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Title: Through Apache Land

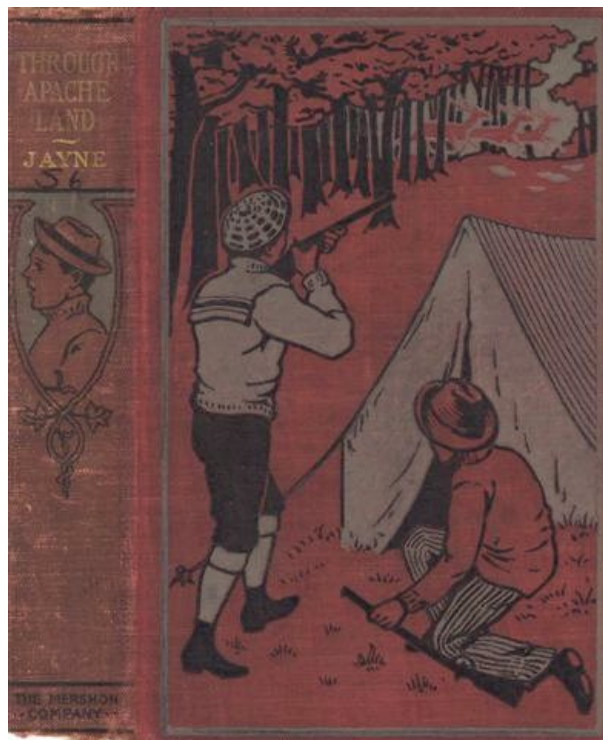
Author: Edward Sylvester Ellis

Release Date: February 27, 2010 [EBook #31421]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THROUGH APACHE LAND ***



THROUGH APACHE LAND

BY LIEUT. R. H. JAYNE

AUTHOR OF "LOST IN THE WILDERNESS," "IN THE PECOS COUNTRY,"
"THE CAVE IN THE MOUNTAIN," ETC.

NEW YORK
THE MERSHON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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THE WARRIOR HAD NOT TIME TO RECOVER * * * WHEN TOM GRASPED HIM BY THE THROAT.

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THE WARRIOR HAD NOT TIME TO RECOVER * * * WHEN TOM GRASPED HIM BY THE THROAT.

NED TRIED THE SCARE GAME AGAIN, FLINGING UP HIS ARMS AND SHOUTING

"THIS 'ERE IS A LITTLE ROW YOU KIN SETTLE WITH ME, INSTEAD OF THAT BOY THAR."

STILL NEARER, UNTIL IT APPEARED AS IF HE HAD TO MAKE BUT A SINGLE LEAP FORWARD.

THROUGH APACHE LAND.

CHAPTER I.

MOONLIGHT ON THE RIO GILA.

Along the eastern bank a small Indian canoe, containing a single individual, was stealing its way—"hugging" the shore so as to take advantage of the narrow band of shadow that followed the winding of the stream. There were no trees on either side of the river, but this portion was walled in by bluffs, rising from three or four to fully twenty feet in height. The current was sluggish and not a breath of air wrinkled the surface on this mild summer night.

It was in the wildest part of the Indian country, and Tom Hardyng, the hunter, runner and bearer of all dispatches between the frontier posts in the extreme southwest, knew very well that for three days past it had been his proverbial good fortune, or rather a special Providence, that had kept his scalp from ornamenting the lodge of some marauding Comanche or Apache. Tom was one of the bravest and most skillful of borderers in those days, and had been up in the Indian country to learn the truth of numerous rumors which had come to the stations, reports of a general uprising among the redskins, with whom the peace commissioners had succeeded in negotiating treaties after months of diplomacy. After spending more than a week in dodging back and forth, in the disguise of an Indian he had learned enough to feel that there was good foundation for these rumors, and that the exposed stations and settlements were in imminent peril. As soon as he was assured of this fact he started on his return to Fort Havens, which still lay a good three days' travel to the southwest. It was Tom's purpose to continue his descent until the following night, when, if nothing unexpected should intervene, he hoped to reach the point where he had left his mustang, and thence it would be plain sailing for the rest of the way. He knew the country thoroughly, and was confident that it was safer to perform a part of the journey by water than by land, which explains how it was that he was still in the paint and garb of an Indian, and still stealing his way down toward the Gulf of California.

