that."

"Ten thousand dollars!" gasped Floyd.

"Mexican!" laughed Rosemary with a joking spirit she did not altogether feel.

Thus left to themselves, in a sort of natural prison of the rocks, a roofless cave, the captives spent the night, rolled in blankets. It was cool without a campfire, but none was allowed them. Sore, stiff and disheartened, Rosemary and Floyd arose soon after the sun was up, and made a pretense at breakfast. They were given some tin cups of black, bitter and muddy coffee, without sugar, but it was most comforting.

"I never tasted anything better!" declared Floyd, draining the last drops.

"Nor I," agreed his sister.

There was a movement among the Indians, and it was evident that they were about to take to the trail again. Rosemary and Floyd wondered how far they would thus be led into the mountains. Surely if a demand for ransom money was to be made it must be made soon.

But then they did not know how far they were from the ranch of their uncle, whom they had set out to

visit. They might be going toward it or away from it. They had lost all sense of direction.

Suddenly something seemed to take place down in the main camp of the Indians that indicated a new element in the grim adventure. There were shouts and excited cries—cries of alarm, it was very evident.

"Oh!" cried Rosemary with shining eyes. "Maybe it's a rescue party after us?"

"I hope so!" shouted Floyd.

A moment later Mike, his face showing unmistakable signs of fear, came rushing in, and by signs, and talk in his own tongue, of which Rosemary and Floyd could understand a few words, he indicated that they were to follow him.

Meanwhile the confusion and alarm in the main body of the Yaquis increased.

What had happened?

CHAPTER XVIII

SEPARATED

Though realizing how useless it was to question Mike—useless because she doubted if he understood her, and equally futile because he would not bother to answer her—still Rosemary fired a volley of questions at the Indian.

"If I had my way I'd fire a volley of bullets at him—provided I had them to fire!" growled Floyd. But he had not, and Rosemary did not deem this an occasion to again produce her weapon, which she was keeping as a last resort.

Besides, Mike did not betray any specially hostile intentions. He seemed merely anxious to get Rosemary and Floyd out of their prison pen, so to speak, and on the move.

"But what's it all about?" demanded Rosemary. "What's the excitement, and what's the hurry?"

For that there was excitement and an alarm, and that she and her brother were being urged to hurry was very evident.

"Yes, what is it?" and Floyd added his demand to that of his sister.

"No *sabe!*" grunted Mike, that being his way of using his command of Spanish to indicate that he did not know. More likely he did not want to tell. But there was no way of forcing him.

"Oh, we've got to ride those horrid knife-backed ponies!" half groaned Rosemary, as she saw led out for the use of herself and her brother the steeds on which they had been carried thus far into the mountains. "They're so bony I'm afraid their backbones will cut through the saddle."

"They look as though they might," agreed Floyd. "Gee, but I'm dirty and I'd like a shave and this is perfectly rotten altogether!" he completed with a sigh.

"Don't mention such a thing as a bath tub!" wailed Rosemary. "I don't believe these heathen know what water means for washing in."

Certainly the appearances of the Yaquis bore out that assertion. They were dirty, grimy and greasy to a degree—and a high degree at that.

Rosemary wore bloomers under a short skirt, an attire eminently suited to women folk in the west. For Rosemary was a rider of no small ability, more at home in the saddle than on the seat of an auto, and she and Floyd counted on much riding once they reached their uncle's ranch which now, alas, seemed far away.

Thus attired the girl found no difficulty in getting into the saddle, and her ability provoked murmurs of admiration from the Yaquis.

"Oh, if I only had a chance I'd show you how to ride!" declared Rosemary, when she understood that

her skill as a horsewoman was being commented on. "Let me set out in the open once, with a good horse under me instead of a specimen of crow-bait, and I'll open your eyes!"

But this was not to be—just yet.

Floyd, too, was a good rider, but his sister had more of a natural knack with ponies, and often bested him in a race. He too, now swung a leg over the saddle and mounted. With Mike in the lead, and several of the Yaquis bringing up in the rear as a guard against a retreat on the part of the captives, they were urged forward out of the rocky defile into which they had come the night before.

Eagerly Rosemary and Floyd looked about them for some indication as to the cause of the sudden excitement, and the movement among the Indians. Anxiously the captives scanned the horizon for a sight of some rescue party, the approach of which might have sent the Indians scurrying for cover. But nothing was to be seen—at least of that nature, though Rosemary and her brother did see something that caused them great surprise.

This was a sight of the main body of the Yaquis, under the leadership of Paz, moving off at a right angle to the main trail, while Mike, evidently in command of the smaller party which guarded the captives, was going on up the mountain slope, farther into the fastnesses of the rugged peaks.

"Say, what's up?" asked Floyd, of his sister.

"Don't know, but it looks as if they had separated. One band going one way and our bunch this way. I don't like it either. I'd rather deal with Paz, ugly as he is, than with this Mike, who is Irish only because we've given him that name," Rosemary answered.

"It is queer," murmured Floyd, as he guided his pony along the difficult trail. "Paz has gone off with the main body of Indians, and left us in charge of these. If I only had a gun we could take a chance and rush them, Rose. There's only about three dozen!"

"Too many for just one gun," she answered.

"But can you guess what the game is?" her brother wanted to know.

"Well that's all I can do—guess. From what went on soon after breakfast I imagine some of the Indians saw, or heard about a party that was on their trail."

"You mean a party from Diamond X?"

"Either that or soldiers."

"That's so! Soldiers!" cried Floyd. "I hadn't thought of them! Of course there are troopers stationed out here at various places. And word of the Yaquis uprising is sure to go to them. Maybe a band of U.S. Regulars is on the way to save us, Rose!"

"I hope so. But we can't count on it. What I do think, though, is that Paz took alarm at something, and he isn't going to chance being found with us on his hands."

"You mean he's passing the buck to Mike here?"

"Something like that. If our friends or Uncle Sam's men round up this bunch of cut throats and find us in their possession it will go hard with them. So Paz isn't taking any chances."

"That may be the explanation," agreed Rosemary. "Anyhow we're being taken farther into the mountains by a small band, and the larger body is sliding off to one side."

"It's a queer thing," said Floyd, as he and his sister rode along side by side, "that these Yaquis didn't turn back into Mexico, and take us across the border instead of rushing us into the United States."

"Maybe they were afraid to cross the border, which is pretty sure to be better guarded than usual, after this outbreak," Rosemary said. "Or maybe the Yaquis didn't want to share spoils with any of their friends on their own side of the fence."

"That's so!" agreed Floyd. "And now that there's a chance of ransom money—or these beggars think there is—I reckon they're less anxious than before to whack it up."

"That's it! They're taking us as far off as they can to keep the cash among themselves, and, meanwhile, Paz leads the main body away from us."

"But what that move means I'd like to know," mused Rosemary.

It was rather a puzzle to her and her brother. All they were sure of was what they saw—that the Yaquis had separated, most of them following Paz, while the captives were left in charge of the villainous Mike and his selected followers.

Rosemary slipped her hand into her pocket to feel the handle of her automatic.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIGHT

The discovery of the Indian trail, and the unmistakable evidence that the marks had been left by a band of Yaquis, was the most encouraging news the boy ranchers and their friends had received since starting out to rescue Rosemary and Floyd. It was a fortunate meeting with the U.S. Troopers.

"Only for that," observed Bud, as he rode along with his cousins, "we'd have been way off. We were headed just in the opposite direction when we took to cover thinking the Yaquis were coming after us."

"Yes, and the longer we traveled the farther off we'd be," agreed Nort.
"It's lucky all around."

"It'll be luckier when we come up to this band of Greasers and take Rosemary and Floyd away," declared Dick.

"Just think!" exulted Nort. "We'll soon be taking part in a real Indian fight! I didn't think there could be such a thing outside of a novel."

"Are these Yaquis real Indians?" asked Dick. "They don't impress me that way. Seems more like fighting some low down colored men."

"I wouldn't insult a decent negro by comparing him to an Indian of the present Yaquis tribe," laughed Bud. "They aren't at all alike. But the Yaquis are real Indians of one of the Mexican races—a race that was once among the best. Of course, even then, they weren't like our American Indians."

"I guess I'm looking for tomahawks and scalping knives and listening for warwhoops!" admitted Dick. "I have an Indian stone pipe home, with a long flat stem, made of a piece of oak, with designs burned in it. Around one end are wound some red and blue beads, and the stem has some old faded ribbons tied to it. Have the Yaquis anything like that?" he asked Bud.