"Them Apaches are a cute set," he muttered, as he glided along through the bank of shadow; "I believe they've larned I've been up among them lookin' around. I can't tell 'zactly how they larned it. I've played Injun so often that I know I can do it purty well; but they know there's somethin' in the air, and them signs I spied yesterday showed plain 'nough that they was lookin' for me. They'd give a dozen of their best warriors, with a chief throwed in to make good weight, to keep me from reachin' Fort Havens with the news that the Apaches are makin' ready to raise Old Ned along the border. Fact is, I do carry big news, that's sartin. Hello!"

This exclamation was caused by the appearance of a bright point of light on the edge of the bluff, several hundred yards down the river, and upon the opposite side. At first glance it resembled some star of the first magnitude, which a sudden depression of the bluff had made visible. The scout ceased paddling, and, suffering the canoe to drift slowly with the tide, fixed his keen gray eyes upon the fiery point.

"That ain't any more of a star than I am," he added, a second later. "There she goes again!"

The torch, for such it was, remained stationary for scarcely a minute, when it began revolving swiftly from right to left, the gyration being of such a nature as to prove that it was swung by the hand of some person. Three revolutions, and then it suddenly reversed and made three in the opposite direction, then two back, then two forward, then one back and forth, and then it vanished in the gloom of the night. Tom scarcely breathed while viewing this pantomime, and when it ended he still held the paddle motionless while he chuckled to himself, for he knew what it all meant. He had seen Indian telegraphy before, and had learned to comprehend a great deal of those mysterious signs and signals by which news is carried across mountain and prairie with incredible speed. He had ridden his fleet mustang to death to head off some of these telegrams, and yet in every case the Indians, by some trickery unexplained to him, had outsped him.

"Yes, I can read that," Tom growled, still drifting with the current. "That ere redskin is signalin' to some other scamp, and it's all about *me*. It says that I'm on the river somewhere, and a lookout must be kept for me."

Such was the fact. The Indian who swayed the torch meant thereby to appraise some confederate that the scout who had dared to penetrate such a distance into their country, and to unearth their most important secrets, was seeking to make his way down the Rio Gila and out of their country again. This much said the torch in language that could not be mistaken. Although it added no more, yet the sequence was inevitable, and Tom needed no one to apprise him that the river both above and below him was closely watched, and that he was in the greatest peril of his life. Being entirely shrouded in shadow, he could not see the moon, which rode high in the sky, scarcely touched by a floating cloud.

"I wish the moon would go out of sight altogether," he said to himself, as he viewed the clear sky. "I'd like to see it as black as a wolf's mouth, and then I'd teach these scamps somethin'; but there's too much confounded moonlight layin' loose for a chap to show any scientific tricks."

The fact that a redskin had indulged in signaling suggested that there must be some one to whom he had signaled, and the hunter devoted himself to learning where the second Apache was located.

"As near as I kin calc'late, the chap must be on this side of the stream, and purty close to where I'm rockin' in the cradle of the deep this very minute."

He now moved his paddle slightly—just enough to hold the boat motionless while he looked and listened. The stillness was profound; not even the soft sighing of the wind reaching his ears. He had peered around in the gloom only a few minutes when he discerned the reply to the signal already described, and so close that he was startled. Scarcely fifty feet below him, and on the edge of the bluff, several yards in height, a light flashed into view. A second glance showed him that it was a flaming torch held in the hand of an Indian, who began whirling it around his head with a swiftness that made it seem like a revolving wheel of fire. The rapid motion of the torch, as the reader may infer, caused an equally rapid increase of the flame upon it, so that it revealed the Indian himself; and the hunter, as he looked toward it, saw the figure of the warrior standing like some pyrotechnist in the center of his own display.

A better target could not have been asked, and Tom, quick as thought, raised his rifle and sighted it; but with his finger upon the trigger, he refrained, lowered the piece and shook his head, muttering as he did so:

"He deserves it, and I'd like to give it to him, but it won't do. They'd know what the rifle-crack meant, and I'd have a hornet's nest about my head quick as lightnin'."

Tom was not certain of the meaning of the exhibition he had just seen, but believed that it was intended as a mere reply to the other—the same as if the Apache had shouted "All right!" in response to the notification. The Indian must have circled the torch in this manner for more than a score of times, when he threw it from his hand into the river, where it fell with a hiss, and was instantly extinguished.

The scout was in a quandary. If he continued down stream he must pass directly beneath the spot where his foe was standing, and the shadow was by no means dense enough to make it possible for him to escape observation. He was confident, however, that if he could change places with the warrior, he could discern the canoe without any closer approach. He was at a disadvantage, for the bluff was perfectly perpendicular and so high that he could not reach the ground above without retreating up the river for at least a quarter of a mile, where the bluff was depressed enough to permit him to draw himself upward upon it. Had the bank been low and wooded, it would have been the easiest matter in the world to have shoved the canoe into the shelter, or to have circumvented the Indian by lifting it bodily from the water and going around him, and striking the river again below. But Tom hesitated only a few minutes. He was anxious to get forward, for delay was dangerous and he felt annoyed at the manner in which he was dogged.

"Here goes," he exclaimed, starting the canoe forward again. "If that Apache is anxious for a scrimmage, he can have one."

CHAPTER II.

TOM HARDYNGE'S RUSE.

Hardynge was too skillful a hunter to place himself directly in the way of the Apache whom he knew to be the most treacherous kind of an enemy. His purpose was to indulge in a little strategy and to seek to outwit the redskin, as he had done on many an occasion before. It required but a second for him to slide his rifle over upon his back, the stock being hastily wrapped with a leathern sheath, which he always carried for such an emergency, when he gently let himself over the stern of the canoe, taking care to make no splash or noise in doing so. He then permitted his body with the exception of his head to sink entirely beneath the surface, while he floated with the boat, lying in such a position that he made it effectually screen him from the view of any one who

might be upon the bank above. It was hardly to be expected, however, that if the Indian saw the boat, he would permit it to pass unquestioned. Tom did not anticipate it, and he was prepared for that which followed. For several minutes the most perfect silence prevailed. At the end of that time, the scout knew that he was exactly beneath the spot whereon he had seen the answering signal, and scarcely stirred a muscle, keeping his head as close as possible to the boat, and so nearly submerged, that he could scarcely breathe.

"Hooh! hooh!"

The Apache had noted the empty canoe drifting below him in the shadow, and surveyed it with something of the feeling of the detective who suddenly stumbles upon a clue, the precise meaning of which is at first a mystery to him.

It is hardly to be supposed that he intended this outcry as a hail to the boat, which he must have seen contained no one. Its appearance would naturally suggest to one in his situation that the occupant had been alarmed by the signs of danger and had taken to the land. This supposition was so natural that Hardyng would probably have got safely by the dangerous point but for a totally unlooked-for mishap. The water, which up to this time had been fully six feet in depth, suddenly shallowed to less than a quarter of that, so that he struck his knees against the bottom. The shock was very slight, and scarcely caused a ripple; but it takes only the slightest noise to alarm an Indian, especially when he is on the watch. That faint plash caused by the jar of the body caught the ear of the listening, peering redskin, who instantly slid his body over the bluff, and balancing himself for an instant, dropped with such precision that he struck the canoe in the very center, and preserved its gravity so well that it tipped neither to the right nor left.

At the very moment the Apache dropped, the hunter rose to his feet, knife in hand. The water rose scarcely to his knees, and the bottom was hard, so that it was almost the same as if he stood upon dry land. The warrior had not time to recover from the slight shock of his leap, when Tom grasped him by the throat and used his weapon with such effect that it was all over in a few seconds.

"There! I reckon you won't go into the telegraph business again very soon!" he growled, as the inanimate body disappeared down the stream, and he coolly re-entered the canoe, which had floated but a short distance away.