"Not that I know of. The present generation smoke cigarettes when they can get 'em, something no self-respecting American Indian would dream of. Maybe the Yaquis have some such ceremony as smoking the peace pipe, but I don't know about it. I never saw any of their stone pipes. I know the kind you mean, Dick. The pipe part is hollowed out with a small hole—hardly holds enough tobacco for a good smoke, I'd say, though I never tried it."

"That's the kind," Dick said. "Well, to my mind, these Yaquis aren't half so—so—well, you know what I mean," he concluded, at loss for the right word.

"Picturesque," suggested his brother.

"That's it! They aren't at all the kind of Indians you'd like to read about."

"Rex Beach doesn't think much of 'em," commented Bud. "I read in one of his books where he says the Yaquis are a playful people, and they dearly love to hold up Southern Pacific trains. It's one of their favorite sports and pastimes."

"Do you really think they do?" asked Dick. "If they're train robbers they have more gumption than I thought."

"Well, I don't know," admitted Bud. "Rex Beach writes good stuff, and has some corking movies out, but maybe he was joking when he spoke of the Yaquis. Anyhow we know what they've done to our friends, and it's up to us to pay 'em back!"

"You said a hollow-toothful that time, kid!" declared Rolling Stone, as he cantered up ahead to take part in a consultation, caused when a new "sign" was discovered.

The discovery of new marks in the soil—marks left by the passing along of some Indians—was deemed of enough importance to call a halt, while those most familiar in the interpretation of such mystic evidences, made certain what they indicated.

In this discussion the boy ranchers could have no part for they were not at all versed in the meaning of what was quite plain to Rolling Stone, some of the trooper scouts and a few of the cowboys.

"We'll eat as long as we had to stop," decided Captain Marshall, when it was made known to him that some of the scouts wanted to scurry about in a circle, and ascertain if there were any more evidences that would help solve many vital questions.

The troopers had come out well rationed—much better so, in fact than had our friends, and the soldiers extended an invitation to their comrade in arms to partake of "grub," an invitation that was quickly accepted. For the American soldier is the best fed of any in the world.

In the midst of the meal word was sent back to have Buck Tooth, the old Indian in the service of Bud, to come out to where the trooper scouts and cowboys were having a consultation.

"Buck Tooth can tell 'em what's what," declared Bud. "He claims to be a Yaqui, though since these imps have pulled off this stunt I think I'll get Buck Tooth to change his tribe. But he can read Indian sign all right."

This was evidently so for, a little later, exultant shouts on the part of the trooper scouts and the cowboys announced that something new had been found. And it was Buck Tooth's discovery as the boy ranchers learned soon.

The old Indian had carefully studied the trail, and then, going off to one side, had hunted about until he found what he was in evident search of—another trail, leading in the opposite direction from that our friends had been following.

"Yaquis come 'long here—go up to mountain, then come back 'gin, same way like, then go like so," and Buck Tooth held out his arm stiffly, extending two fingers of his hand wide apart like a fork.

"I see what he means!" exclaimed Snake Purdee. "They doubled on their track for part of the way back, and then branched off from the trail, thinking to fool us. But they didn't."

"It looks that way," agreed Lieutenant Snow. "This trail Buck Tooth discovered is much the fresher. We ought to follow that."

And this they did, after a hasty meal.

Once more they were after the Yaquis, and late that night one of the scouts in the lead car riding back at full speed with the news:

"They're right ahead of us!"

"Wow!" yelled Bud.

"Hurray!" shouted Dick.

"Get ready for the fight!" cried Nort.

"Wait a minute now, boys!" advised Snake. "You may have a proper part in the fracas, but remember we're with the United States troops, and under the leadership of Captain Marshall. We must do as he says."

"Oh, I guess the Captain will give the boys a chance," said Lieutenant Snow with a smile, as he gave an order to the buglar.

The stragglers rode in, the troops were quickly formed for immediate action, and other scouts were sent out to report on the location and disposition of the Yaquis, which were about three miles in advance, the first scout said.

"Did you see anything of Rosemary or Floyd?" asked Bud anxiously.

"No. I wasn't close enough for that. But the beggars are legging it for all they're worth!"

"Then let's get after them!" cried the Captain. "We don't want them to get away!"

The pace had not been fast, so the horses were comparatively fresh, and they were now urged into a trot, while skirmishers were sent on ahead to receive the first reports of the advanced scouts.

Suddenly, as the sun was beginning to dip below the horizon, some of the scouts came riding back, pointing down into a small, rocky valley, while the foremost yelled:

"They're making a stand down there!"

"Come on!" cried Captain Marshall, and, a few minutes later the fight against the Yaquis began.

CHAPTER XX

THE WHITE FLAG

The boy ranchers—at least two of them,—were much disappointed at the manner in which this fight against the Yaquis started. And I think I need not say that the two I mean were Dick and Nort. Bud, while he had never before taken part in a fight against Indians, did not expect so much of the romantically picturesque and so was not so disappointed.

But like most healthy lads Nort and Dick, in their early days, had read many books about the west, stories of adventures among the cowboys, miners and Indians—especially the latter. And all the stories had to do with the dashing manner in which the redmen fought, when they fought in the open. Of course, when they had the chance, the Indians preferred to sneak up on their victims and take them unawares. It was easier than standing up against gunfire.

But when the Indians had fought there was a dash and spirit about their attack that made the blood run faster in the veins. The redmen would begin circling about the band they were to attack, riding their ponies faster and faster as they approached, leaning over on the far side, to bring the animal's body between themselves and the hail of bullets. Then the doughty Indian, hanging to his saddle blanket by one moccasined foot would fire from under his pony's neck, dashing away in time to escape the white man's bullet.

That was warfare to make any real lad wish to toss aside his school books and hike for the great WEST!

And it was by anticipating such scenes as this that Nort and Dick were disappointed. But, in a way they had been prepared for it by seeing what manner of Indians the Yaquis were. No warpaint, no feathered headdresses, no necklaces of bears' claws, and of course no bows and arrows.

It must be admitted that the stories on which Nort and Dick had fed their imaginations were true enough about the time they were written. But the romantic Indians died off, or were confined on reservations, and those who occasionally sneaked over the border from Mexico, to make raids by which they gathered in cattle, ponies and weapons, were not of this class.

"It's like making an attack on a bunch of Greasers!" declared Nort, in some disgust, as the fight opened.

But just then a bullet sang uncomfortably close to his head, and as he ducked down—too late of course had the shot been true—Bud laughed and said:

"Don't lose sight of the fact that they can shoot!"

Indeed the Yaquis, thus forced to make a stand and fight, were not going to give up easily. The soldiers, the outfit from Diamond X and the boy ranchers were to have no easy time of it.

It was inspiring to witness the manner in which the troopers went about the business of rounding up the renegade Yaquis. At the first intimation that there was to be serious fighting, when the band had gotten close enough for effective work, the horses were sent back to be out of danger from the bullets. The animals belonging to Bud, Nort, Dick and their friends were taken in charge by some of the troopers. For it was vitally necessary that means of retreat or of advance be preserved. And of course there was no thought of retreat on the part of our friends.

Buck Tooth, the old Indian, slid from his pony with a sigh of relief. He did not care for riding. He liked an automobile, but he was too fat to sit in comfort on a rangy cow pony.

"Keep head down!" he advised Nort, as he saw the lad apparently duck a bullet.

"Guess that's good advice," admitted the lad with a sharp intaking of his breath.

"Do same like soldiers," went on Buck Tooth.

And, as I have said, the example of the troopers was one to be followed. This was not the first time

they had been in Indian fights, and against more worthy foes of the redman type. Each trooper picked out such natural shelter as was available, and then began looking over or around it for a sight of some human target at which to aim.

This sort of warfare would be carried on until there was a chance to rush the Yaquis, when the horses could be brought up for this purpose, or the charge made on foot. The Indians, exercising as great care for their steeds as had the white men, had also sent the ponies to the rear.

The place of the fight was about the middle of a small valley, closed in at either end by broken hills of rock, while rocks and great boulders were scattered over the floor of the vale, thus affording natural shelter for both sides. The rising ground at the rear of each party prevented the chance of a rapid retreat, and it was evident that the fight would go to a "finish."

Just how large the party of Yaquis was could not be told, but Captain Marshall believed he had more men than were rallied to the support of Paz, the notorious leader of the Mexicans.

"But I haven't seen Rosemary or Floyd," remarked Nort, as he wormed himself into a hollow place behind a rock, not far from Dick and Bud.

"Well, they are probably back in the rear. That's where they generally keep their captives," explained Dick. "If they see the fight going against them they'll send word back and some party will scoot out with our friends."