He had scarcely done this when a new idea struck him, and, hastening after the receding body, he carefully drew it into the boat again. Here it was the work of but a few minutes to place it in a sitting position in the stern in the most natural posture imaginable, so that any one looking upon the figure would not have suspected for an instant that it was anything but an animate being. Making sure that its pose could not be improved, the scout then turned the boat directly away from the bank, never changing its course until the very middle of the Gila was reached, when he began paddling in as leisurely a manner as if no danger threatened. It was a daring stratagem, but it is only by such means that men are enabled to escape from peril, and although fully aware of the danger he was incurring, he kept on his way with that coolness that years of experience had given him.

As he approached a point opposite that where he had seen the first signal he did not turn his head, but he looked sideways and scanned the bank with the most searching scrutiny. Sure enough, at this moment he plainly discerned the figures of fully a half-dozen Indians standing upon the bluff and apparently watching the canoe with a curiosity that was natural.

"All right," thought the hunter; "so long as you let me alone I won't hurt you."

Had there been but the single occupant of the canoe the Apaches would not have stood debating in this fashion as to what they should do, if, indeed, they should do anything at all. Unity in the question would have shown that it was the identical individual for whom they were searching, for they knew that he was alone; but the fact that there were two, and both in the guise of Indians, could be explained upon no other hypothesis than that they were really what they seemed to be.

"Hooh! Hooh!"

It was precisely the same exclamation which had been uttered by the warrior who sat so cold and inanimate in the stern of the canoe, and Tom, without the least hesitancy, ceased paddling for the instant, straightened up, and responded in the same guttural fashion, resuming the use of the oar at the same time, as if he meant that that should be the end of it. But the Apaches immediately followed up their ejaculations with some other sounds, which were doubtless intended as a summons for the craft to heave to and "show her papers." Tom did not understand the Apache tongue well enough to comprehend the precise meaning of these words, although he was pretty well convinced of what the others were driving at. He did not dare to attempt to reply, nor did he dare to move faster; so he did the only dignified thing possible under the circumstances. He continued that automatic paddling, and, assisted by the current, was rapidly leaving his enemies in the rear when they called to him again, moving at the same time down the bank in a fashion which showed that they meant business. The hunter, not yet ready to make the desperate dash which he had reserved for the last final effort, if he should be driven to the wall, ceased work again and called out:

"Hooh!"

He said it as impatiently as he could in the hope of "cutting off further debate," and resumed

paddling, knowing that a comparatively short distance down the river the banks were so depressed that he could readily make his way from the boat to the land, so that after getting fairly below the Apaches his chances of ultimate escape were greatly increased.

The Indians must have been exasperated at the refusal, for Tom had taken scarcely a dozen strokes when he saw the flash of several guns upon the bank, and the whizzing of the bullets around his head left no doubt of the target at which they aimed.

"I can do somethin' of that myself," growled the hunter, as he laid down his paddle and took up his gun.

Without the least hesitation, he fired directly into the group, and the wild cry that instantly followed told with what a fatal result also. All diplomacy was ended by this act, and without pausing to reload his piece, he dropped his gun and bent to the task. The long ashen paddle was dipped deep into the water, and the light vessel shot like an arrow down stream. It seemed, indeed, to be imbued with life, and fairly skimmed over the surface. The unexpected and defiant response to the summons of the Apaches threw them into temporary bewilderment, and the minutes thus lost to them were golden ones gained to the fugitive, who shot the canoe as close to the opposite shore as was prudent, and wielded the paddle with the skill of a veteran.

Having now no need of the dummy that had stood him so well for the time, Tom did not hesitate to throw him overboard as a useless incumbrance, and, thus relieved of the dead weight, he sped forward with wonderful speed. In a short time after that the redskins had vanished from view, and almost any one would have supposed that the danger was passed; but Tom was well aware that it was only a temporary lull in the storm. The Apaches were like bloodhounds, who, having once taken the trail of their prey, would relax no effort so long as there was a chance of capturing him, and so he abated not a jot of his tremendous exertions.

CHAPTER III.

PURSUED BY THE APACHES.