"Then we'll have the chasing to do all over again," ruefully observed Nort.

"Oh, I guess Captain Marshall knows a trick or two," commented Bud. "Look, he's sending some of his men out now to try and get in the rear of the Yaquis."

Dick and Nort turned to see a detachment of the troopers making their way on hands and knees out among the rocks. Their object was what Bud had stated—to get in the rear of the Indians and not only attack them from that vantage point but also to prevent a retreat with the captives, in case Rosemary and Floyd were at that point.

And now the fight began in earnest.

With each party in a position advantageous to it the first few minutes of attack and defense were marked only by firing that accomplished nothing.

That is to say there was an exchange of bullets, most of which spattered against the rocks, sending up sprays of vicious lead or showers of pulverized stone, but inflicting no dangerous wounds. One of the troopers was temporarily blinded by some of this stone dust getting into his eyes when a bullet struck the rock just over his head, and several others, including Lieutenant Snow, were "creased" by bullets when they exposed an arm or leg. But these were only trifles in the day's adventure.

If the Yaquis were not as romantic, tricky and brave as the old Apaches or Sioux, they were no quitters, and they seemed to be well directed. For after the first scattered firing on their part, they began a fusillade which increased in intensity.

"They aren't saving ammunition," commented Snake, as he drew a quick sight on an exposed head, and had the satisfaction of seeing it drop back out of sight in a manner that told of a hit.

"I guess they know it's a case of shoot or be shot," remarked Yellin' Kid, his tones low, for a wonder.

It must be stated that the troopers and those with them fought under a better system, and were better trained, to say nothing of being better individual marksmen. For this reason the casualties on the side of the Yaquis soon began to mount up. Occasional yells, and the spasmodic leaping up of some "warrior" as he was hit after a careless exposure of limb or body, told that the renegades were paying toll.

On the other hand more than one trooper was hit, two being killed not far from Bud and his cousins.

Nor did our heroes escape. For Nort received a nasty, but not dangerous wound in the left leg, while Dick, incautiously looking from behind his rock, to see the effect of one of his shots, felt a bullet clip the lobe of his right ear, bringing pain and plenty of blood.

At first Bud and Nort thought Dick had been killed, for he fell back with a groan and his neck was

stained a bright red, his ear bleeding freely. But after the momentary shock the lad raised himself—still keeping back of his rock, and cried:

"I'm all right. That ear always was too long!"

"Good stuff, kid!" cried one of the troopers. "Here, wind some of this on," and he tossed over a roll of antiseptic bandage.

Minor hurts were thus quickly bound up, and Bud, having received a painful wound in the right hand, had to retire from the fight. He did not actually go to the rear, however, but remained with Nort and Dick, handing them cartridges to reload their weapons.

"Gosh! This is rotten!" bewailed Bud, looking at his bandaged hand. It was dismay not at the nature of the wound, but because he could no longer "pepper" the Yaquis.

And the Indians were being attacked with a vengeance and were being "peppered" to such good advantage that some of them rose up and started to run to the rear. This was the last running they did, however, for the unerring rifles of the troopers picked them off.

And then the strategy of Captain Marshall had its effect. For suddenly the troopers he had sent to attack the rear of the Yaquis opened up a fire and this, being augmented by shots from the main body, soon threw the Indians into such confusion that the end was only a question of minutes.

And it came suddenly. For just as Captain Marshall was preparing to order a charge, Snake gave a yell and shouted:

"The white flag! They're quitting!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRICK DISCOVERED

Truly enough, this had happened. On top of one of the jagged rocks, behind which they had conducted the defense that had failed, stood a ragged Yaqui Indian. To and fro, on the end of his gun, he waved not exactly a white flag, but a dirty rag that once might have been white. Objects of this hue did not long remain like the driven snow among the Yaquis.

"Cease firing!" blared the bugle, and the spiteful rattle of the soldiers' guns stopped abruptly.

"Cover the beggar, some of you," ordered Captain Marshall, "and a few of you get ready in case this is a trick and they try a rush. I'll look into this."

"Let me go!" pleaded Lieutenant Snow eagerly. "I can sling their lingo a bit, Captain."

"Very well," assented the commander. "But watch yourself, Mart. I don't trust the devils, though if they try any of their tricks we'll wipe out the whole band. I wish I had a rapid fire gun. We made a mistake coming off without it. But we had to leave in a hurry."

During this brief talk, during which none of the soldiers or cowboys exposed themselves, the figure of the Indian continued to stand in full view and easy shot, waving the flag that told of a desire to surrender.

Or did it? Was it but a trick? That remained to be seen.

Seeing that his men were in readiness for quick work, Captain Marshall, himself holding his carbine where he could easily get at it, signalled to Lieutenant Stone to advance, under the flag of truce, to listen to the capitulation of the Yaquis. A trooper went with the lieutenant, carrying one of the company guidons, which, while not exactly a flag of truce served the purpose well enough. Besides the outfit from the fort and Diamond X were not surrendering.

"Had enough, Yaqui?" asked the lieutenant, as the Indian came down from his perch, and advanced to a point midway between the hidden Mexicans and the equally concealed troopers. In the rear was another band of soldiers, so, if it had been necessary, the Indians could have been withered by a cross fire.

"We stop," grunted the Yaqui.

It was the giving up.

Then followed a talk between the officer and the representative of the Indians. This was not Paz, who probably was too cowardly to trust himself in the open under the guns of his rightful enemies.

"Unconditional surrender, lay down every gun you have, march out and be made prisoners!" was the ultimatum of Lieutenant Snow.

It was the only terms that could be offered the treacherous band that had broken over the border from Mexico.

"And tell 'em," shouted Snake, who, with his friends had understood the import of what was said, "tell the beggar if any harm has come to Rosemary or Floyd, we'll kill every one of the Greasers!"

Lieutenant Snow waved his hand for silence. He listened to something the bearer of the flag of truce had to say, and then the officer announced:

"The captives aren't here!"

"Aren't here!" cried Bud, Nort and Dick together.

"Don't let nim fool you!" shouted Yellin' Kid.

"Order them to march out, unarmed and then we'll search their camp," called Captain Marshall.

Seeing that it would be useless to prolong matters, and knowing his entire band would be wiped out if he continued the fight, now that his rear was attacked, Paz growled out the necessary orders to his followers, and they came out from amid the rocks—that is those who could walk.

They were a sorry-looking lot. Always of a nondescript type, dirty, ragged and greasy, the Yaquis were even worse now, for they had been on the trail for some time, and had taken part in at least two fights. They had had no time to recuperate since making the raid in La Nogalique.

As they filed out, miserably enough, they were passed into a sort of hollow square, formed by the troopers, and there each Indian was searched for a hidden knife or revolver. One or two were found and confiscated amid the snarls of rage on the part of the owners, who, doubtless, meditated treachery.

Paz and his followers having been secured, a guard placed over them, and the wounded of the troopers being cared for as well as possible, search was made of the place where the Yaquis had made their stand. Several dead Indians were found, and some so badly wounded that death was only a question of a short time. These were made as comfortable as possible, for though they were entitled to little consideration while the fight was on, matters were different after the surrender.

"But where can Rosemary and Floyd be?" was the question asked over and over again by the boy ranchers and their friends, when it was seen that the captives were not in the Yaquis camp. At first it was supposed they had been sent to the rear with the Indians who were guarding the ponies. But there was no trace of the youth and his sister who had been carried away.

Then the more sinister thought came.

"Could they have been made away with?"

No one asked this in so many words, but it was in the minds of all, and a careful search was made to disclose if the ground had been recently dug up. Nothing of the sort was found, however, and then the boy ranchers and their friends breathed more easily.

But though the main body of Yaquis had been captured the prisoners were not found. And one of the objects of the rescue party—the main object in fact—was to locate Rosemary and Floyd.

"We've got to get it out of Paz what has happened to them, if we—if we have to torture him!" declared Snake. "Can't you make him talk, Captain?"

"Well, of course we dare not, for the sake of the good name of Uncle Sam's men, resort to torture. But we can try some modern police methods—putting him through the third degree, so to speak."

"That's it!" cried Bud. "Give Paz the third degree!"

Once the prisoners were secured, the wounded attended to and the dead buried, the whole attention of the rescue party was given to locating Rosemary and Floyd. That Paz knew the secret of their

disappearance could not be doubted—at least our friends did not doubt.

"Though of course," said Captain Marshall, when preparations were going on for putting Paz through the third degree series of questions, "of course there may have been several bands involved in this raid, and some other body of Yaquis may have taken away the young man and his sister."