As stealthily as a phantom did the canoe bearing the scout skim along the shore of the Gila, hugging the banks as closely as possible, so as to take advantage of the ribbon of shadow which followed the winding of the stream. The moon was creeping higher up the sky, and this advantage would soon be denied the fugitive altogether, so every minute was improved to the utmost. Now and then Tom ceased paddling, and as the boat shot forward with undiminished speed, bent his head and listened. This was continued until he had passed fully a quarter of a mile, when he rested for a longer time than usual.

"I guess they'll have to give it up," he said to himself, with a peculiar chuckle. "They ketched me in a bad box, that's sartin, where I couldn't climb out on either side. But things are a little better here," he added, as he looked from side to side at the bluffs, which were so low that the tops could be easily reached from his boat. "I don't much want to tramp over-land, but if it is necessary I've got somethin' of a chance, which isn't what I had before."

He might well prefer the water to the land; for on the former, whether he went fast or slow, there was no trail left for the keenest bloodhound to follow; on the latter it was impossible to conceal his most cautious footsteps from the eyes of the redskins. The surface of this portion of Arizona was of such a nature that everything was against the hunter. There was no wood nor tributary streams for miles. If he left the Gila, and struck across the country, it would be over an open plain, where he could be seen for miles. He would be on foot, while his enemies would all be mounted on their fleet mustangs. How, then, could he elude them by leaving his boat? His only hope was in traveling at night, but night must always be followed by day.

"I wonder what ideas will creep into their skulls," he muttered, reflecting upon the view the Apaches had gained of him a short time before from the bank. "A dead Injun is a good deal better than a live one, as that 'ere critter proved to me. If I hadn't fired back agin, they might have thought I was one of their own warriors—mebbe they'll think so now. Great Scott!"

The scout was paddling along in his leisurely manner, when his eyes, by the merest accident, happened to rest upon the other shore, at a point a short distance below him. While thus looking, he saw distinctly a point of light appear and vanish three times! It performed no such gyration as those which he had first seen, but simply came forward and receded until it was gone altogether, leaving the same misty darkness as before. More by instinct than from any other cause, Tom turned his eyes to the point opposite where he had seen this exhibition. He had scarcely done so when precisely the same thing was seen!

"Jest what I expected," he said as he checked the downward progress of his boat. "The varmints have 'spicioned that one of the chaps in that 'ere canoe which passed before 'em is myself, and they're goin' for me like lightnin'. They've mounted their horses, and kept it up till they knowed they'd struck a p'int below me, and there they've signaled to each other that I'm still above 'em on the river, and still to be ketched."

The scout was certain that his theory was correct, and that, distasteful and dangerous as it might

be, the time had come for him to leave the river. To continue further would be to precipitate a collision in which there was no possibility of the good fortune that had followed him in the first place. Besides this the night was so far advanced and the moon so high up in the sky, that the shadow had narrowed to a band which was practically useless.

"No use makin' faces when you've got a dose of medicine to take," he added, as he ran the canoe close to the shore.

There he found that by standing upon his feet he could easily reach the edge of the bluff above and thus draw himself up when he chose. This he proceeded to do, but he was too skillful a hunter to leave behind him such tell-tale evidence as the canoe itself would have proven. Were he to leave that as it was, it would be sure to catch the eye of the Apaches within a quarter of an hour and tell them precisely what had been done. And so, as the hunter hung thus by his hands, with his long rifle secured at his back, he caught the toe of his moccasin in the craft in such a way that it dipped and took water. He held it thus until it could contain no more; but its composition was such that even then it would not sink. There were loose boulders in the bank, and the hunter proceeded to drop these carefully into the boat below. It required several for ballast, when it quietly went to the bottom, where it was certain to stay. This done he addressed himself to the task before him.

As he straightened up and looked off in the moonlight, a very discouraging, although familiar sight, met his eye. The moonlight was quite strong, and he was enabled to see objects indistinctly for a considerable distance. It was everywhere the same. A level, treeless prairie, where for miles there was not a drop of water to be obtained, and over which, as has been already shown, in case he attempted to make his way, he would be placed at the greatest disadvantage possible, especially as his own mustang was still a good hundred miles to the southwest, if he had succeeded in avoiding capture up to that time. But the life of a frontiersman, besides being perilous at all times, is hardly ever anything but disagreeable, despite the curious fascination which it holds for those who follow it. Tom did not hesitate a moment longer than was necessary, now that a disagreeable expedient was forced upon him.