"It was Paz, I'm sure of it!" declared Bud.

"He looks guilty!"

Certainly the Yaquis leader looked ugly and mean enough to have perpetrated this deed. But he maintained a scowling silence as he sat on the ground before his captors.

"Now, Paz," began Lieutenant Snow, who acted as interpreter, "you may as well tell the truth first as last, for we're going to get it out of you, if we have to resort to—well, you know what I mean. *Sabe?*"

"No *sabe!*" grunted the Indian.

Then the work began. It was not a pleasant task, and it was only excusable on the plea of dire necessity. The Yaquis were entitled to no mercy.

But through it all Paz maintained a grim silence. When he did speak it was to deny that he or his followers had even seen Rosemary and Floyd, much less had they kidnapped them for a ransom.

It remained for Buck Tooth to expose the trick. The wily Indian, perhaps knowing the habits of the race he had forsaken, had been prowling about among the sullen prisoners. He openly laughed at them for the plight in which he found them, taunting them as cowards of the first water.

Then, having wrought them up to the desired pitch of anger, Buck Tooth laughed and played a trump card, so to speak. In his own way he told a group of the captives that not only had they been caught, to be sent back to Mexico there to suffer long imprisonment, but the object for which they had risked so much had been snatched from them.

"We have the boy and girl!" boasted Buck Tooth.

This was vehemently denied and then, in a burst of anger, as Buck Tooth insisted this was so, the Yaqui blurted out the truth that Paz was endeavoring to conceal. Rosemary and Floyd had been taken away from the main body by a squad under the leadership of the Indian whom Rosemary had dubbed "Mike."

"Ugh!" grunted Buck Tooth. He had found out what he wanted to know. The trick was discovered.

CHAPTER XXII

ANXIOUS HOURS

Paz grunted, with characteristic Indian indifference when the work of the third degree ceased, as Buck Tooth, accompanied by the boy ranchers, waddled up and made known what he had found out.

"So that's what the beggar did!" exclaimed Captain Marshall, when he understood. "He split his forces, and sent the young man and girl farther on up into the mountains. Well, it means another chase!"

"And one not so easy to make," added Snake.

"Why?" asked Bud.

"Well, the trail will be worse, for one thing, and we won't have as many men to help. Got to send a guard back with these," and he waved his hand to indicate the Yaquis who had been made prisoners.

"I'll spare as many of my men as possible," said the captain, "and as soon as I get these imps where they'll be safe for the next few years, I'll have the escort return. They'll want to see this thing through. I'm coming with you."

"Oh, that's good!" exclaimed Nort. It was not that he did not depend on the cowboys from Diamond X, but there was something about the troopers that inspired confidence. The cowboys, too, were glad that they would have some regulars with them.

"And now let's get this story in proper shape," suggested the captain. "Lieutenant Snow, you'll get ready to take as many men as you'll need and herd the rascals back over the border, or at least to La Nogalique. It may be that the United States Marshal there will want to deal with them himself. In case he does that relieves you all the sooner. Get in touch with the fort when you have delivered your prisoners, and there may be orders for you."

"Yes, sir," answered the wounded lieutenant, saluting. He had no thought of quitting though he was painfully hurt.

Then Buck Tooth told what his taunts had forced from the captive Yaquis, and the whole trick was plain to the experienced cowboys and the troopers. Paz, fearing the result of keeping the captives with him, had sent them away when he learned that his pursuers were near.

How he learned that fact was one of the mysteries. How the news traveled, in that wild country, where civilized folk were often at pains to get into communication with each other, will probably never be known. But in some manner Paz had become aware of the closing in on him of the soldiers and the cowboys and he had tried to forestall their vengeance. But he did not reckon on the wiliness of Buck Tooth, whose taunts had caused the truth to be blurted out.

So, while Paz and his renegades were being sent back to pay the penalties for their uprising, Captain Marshall, with some of his picked men, and the band from Diamond X got ready to move forward again. One or two of the cowboys, who had been rather badly hit by bullets, were induced to go back for treatment. An effort made to have Bud do the same was met by a flat refusal.

"I've got one good hand!" the lad declared, holding up his left, "and I can shoot an automatic with that after somebody loads it for me."

"We'll load!" offered Nort and Dick.

So the boy ranchers, like the Three Guardsmen "all for one and one for all," stuck together.

"There's going to be hard work—and danger ahead of us," Snake had said, and Captain Marshall bore him out in this.

"That's what we came for," declared Nort.

"Surest thing you know!" assented his brother, and Bud nodded his assent.

So they moved forward again.

This time they were working toward a more certain object than when they were out scouting around to pick up the trail of the Yaquis.

Now they must make their way back to where the party, with Rosemary and Floyd as prisoners, had separated from the main body.

This was comparatively simple as regards tracing the way Paz and his followers had descended the mountain into the valley of the plain where the last fight and surrender had taken place. But when the trail of Mike and his men was located—then would come the real test.

The way grew more rough as they proceeded back along the route taken by the fleeing main body of Yaquis. It was an ascending trail, over a path that was possible only to the tough western ponies.

Fortunately they had an ample supply of provisions and the water supply was adequate, which was a vital necessity. The only hardship in the way of grub was on the horses, the herbage being scanty at times, so that as much speed as was desired could not be made, detours being necessary in order to come upon fodder for the steeds.

This caused them to spend more time on the route than they desired and each hour of delay made the boy ranchers more and more apprehensive for the safety of their captured cousins. However it could not be helped. Certain precautions must be observed if the band of rescuers was to arrive efficient enough to cope with the Yaquis. Though not a quarter of the original body was now in charge of Rosemary and Floyd, they were picked fighters, so Buck Tooth had learned. And they probably would make a stand in some natural fastness which vantage point would be hard to attack and turn.

Through two long, hot weary days the march of the rescuers was kept up, and they were all glad

when night came that they might camp and be at rest.

"But we've struck the branching trail," Bud said to his cousins. "All we have to do now is to keep on until we corner the beggars, and get Rosemary and Floyd away from them."

Bud had sized up the situation correctly, though it remains to be stated that it was easier said than done. By carefully noting the "sign" along the way, the cowboys and soldiers had reached the place where the selected band had ridden away with their captives. And this was the trail now being followed.

There was more than hard work—hard work followed hard work—and there was danger. It had been hard from the very start—from the time the boy ranchers had left after the first wild alarm over the kidnapping of Rosemary and Floyd. They had been keyed up to high tension all the while, and this, in itself, if you have ever experienced it, is wearing. There had been absolutely no time for light enjoyment—none of the humor of the cowboys had a chance to manifest itself.

Aside from an occasional burst into song the way had been grim and weary. There was nothing to lighten it, for over all hung the apprehension that something dreadful would befall Rosemary and her brother.

And that dread was still present.

Even at the very end of the trail it might be found that all their efforts had been in vain, and that the Yaquis, driven into a panic of fear, had ended the lives of their captives.

So there was this nerve-racking pall of gloom hanging over all, and to this was added the hard physical work of keeping to a difficult trail, with danger besetting on every hand.

That there was danger, not the most optimistic of them would have denied. There was danger in urging one's horse up a narrow path overhanging some gorge.

There was danger that some lurking Yaqui, unable to keep up with the main body of Mike's men, might send a bullet into the back of one of the rescuers. Or Mike could have posted a party in ambush at any one of a dozen places along the trail, there to surprise and kill off a number of the vengeful whites following him.

All this made it exceedingly hard for the boy ranchers and their friends, but they were never daunted. On they urged their weary ponies, and the trail was as hard on horseflesh as it was on man and youth.

Still no one complained. Even Bud bore without remark the pain of his wounded hand, and it was a most painful injury. However Captain Marshall had no small skill with what primitive remedies they had with them, and he saved Bud from the necessity of a surgical operation later, as the wound was kept clean, so that it healed from within.

Though once, when it had grown shut, with the possible danger of pus forming within, and had to be opened, poor Bud saw everything getting black before his eyes. And it was only by gritting his teeth, and remembering how, it was said, Indians bit bullets in twain in the excess of their agony before uttering a groan, that the lad prevented himself from fainting under the captain's ministrations.

So night settled down on the second day of their rush forward on the trail of Mike and those he held captive.

"You get to bed and take it easy," Nort said to Bud, when the latter talked of standing guard, after camp had been made.

"That's right," agreed Dick. "There's enough of us without you."

"But I don't want to be a quitter!" Bud said. "And we're so close to Mike and his gang now—or we ought to be—that there may be an attack any hour."

"The Yaquis won't attack at night," declared Rolling Stone. "They're too lazy!"