His first precaution was to make sure that none of the Apaches were in sight. The point at which he had seen the answering signal was so far below that he was certain it would be beyond his vision, and, this much determined, gave him just the "leverage" needed to work upon. It needed but a few seconds to assure himself upon this point, and then he struck off to the southwest. This course, while it took him away from the Gila, would eventually bring him back to it, the winding of the stream being such as to make this junction certain, if continued. The great thing now required was haste; for a great deal depended upon the ground that could be passed over during these favoring hours of darkness. He had taken scarcely a dozen steps when he struck into a long, loping trot, not particularly rapid in itself, but of such a character that it could be kept for hours at a stretch. It was the genuine Indian dog trot, which is so effective in long distances. As the runner went along in this fashion, his thoughts were busy, and all his senses on the alert. He concluded that it was nearly midnight, and that he had, consequently, a number of hours at his command; so he aimed to get as far below the intercepting Apaches as possible, with the intention of returning to the river, before daylight, where he was hopeful of discovering some canoe, or at least of hitting upon some feasible method of hiding his trail from his lynx-eyed pursuers.

This loping trot was kept up for fully two hours, at the end of which time Tom was certain that he was approaching the river again. He still pressed forward for another hour, when he came to a halt. Although he had continued this great exertion for so long a time, yet so good was his wind that when he paused there was no perceptible quickening of the respiration. Years of training had made him capable of standing far more trying tests of his strength than this. The scout carefully turned his head from side to side, looking and listening. All was still, and his ear caught no ominous sound. Then he moistened his finger and held it over his head. Yes, there was the least possible breath of air stirring, as was told him by the fact that one side of the moistened finger was slightly chilled. Everywhere, right, left, in front or rear, so far as the bright moonlight permitted his vision to extend, was the same dead level of treeless plain. Kneeling down he applied his ear to the ground. Could it be? There *was* a sound thus carried to his ears—the very sound which above all others he dreaded to hear. It was a faint, almost inaudible, tapping upon the earth. Far away it was, but drawing nearer every minute.

The scout knew what it meant. It was the sound of horse's hoofs!

CHAPTER IV.

OUTWITTED.

"I'll match them Apaches agin the world for shrewd deviltry," exclaimed Hardyng, unable to suppress his admiration even in the moment which told him of his own increased personal danger. "By some hook or crook, the Old Boy only knows what, they've found out my game, and are after me. Ah! if I only had my mustang, Thundergust, with me!"

Tom now changed his direction more to the north, his intention being to strike the river much

sooner than was his original purpose. It was the only thing he could do to escape the redskins, who showed such a wonderful skill in following him up.

As near as he could judge, something like ten miles still intervened between him and the friendly stream—a distance which he was confident of passing before daylight, if he did not find his pursuers in his path. The greatest care was necessary to keep out of the way of these creatures, and the fugitive had run but a short distance when he paused and applied his ear to the ground again. Only for an instant, however, when he bounded up and was off like a shot. The alarming sounds came to his ear with such distinctness as to prove that the Apaches were close at hand. Guided by some strange fatality, they were bearing directly down upon him at full speed. More than all, those pattering footfalls were such as to indicate that the swarthy horsemen were not approaching in a compact group. They had separated so as to cover a wide area of ground, and were advancing in such an array that the difficulty of escape was increased tenfold. Everything conspired against poor Tom. The bright moonlight, the broad level stretch of plain, the fact that he was on foot, and his pursuers, besides being well mounted, were among the most skillful riders of the Southwest, made his situation about as desperate as it is possible to imagine.

A few minutes later the fugitive paused again, but this time it was not necessary that he should apply his ear to the ground. The sounds of the mustangs' hoofs came to him very plainly through the midnight air, and as he looked around he half expected to see the shadowy figures of the horsemen plunging forward in the gloom toward him! Nothing was to be seen, however, of them, and, feeling that the situation was becoming desperate, he changed his course again, his purpose being simply to get by the approaching marauders without caring in what direction he went. Had he been five minutes earlier he might have succeeded, but he was just that much too late.