This, indeed, is characteristic of many Indian tribes, though perhaps the real reason may be based on superstition instead of objection to exertion.

However, Bud allowed himself to be persuaded to take his ease rolled up in his blankets. There were no tents, and, in fact, none were really needed, for though the nights were cooler than the days, a blanket and a fire made every man comfortable.

So night settled down, the stars came out, the cooling wind blew the smoke of the camp fire here and

there and the posted sentries walked their beats, waiting for what might happen.

That they were near to the hiding place of Mike, and, it was hoped, of the captives too, could not be doubted. The trail had become more fresh with every mile traversed.

"He's gone into some cave to hold off as long as possible," was the opinion of Captain Marshall.

Nort and Dick had adjoining posts. They had been selected for the first four hours of duty, from 8 to 12 o'clock, and it was near that last hour when Nort, coming back from having reached the end of his beat, called softly to his brother.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Nort.

"What do you mean?" asked Dick in turn.

"Well, like some one walking. Listen!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST STAND

The boy ranchers—only two of them now, for Bud was taking a much-needed rest, stood silent in the darkness, on one edge of the camp. They listened "with all their ears," for they were, if not exactly in the enemy's territory, at least within striking distance of the Yaquis, and every precaution must be taken.

So when Nort whispered to Dick that a suspicious noise had been heard, Dick was only too ready to believe it.

"Where did you hear it?" Dick asked in a cautious voice when, after several seconds of intent listening, neither had caught a sound.

"Off there," replied Nort rather vaguely, pointing to the darkness ahead of them—a darkness where the rays of several camp fires did not penetrate, and which the starlight did not seem to pierce.

"I don't hear anything," went on Dick. "Maybe it was only the wind. We don't want to give an alarm and—"

"Hark!" interrupted his brother in a low but tense voice.

Clearly then, to the ears of both, came the unmistakable sound of someone or something approaching. There was the crunching of gravel, and the noise of some hard substance moving on a rock.

"It's the Yaquis!" whispered Nort, as he brought his rifle to bear on the blackness in front of him. "They're creeping up to make an attack!"

Dick also got his gun in readiness for instant action, and the boys were just about to fire when a noise, best described as "unearthly," smote their ears. It was a long drawn out cry, weird and blood-curdling. That it was the warwhoop of the Yaquis both boys were beginning to believe, in spite of knowing that these Mexicans seldom if ever used such romantic if terrible means of terrifying their enemies.

I say the boys were on the verge of accepting the noise as that, when its character suddenly changed, and the stillness of the night was fairly shattered by a loud:

"Hee-haw! Hee-haw! Hee-haw!"

The reaction was so great that Nort and Dick nearly dropped their guns, and they turned to look one at the other with sheepish grins that would have been visible had the light been stronger. And then, with one voice the brothers exclaimed:

"Maud!"

It was one of the army transport mules, an animal that helped carry the camp baggage! She had

strayed.

Again rose the cry, not so weird now that its nature was known.

"Hee-haw! Hee-haw!"

And from the camp came a disgusted complaint from some sleepy trooper as he shouted: "The chump who tied that mule so he could wander ought to be made to go get him!"

There was laughter at this, for many had been awakened by the braying of the animal. And then one of the men in charge of the animals came out and managed to corral the wanderer.

"Gosh! I'm glad we didn't shoot!" exclaimed Nort, as their tour of duty ended and their relief came.

"Same here!" added his brother. "How they would have laughed at us if we had plugged old Maud!"

This was the only disturbing incident of the night, the remainder of which passed quietly.

With the first streak of dawn the troopers were up, as were the cowboys, for Rolling Stone had said, and Buck Tooth agreed with him, that if the Yaquis did attack it would be at dawn, since they seldom fought after nightfall.

But no attack came, and breakfast was served, with sentries on the watch to guard against surprise. Some steaming hot coffee, crisp bacon the odor of which was an aroma in the morning air, flapjacks and sour dough bread for those who wanted it, made the meal, which well fortified those who partook of it for the day's events, which were destined to be strenuous.

Once again the order was:

"Forward—march!"

Again they were on the trail of the Yaquis.

As they advanced the "sign" became more pronounced that the band had passed that way. Whether they had the captives with them could, of course, only be guessed at.

But the trail had been carefully scanned, and there was no evidence that Rosemary and Floyd had been put out of the way. As far as could be told the captives were still the prisoners of the Indians. And there were no marks to show that any smaller body had branched off from this band of Yaquis that had the unfortunate youth and maiden in charge.

So it was with the hope of finding their cousins safe, though perhaps in dire distress, that the boy ranchers pressed on with their friends the troopers and the cowboys.

As the trail became more pronounced, greater precautions were taken against a surprise. And a surprise in the rocky defiles through which they were passing would have been well nigh fatal. So scouts were constantly in the lead, ready at the first suspicious sign to send back word to the main body to be on the alert.

The morning passed without incident, save for one or two false alarms, and there was a sigh of relief when the midday meal was served without interruption in the shape of hostile bullets. Then, after a brief rest for the horses, the march was again taken up.

"I wonder when we'll find them?" asked Nort.

"It's been quite a while now," added Dick.

"Poor Rosemary," sighed Bud, trying to find an easy position for his wounded hand. "She must have had a tough time."

"Yet she had a lot of grit to send that message the way she did," commented Nort.

"Yes, only for that we wouldn't have known about it for a long time—maybe too late," agreed Bud.

It was but a few minutes after this talk that, suddenly, a shot rang out well up ahead. Instantly every nerve tingled for it might mean the beginning of the last fight. The shot was almost at once followed by others, and then a scout came clattering back.

"We've found 'em!" he cried. "And it's going to be a dickens of a fight! They're in a regular fort!"

The firing in front became more brisk. Clearly all the van guard was now engaged, and quick orders

were issued to send up a squad or two of the troopers, while the main body prepared for what they hoped would be the last battle.

Captain Marshall rapidly questioned the messenger who had come back. The man told how he and his companions had been riding along when they were suddenly fired upon. The shot came from a ledge at one side of the defile through which the trail ran, and they had a glimpse of a Yaqui warrior shaking his fist at them in defiance as he disappeared amid the rocks after delivering his warning shot.

Then the shooting between the outposts of the Indians and the advance guard of the rescue party became general as the scout rode back to report.

Captain Marshall hurried to the front with his first band of fighters, the cowboys and our youthful heroes being bidden to remain where they were until the officer had made an observation. In a little while Captain Marshall came back.

"It will be their last stand!" he exclaimed.

"How so?" asked Snake.

"Well, they're there with their backs to the wall. They can't get out at the rear and we're here in front to stop them if they come this way. It will be a fight to a finish!"

And as the boy ranchers wondered at the fate of Rosemary and Floyd there came from the front a burst of firing.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RUSE OF ROSEMARY

Well it was that a body of fighters with the experience of the United States troopers and the cowboys from Diamond X ranch went up against the Yaquis, and not some brave but rash band of rescuers. The latter would have been defeated almost at once for the Indians had picked out an admirable place in which to make their last stand.

They had retreated into the mountains, along a trail that only the most hardy could follow. Then, finding, as they doubtless did, that their pursuers were ever at their heels, they hastened to what was, virtually, a natural fortress—a nook among the rocky walls of the defile. From there they shot at the approaching troopers and cowboys.

"No useless risks!" ordered Captain Marshall, as he and his men came up to the attack.

The Yaquis had several distinct advantages in their favor. They were up above the rescuers and could fire down on them, while the boy ranchers and their friends had not only to fight but to climb up, and the latter was a handicap.

Then the Indians had what was almost like a rocky fort to protect them, while those making the attack had to approach pretty much in the open. Of course there were rocks that could be used as cover, but these were so scattered that it prevented the approach of the men in a body. Individuals could creep from rock to rock, and so advance, but there could be no concerted rush against the Yaquis, and that was what was needed to overcome them.

However the fight was only in its early stages yet, and, like a football game, one could not tell what would happen until the final whistle was blown. Captain Marshall was a veteran fighter and could be depended on. His men realized this, and so did the outfit from Diamond X.

There was nothing very spectacular about this fight. Little of it could have been seen by an observer, if you except the spurts of smoke from unseen guns and the echoes caused by the shots. For each man, on both sides, was firing from cover. The Yaquis had the advantage that their cover—a big wall of rock—sheltered many of them in an almost straight line, and they could fire in volleys on signal, while the soldiers and cowboys had to fire individually and at odd times, as they made their way from one sheltering stone to another.