He was stealing forward in his cautious manner, with the sound of the horses' hoofs growing more distinct every second, when, sure enough, the figure of an Indian horseman suddenly came in sight, bearing down upon him as straight as an arrow. The very instant Tom saw it he sank down upon his face, scarcely daring to hope that his pursuer would pass him, and prepared for whatever he chose to do.

The scout turned his head so that he could watch every movement and guard against it, his hand being extended beneath his body in the most natural position possible, but grasping his loaded revolver.

It may have been that the Apache would have gone by but for the action of his mustang. These intelligent animals seem to know, in many cases, far more than their masters, and the one in question was yet some yards distant from the prostrate form, when he halted with a snort. This opened the ball, and the scout anxiously awaited the fight which seemed inevitable.

Fortunately, the Indian party had separated to such an extent that no others were in sight of the fugitive, who thus had but a single man to contend against, although there was no question but what any number of others could be summoned to the spot in a twinkling. The foeman understood the situation at a glance; that is, he knew that the man for whom he was seeking was prostrate upon the ground before him, but he had no means of judging whether he was dead, asleep, or feigning. Under these circumstances he advanced very cautiously, his mustang betraying considerable reluctance at walking up to a man stretched out at full length.

This was precisely what Hardyngge desired, as every minute that matters remained in *statu quo* placed the friends of his adversary further away and simplified the encounter, which he considered as certain to take place.

Something like ten minutes were occupied in this stealthy advance of the horse, at the end of which time he stood so that his head was directly over the shoulders of the prostrate man, who still lay as motionless as a statue.

"Hooh!" exclaimed the rider, holding himself ready for any demonstration upon the part of the suspected white man. But the latter never stirred, although he shivered a little at the fear that the mustang might place his hoof upon him.

Tom's peculiar peril will be understood when it is stated that the Apache was master of the situation from the instant they came in sight of each other. Had the fugitive fired at him the moment he caught sight of his horse, he might have tumbled him to the ground, but it would have brought the rest of the party around him in an instant. As matters now stood, the Apache would have fired at the first movement he made, no matter how dexterous, to draw his hand from beneath his body, and so Tom bided his time.

"Hooh!"

This was repeated several times, when the warrior tried to force his mustang to step upon him; but the animal was too timid to be forced into doing such a repugnant thing, and, when angrily urged thereto, leaped clear of the body with a sniff of terror, and galloped several rods before he could be brought round and compelled to face the unknown again. This seemed to convince the Apache that the man was dead, and without any further hesitation he slid down from the back of his horse, and advanced to the figure for the purpose of scalping him.

He had just stooped down, knife in hand, when the form turned like a flash. There came a blinding flash, then a report and a cry, almost together, and Tom Hardyngge seemed to leap up from the ground as if a bomb had exploded beneath him, and, dashing toward the mustang,

seized his rein and vaulted upon his back before the animal really knew what had taken place.

It was a daring deed, but it succeeded to perfection. The scout had not only extinguished his foe, but had captured his horse as well. The sound of the pistol might reach the ears of other Apaches, but he cared nothing for that. He was as well mounted as they, and, with the start which he had gained, they were welcome to do all they could. In view of this, it was impossible for him to restrain his exultation, and the moment he realized that he was fairly astride of the mustang he let out a shout that might have been heard a mile away. The steed which bore him was an excellent one, and he had no fear of being overtaken by any of them. He knew in what direction to take his flight, and away he sped with his horse upon a dead run. He scarcely drew rein until daylight broke over the prairie, when he found himself pursuing a direction parallel with the river, and making good headway toward the point where he hoped his own matchless Thundergust was awaiting him.