Thus the Yaquis could concentrate their fire on one man if they had a glimpse of some incautiously

exposed arm or leg, while no one soldier could hope to inflict much damage on a crowd of Indians behind a thick stone wall.

But the fight was not so unequal as seemed at first sight. For while the Yaquis were strongly entrenched, they were outnumbered—of that there was little doubt. And they were fighting picked men, who had been in many dangerous skirmishes and fights, whereas the Indians were at best but a sort of brigand bushwhackers.

Each side was desperate, perhaps the Indians more so, for they must have realized that they would be given short shrift if any harm now came to Rosemary and Floyd. The soldiers and cowboys would not hesitate to take swift and sure vengeance. So the Indians must fight to the bitter end, selling their lives as dearly as possible.

"I just wonder if Rosemary and Floyd are up in that nest of beggars?" mused Bud, as he and his cousins were at last allowed to proceed up the defile, toward where the Yaquis were making their last stand. Bud had begged so hard to be allowed to go to the front, to at least help his cousins load their weapons if nothing else, that permission had been granted.

The boy ranchers were close together now, each sheltered behind a rock, and almost in line with the foremost of the attackers who were under the shadow of the natural fort, behind the wall of which the Yaquis were making their last stand.

"I hope they are up there," said Nort, answering Bud's question. "If they brought them this far they probably wouldn't do away with them now. They must be up there!"

"I wish we had them down here," said Dick. "It's going to be hard work to get the imps out of their den!"

"You supplied two good earfuls that time, kid!" said Rolling Stone. "Ah, you will, will you!" he added quickly, and he fired at an exposed head over the top of the wall that hid the Indians.

There was a howl of pain mingled with rage, that could be heard above the din of the fighting.

"You nipped him!" cried Yellin' Kid.

"I tried to," grimly said Rolling Stone.

And so the fighting went on, in pot-shot fashion, with occasional volleys from the Yaquis.

"They're only wasting their lead," spoke Captain Marshall. "But I wonder where they got so many cartridges?"

"Likely they made another raid," suggested Snake.

This, later, was found to be the case. A store keeper had been killed and his stock looted, provisions and arms being taken.

If the boy ranchers and their friends could have looked behind the natural wall of rock, which constituted the fort that proved to be the last stand of the Yaquis, and if they could have looked farther, into a big cave, the mouth of which was concealed from a view below by this same wall, their questions as to Rosemary and Floyd would have been answered.

For the captives were there. Weary, apprehensive, tired and fairly ill from their hardships, Rosemary and her brother had been thrust into the cavern when the Yaquis reached this vantage place, knowing their pursuers were close behind them.

"Something's up!" Floyd had said as they were rudely hustled into the hiding place.

"I hope it's the end," said Rosemary dismally. Poor girl! She was about done up, and she no longer had her weapon as a means of defence. By a ruse it had been taken from her, though she and Floyd fought desperately to retain it. But Mike, as one of his men snatched it away, only laughed at them.

"The end! What do you mean?" asked Floyd.

"I mean I think this will be the last fight. You can tell by the way they thrust us in here, and hurried out with their guns, that something unusual is taking place. I believe our rescuers are coming!"

"That's what we thought when they sent us off in charge of Mike and the smaller gang," observed Floyd.

"Yes, but this is different!" declared Rosemary. "They can't get out of this place in a hurry, and once our friends, whether soldiers or cowboys from Uncle Henry's ranch, get this far, they'll never give up until they break through the Indians."

"If they only do!" murmured Floyd. He was cut and bruised from a fight he had with two of the Yaquis, when he endeavored to go to the aid of his sister, as her weapon was wrested from her. Floyd's left arm was badly wrenched, so he could hardly use it.

And then, after the hurried thrusting into the cave of the captives, had come the first shots of the soldier scouts in response to the fire of the Yaqui sentry.

"They're here!" cried Floyd, when it became very evident that an attack in force was going on.

"Oh! I'm glad!" exclaimed Rosemary, and tears of relief came to sooth her ragged nerves.

They went as close as they dared to the mouth of the cave to look at the backs of the Yaquis who were lined up along the wall firing down on the soldiers and cowboys. No guard was stationed at the entrance to the cavern—none was needed. The rear was a wall of solid rock, as Rosemary and her brother had discovered soon after being rushed into it. In front of the entrance was a rocky platform, and extending along the outer edge of this, in the form of a semicircle, was the defending wall of stone.

This rocky wall dropped abruptly down into the defile where the cowboys and soldiers were making the attack. It would be almost impossible to descend it. The way up was by a narrow passage which was now choked by rocks the Indians had piled there.

On either side of the cavern's entrance the rock rose in steep slopes, not altogether impossible of being scaled, but a hindrance to a quick retreat. That is what Captain Marshall meant when he said the Yaquis were practically backed up against a stone wall.

The firing became sharper and quicker and the reports of the guns of the attackers sounded nearer. They were, in fact, creeping up, taking advantage of every bit of cover.

There were casualties on both sides, Dick being put out of the game by a bullet through his right arm. Fortunately it only entered the flesh, breaking no bones. But he was ordered to the rear, much to his disgust. Nort and Bud still stuck, Bud helping Nort in loading.

Perhaps the situation was hardest on Rosemary and Floyd, for they were obliged to remain in the cave, doing nothing, and fearing the worst. If the Indians succeeded in standing off the rescuers, or in killing so many of them that the survivors would not dare rush the place, what would it mean to the captives?

Rosemary dared not think of it.

Then, following a period of unusually heavy firing, the plucky girl made up her mind to act.

"Floyd!" she exclaimed, "I'm desperate! I'm going to do something!"

"Not—you're not going to—"

Floyd stumbled over expressing the fear that she was going to rush out and throw herself over the rocky wall.

"It's just a chance," went on Rosemary, "but I'm going to take it. A desperate chance!"

"But what, Rosemary?"

"I'm going to play a trick on these Indians! I think I can do it!"

"A trick?"

"Yes. As soon as the next period of heavy firing quiets down I'm going to rush out, yelling, and point back to the cave. I want you to do the same."

"But what good will it do?"

"It will give the Indians the impression that our friends—or some one—has managed to get up the rocks, and that they are coming from the rear. There may be an entrance into that cave from the back. I don't know, and I don't believe these Indians do. Anyhow if we rush out, all excited, yelling as hard as we can, and pointing to the cave back of us, I think the Yaquis will take the alarm and become so confused that our friends, whoever they are out there, will be able to rush this position."

As yet, you must understand, Rosemary and her brother were unaware of the identity of the attackers.

Rosemary started up from where she was sitting in their extemporized and miserable prison cave. It was evidently her intention to put into operation at once her desperate plan.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed her brother.

"What for?" she questioned.

"I'm not so sure that it is the best thing to do," he answered.

Floyd was rather less impulsive than his sister—that is on occasions. There were times when he could be more hot headed.

"Well, what else is there to do?" Rosemary asked.

She was going to be perfectly fair about it, and if Floyd had anything better to offer as a suggestion she would listen to him.

"Let's think about it a bit longer," he finally said, with a long intaking of breath, which told more plainly than words, how the situation was oppressing him. "I'm sure it's mighty plucky of you, Rosemary, to lay out such a plan as this, but I don't believe I ought to let you try it. Something might happen."

"Something is going to happen anyhow," she said, with ominous quiet, and a grim tightness showed in the lines of her mouth. "I believe these Indians have just about reached the end of their rope. They have been very patient with us—that is patient from their standpoint. Now they have met with opposition, and they must know if they are overpowered it will be to our advantage, and that our friends, or whoever is out there firing, will take revenge."

"That's so," agreed Floyd.

"Well then, we've just *got* to do something!" said Rosemary, desperately. "And I'm going to do it."

Again she started up.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed her brother again.

He seemed to be listening. He leaned forward, and then softly arose from where he was sitting and went forward.

"What is it?" asked his sister in a low voice.

"I thought I heard voices—good old United States voices, and not this jargon of Mexican and Spanish," was the reply. "Maybe some of the attackers, whoever they are, have broken through."

A look of delighted joy came over the face of Rosemary. But a moment later it faded away and she seemed hopeless.

"It can't be," she said. "There'd be a lot of yelling and shouting if any of those who are attacking the Yaquis had broken through their lines," she went on. "There's no use waiting, Floyd. Let's try my plan!"

But her brother was not yet convinced.

"It will be all right if it works," he agreed. "But if it fails, and they only have the laugh on us, we'll be treated so much the worse. I don't mind on my own account—but yours!" and he glanced at his sister.

"I hadn't thought of that," spoke Rosemary in a low voice. "If it should—fail—why—"

She did not complete the sentence.

"It would only make them more angry, I'm afraid," went on Floyd.

There was silence, for a time, between brother and sister. It was broken only by occasional and distant shouts, punctuated, now and again, by a shot. But the heavy fusillade had subsided for a time.

"Well?" questioned Rosemary.

She was eager to get some action.

"This is what I'll do," said Floyd, after some tense consideration,

"I'll take a look around and see how matters shape up."

"Then what?" asked Rosemary.

She was evidently not going to let the matter go by default.

"Well, then if I can't see anything better to do than what you proposed, we'll go to it!" decided Floyd. "You sit here and I'll scurry around. I won't be long."

"No, please don't," begged Rosemary. "If we're going to do anything we'll have to do it very soon. This can't last—much longer!"

Floyd did not stop to ask his sister just what she meant. In fact he did not dare question her as to what it was that could not last "much longer." He had a desperate fear that it was Rosemary's own spirit that was on the point of breaking.

Up to now she had kept up her courage remarkably well. But there was a limit, and if the breaking point had been reached Floyd did not know what would follow.

He shot a quick look at the girl before he started out on what he thought might be a last desperate venture. He felt that he might discover something to do—some way of escape—that would not make it necessary for his sister to virtually rush into danger.

And he was relieved when he saw the calm and cool look that was on Rosemary's face.

"She isn't going to give up!" decided Floyd.

There was an exultant feeling in his heart.

During this talk between brother and sister the dirty Indian detailed to guard the captives had sauntered within view of them every now and then. To quiet his suspicions, in case he should have any, Rosemary and Floyd had spoken most casually on these occasions.

The lad waited until the guard had come on one of his periodic trips of inspection and had dropped out of sight on a ledge of rock, and then Floyd started out.

"Don't be too long!" called Rosemary in a low voice.

"I won't!" he promised.

Walking as aimlessly as he could pretend, Floyd started toward a break in the natural wall that ran in front of the prison cavern. He wanted to see if he could catch a glimpse of the Yaquis below him.

"And I'd give a whole lot of money—if I had it—to see who is fighting them," thought Floyd. "But I haven't much left."

He glanced ruefully down at his now soiled and torn garments. And as he thrust his hands into his pockets he missed many a trinket and possession. For nearly everything had been taken away by Paz, Mike or some of their rascally followers.

Two or three Indians, some of them wounded, were coming back "from the front," so to speak. One of them glanced scowlingly at Floyd, as he passed the lad, evidently associating his wounds with the presence of the prisoner.

"I'd give you a whole lot worse than that if I had a chance—Ugly Face!" thought Floyd.

Another member of the renegade band grinned or—Floyd took it for a grin—as he passed. But none of them seemed to care where the lad went or what he did, and for this Floyd was glad.

"I seem to be getting somewhere," he murmured. "Whether I can hit on any scheme to beat Rosemary's is a question, but I don't want her to take the risk unless there's nothing else to do."

He had now reached a low spot in the natural rocky wall. He felt that if he could once get a glimpse at this point he might see something that would help him and Rosemary.

And to his great delight, when he had sauntered, as casually as he could make it, to an observation point, what he saw made him gasp for breath.

For, grouped closely together, below him, on a sort of big table of rock, were a number of the Yaquis.

They appeared to be holding a sort of council or parley, and were gathered about an Indian to whom Mike and Paz often delegated certain duties.

But this was not what caused the heart of Floyd to thump so desperately against his ribs, making such a noise, he wildly feared, that the pounding would be heard by some passing Indian.

What caused him fairly to gasp for breath was the sight of a great boulder, poised on the edge of the natural wall, and hanging almost directly over the group of talking Indians.

"If I can push that rock down on them it will do the trick!" thought Floyd. "It'll put some of 'em out of business, and the rest will be so frightened that they'll retreat. Then whoever is out there trying to break through to help us, will have matters their own way. That's what I'll do. Ill pry that rock loose and let it dash 'em on the heads."

It was a horrible thing to think of, much more horrible to do, but the situation of Rosemary and Floyd was desperate indeed. The end seemed to justify the means.

"The point is," mused Floyd, "can I shove that rock down?"

Looking about him he saw that he was not observed. He quickly made his way nearer to the rock, and then, reaching out his hands, he pushed.

Gently at first he exerted the pressure, and then putting more power into the shove he thrust with all his might.

"It's giving! It's giving!" thought Floyd, with a desperate catch of his breath. "I can shove it down on 'em and dash 'em all up!"

He exerted all his strength. The rock was moving, and even with all the villainies the Indians had to their discredit Floyd's nerve almost failed him as he saw the great boulder sway as if for the plunge.

But to his chagrin he felt the rock move back toward him again. He tried to hold it away—to thrust it from him—but nature, in the guise of the attraction of gravitation—pulled the rock back into the socket-shaped bed where it had rested so long.

It rolled back with a grinding sound, and Floyd feared, for a moment that he had loosened it so that it would topple back and fall upon his feet.

But this did not happen. The great half-round stone oscillated to and fro and then came to rest. Floyd had only caused it to sway a little.

"Well, I moved it!" he said with a gasp. "I'll try again. If I can only get it started it will do the trick."

Again he pushed, with all his might, but again the same thing happened. He managed to make the rock sway outward, a little farther over the edge of the wall, but back it came again into its hollow resting place.

Then Floyd understood the nature of the matter.

"It's a balanced rock," he said to himself. "She's been resting here for ages, and you can move it just so far but no farther. It would take a team of army mules to dislodge it."

He looked over the wall again. The Indians were still in the same place, eagerly talking—a score or more of feet below the boy.

"It's too good a chance to miss!" whispered Floyd desperately. "I wonder if I can't find some sort of a lever and pry it loose."

He looked about him. Not far away was part of a dead tree branch, thick as his arm.

"Just what I need!" he exclaimed.

He ran to pick up the branch and, returning with it, set one end under the balanced rock, that was still swaying slightly from his exertions.

"Now for a last try!" murmured the lad.

He bent his weight on the long end of the improvised lever. The rock seemed to rise from its socket bed, and to sway outward. There was an exultation in the boy's heart. He thought, in another instant, that he could send the great stone crashing down into the midst of the Yaquis.

Then, suddenly there came a sharp report, and Floyd felt himself falling.

His first feeling was that he had been shot and that this was the end. But he felt no pain, save a sudden bump as he sprawled on the rocks, and then he realized what had happened.

He had pressed so heavily on the old and dried piece of wood that it had snapped and broken with a report like that of a pistol, and he had dropped.

"Too bad!" murmured Floyd.

As he picked himself up he saw two of the Yaqui Indians running around a rocky corner. They had evidently been drawn to the place by the sound.

"No good letting them know what I tried to do," quickly decided Floyd.
"It would only make it worse for us."

Having decided on a line of action it did not take the lad an instant to carry it out. Quickly he picked up the broken pieces of his lever and started back with them toward the cave where he and his sister were held captives.

"Make fire!" he said to the Indians. "Make fire—cook grub!"

"Ugh!" they grunted. They evidently accepted this obvious explanation.

Their suspicions lulled, they turned and went back the way they had come, pausing long enough, however, to watch Floyd enter the cave where Rosemary waited.

"Well," she questioned, as he threw the broken ends of his lever on the rocky floor.

"No go," answered Floyd despondently. "I had a peach of a chance to play a trump hand on them, but luck was against me."

He told what he had tried to do with the rock.

"Oh? I—I'm almost glad it didn't succeed!" said Rosemary with a shudder. "It would have been—terrible!"

"Nothing is too bad for these devils!" cried Floyd. "But I give up. I can't think of anything more to do."

"Then shall I try my way?" asked his sister.

"It is a desperate chance," Floyd murmured.

"But don't you think we ought to try it? We may be able to reach the wall, and get over, or go down the trail we came up. It was too steep for the horses, but maybe we can make it."

The horses had been abandoned by the Yaquis as they entrenched themselves for this last stand. The animals could not make the ascent.

"Well?" asked Rosemary of her brother.

"I'm with you!" he said, with a sharp intaking of his breath.

Then they got ready for the ruse Rosemary had proposed.

CHAPTER XXV

"ALL'S WELL!"

What was taking place down below, Rosemary and Floyd could only guess at. But that the rescuers were taking advantage of everything possible was evident from the occasional hits they made among the Yaquis. More than one was killed and several wounded as they fired over the top of the wall, or through loopholes amid the rocks.

Then, soon after the determination at which Rosemary had arrived, there came a more violent fusillade than any that had preceded. In this several Indians were forced to retire because of serious

wounds. Then the firing died away.

Though the captive lad and his sister did not know it, this sudden cessation in the firing of the attackers was due to an order of the commander of the troopers. The captain was, also, nominally in command of the boy ranchers and their friends.

"There is too much indiscriminate firing," decided Captain Marshall. "We haven't an unlimited supply of ammunition. We've got to go a bit slow. No telling how long we may have to camp on the trail of theseimps."

It was a wise determination as they all agreed, and the word went up and down the line of attackers to be sparing of powder and lead. This is what caused the troopers and cowboys suddenly to cease firing, following a desperate fusillade which they hoped would turn the tide of battle in their favor, but it had not done so.

"We must size the situation up," decided the captain. "Find out just how many more rounds we have left—counting also the supply of our friends from Diamond X," he ordered an officer.

And the taking stock of the situation was soon under way. That the Yaquis were as glad of the respite, as were our friends, need not be doubted.

Advantage was taken of the lull to look after the wounded, and to bring water to the fighting men, for they were sorely in need of drinks. And warm as the water was, it seemed the best that had ever trickled down their throats.

Back in their prison, Rosemary and Floyd noted the sudden silence that followed the brisk firing. Brother and sister looked at each other, and there was fear in their faces.

"Do you suppose that means they have quit?" asked the girl.

"Who?" her brother wanted to know.

"The ones who are out there trying to help us—cowboys from our uncle's ranch, I hope."

"I hope so, too, and I hope they haven't had to quit," spoke Floyd. "But we've got to go on with what we planned now. I'm for it as much as you are, Rosemary. Something has to be done! Are you sure you won't weaken at the last minute, and cave in?"

"Did you ever know me to do a thing like that?" she asked with flashing eyes.

"No, I never did."

"Well, I'm not going to start now! Don't worry, Floyd. Somehow I feel sure that this will pull us through! I thought of it in the night—perhaps I dreamed it—and I have a feeling that it is going to work out all right. Don't be afraid. Let's try it with all our might! Are you ready?"

"As ready as I ever shall be," was the grim answer. "But if you're playing a 'hunch,' so to speak, that's different. You always were lucky!"

He laughed grimly, and Rosemary joined in. It was the first time they had laughed since being taken captives.

As her brother had said, Rosemary was "lucky."

For a moment brother and sister looked about them. They must act soon, and, after all, the consequences could not be much worse than those which continually were hanging over them.

"Whenever you're ready—give the word!" whispered Floyd.

"Now!" suddenly called Rosemary to her brother.

"Come on!" he echoed.

Together they rushed from the cave, straight toward the band of Indians lined up, with their backs toward them, along the wall of the improvised fort.

What Rosemary said she never really knew. It was a burst of wild, hysterical yelling, such as girls and women alone are capable of. And as she screamed and ran she pointed back toward the cave.

As for Floyd he declared that what he yelled was something like:

"They're coming! They're coming! They're attacking in the rear!"

To this he added some improvised warwhoops of his own devising, and some football yells, for he had been a cheer leader at one time for his college team.

Whatever was said little mattered. It was the character of the shouting of the desperate youth and maiden, and their actions that counted. Coming as Rosemary's ruse did, after the hardest firing yet on the part of the attackers, it rather got on the nerves of the Yaquis if they had such organs, which is doubtful.

To every one of them it appeared, as Rosemary and Floyd intended it should, that an attack from the rear was about to take place. As Rosemary had guessed, the Indians knew no more about the cave than she did. They had hastily examined it and decided there was no rear entrance or exit, as the case might be. But they might have overlooked some hidden passage, and this is what all of them evidently thought had been done.

At any rate, as Rosemary and Floyd rushed out, yelling almost like Indians themselves, a panic started among the Yaquis. They saw themselves caught between two fires, with no retreat possible.

With whoops of despair some threw themselves over the cliff. Others rushed into the cave, while some climbed up the rocky walls at either side. A few remained, firing down at the attackers below.

Rosemary's yells, and those of her brother, carried to the soldiers and cowboys. At first they thought a sally was about to take place.

But when they saw some Indians come over the wall, one luckless imp slipping and falling to his death, some idea of what was taking place became manifest to Captain Marshall.

"They're in a panic!" he cried. "Something has frightened 'em! Come on, men!"

He led a rush forward, just as Rosemary appeared at the top of the wall, waving her neck handkerchief in a frenzied signal.

"There she is! Rosemary!" cried Bud, not exactly recognizing his cousin, but guessing the girl could be none other.

The rush of the attackers, together with the panic that had run through the ranks of the Indians like wildfire, was all that was needed to turn the scale. The Yaquis, with howls of fear, not knowing what it was all about, threw down their guns and sought for means of escape.

Mike, the leader, seemed dazed at the suddenness of it all. But he gathered his wits together and, seeing Rosemary at the wall, waving to the soldiers and cowboys below, the desperate Yaquis sprang toward her.

But Floyd was watching his sister. The lad picked up a revolver from where it had fallen as its owner retreated and fired point blank at Mike. The ruffian crumpled up and went down in a heap, as Rosemary herself, unable to stand the strain longer, sank down half fainting.

Her ruse had succeeded. The Yaquis were on the run.

A few minutes later the place was filled with soldiers and cowboys who made prisoners of such of the renegades as were left alive—and these were not many, though they included Mike, who had only been wounded by Floyd.

"Oh, Bud! I'm so glad! So glad!" murmured Rosemary, as her cousin put his arm around her—only one arm for the other was still sore.

"So'm I!" murmured Bud. "This is another cousin—Nort," and he nodded toward his boy rancher companion. "And there's a third one down there—Dick—but he's hurt!"

"Badly?"

"Oh, no, just a piece of lead through his arm. He'll be all right in a few days. But say, Rosemary, what did you and Floyd do to turn the tables so quickly?"

"Rosemary did it all," Floyd said with a cheerful grin. "It was just a bluff!" and he told the story.

"Nerviest thing I ever heard of!" complimented Captain Marshall.

"Heap good squaw!" was Buck Tooth's opinion, and that seemed to sum it all up.

The prisoners secured, the dead on both sides buried and the story of the capture and rescue briefly told, arrangements were made for returning to civilization.

The raid of the Yaquis was over, and so severe was the lesson taught them that it was many years before another trick like that was tried.

Rosemary and Floyd, though they had suffered many hardships, were not physically harmed, except for the youth's wrenched arm, which was painful but not dangerous.

"Oh, but we want some water to wash in!" Rosemary confided to Bud. "They've kept us so much on the go, ever since they captured us, that I can't bear to think of it. I just *dreamed* of clean bath tubs filled with white soap suds!"

"We'll soon be at the ranch," Bud said.

"Oh, but I can't wait until then."

"Same here!" put in Floyd. "I don't believe a Yaqui touches water from the time he's born until he dies."

In order to give everyone a chance to rest, it was decided to camp for a few days in a favorable spot, which was found a few miles from where the Indians had made their last stand—a final stand for many, as more than a dozen were killed.

The others were sent back under guard as prisoners, Mike among them, scowling blackly as he was led away. A scout was sent to the nearest place where there was a telegraph station, to send the good news back to Diamond X.

"And now we can take it easy," observed Bud as he with his cowboy cousins and the newly rescued captives enjoyed the first real meal without anticipations of a fight immediately after it.

"You must have had a dreadful time, Rosemary," said Dick, whose arm was in a sling.

"Well, it seemed so at the time, and yet I want to laugh when I think how I fooled those Indians just by screaming."

"It isn't the first time you've brought help by screaming!" laughed Bud. "I remember once when I tried to kiss you—"

"Tut! Tut!" laughed Rosemary. "That's past history."

And so, in time, was the raid of the Yaquis. In due season Rosemary and her brother, with our boy heroes reached Diamond X, parting from the soldier escort. And once at the ranch, which had been their objective before the kidnapping, the visitors were royally entertained.

"Well, it was the best adventure we ever had," declared Nort, and his brother agreed with him. But it was not to be the last of the exciting happenings in which they were to be involved.

For these were lads of action, ever in the van when there was a chance for a fight. And those who wish to follow the further adventures of Bud, Nort and Dick, may do so in the next volume of this series, which will be entitled "The Boy Ranchers in the Flood; or Saving the Stock at Diamond X."

In that we shall see how they fared when again called on to act their parts in the face of danger. But, for the present we shall leave them to enjoy the company of Rosemary and Floyd at Diamond X and in Happy Valley.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY RANCHERS AMONG THE INDIANS; OR,
TRAILING THE YAQUIS ***

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