Hardynge scarcely halted during the greater portion of the next day, except when his mustang required it, and shortly after the sun crossed the meridian he was gratified at catching sight of the rolling prairie and wooded hills where he had turned his horse loose nearly a week before. While at a distance he gave utterance to several sharp whistles, which produced the response he desired, the beautiful glossy mustang galloping forth to meet him with every appearance of delight. The creature had taken good care of himself during his absence, having feasted upon the rich, succulent grass, and was in the best possible condition.

Turning the Indian horse loose Tom bestowed no further attention upon him, but leaped upon his favorite animal and galloped away to the rocks where he had carefully concealed his saddle and riding gear and where they had lain untouched while he was gone.

Just as he dismounted, his eye rested upon a piece of dried buffalo-skin which was pinned against a tree, the inner side turned outward. The first glance told him there was something unusual, and his curiosity led him to approach and scan it closely. There was some writing scrawled upon it, which he read with little difficulty. The words were startling enough, and as the hunter finished them he exclaimed, in a frightened undertone:

"Thunderation! can it be possible?"

CHAPTER V.

AN ALARMING MESSAGE.

As the scout rode his mustang up to the tree whereon the buffalo skin was fastened, he read the following words:

"TO TOM HARDYNGE:—The stage which left Santa Fe on the 10th inst., is due at Fort Havens between the 20th and 25th, *but it will never reach there*. It has an escort of a dozen mounted soldiers, but they can't save it. The Apaches have arranged to attack it near Devil's Pass, which you know is about a hundred miles northeast from this point, among the mountains. You can't do anything to help it; but Ned Chadmund is with it, and his father, the colonel, offers you and me a thousand dollars apiece to save *him*. I leave to day—Thursday—for the pass, and you must follow the minute your eyes see this. I will be on the lookout for you. Remember there isn't an hour to spare.

"DICK MORRIS."

Colonel Chadmund was the commandant at Fort Havens, whither he was hastening with his news from the Indian country. His family dwelt in Santa Fe, and his only child, a bright boy, about a dozen years of age, had been permitted to start to join his father in accordance with a promise made him a long time before. The escort with which he had been provided would have been ample under ordinary circumstances, and in fact, was larger than was generally customary; but it was not sufficient.

Dick Morris held a position then known as "hunter to the fort" at the post under the command of Colonel Chadmund. It was similar to that which the renowned Kit Carson filled for a number of years in the old days at Bent's Fort. The man was selected on account of his skill in the use of the rifle, and his knowledge of the habits of the game, his duty being simply to supply the command with all the fresh food possible—a position which, it will at once be understood, was no sinecure, involving constant activity and many long, rapid journeys.

Dick was as skillful and shrewd a man as could be found in the whole Southwest. Tom Hardynge, his friend and companion in many a perilous adventure, understood what it all meant the instant he had finished reading the writing upon the buffalo skin. By some means—probably through the Indian runners encountered while hunting his game—he had learned the particulars of the expedition that had been arranged to attack and massacre the escort. Very probably these swarthy wretches were mainly incited to the deed by the knowledge that the son of Colonel Chadmund was to be with the party. It was under the direction of this vigilant officer that the marauding Indians of the border had received such a number of severe blows. They were excited to the highest point of exasperation, and would seize upon any means of revenge at their

command.

Alarmed by the danger which threatened his beloved child, the colonel had sent Dick Morris to the rescue at once. He would have sent a hundred men from his fort, had he believed it possible that they could do any good, but it was clearly out of the question for them to reach Devil's Pass until nearly twenty-four hours after the stage was due there. It was one of those cases wherein all depended upon shrewdness and strategy, and where nothing was to be gained by mere force of arms. The expectation was that the Apaches would hold the boy at an enormous ransom, or probably as a hostage for the safety of such of their blood-stained chiefs as were in the hands of the Americans. This will explain the haste of the hunter, and his anxiety to have the companionship of Tom, who had tramped so many hundred miles through the Indian country.

Ten minutes after reading the dispatch Tom had fastened on the accoutrements of his mustang and was galloping away to the northeast on the trail of his friend. He did not pause even to hunt a little game, after having been so long without food. He was accustomed to privation and hardship, and, if it were required, was good for twenty-four hours longer without permitting a particle of food to pass his lips.

He was leaving the treacherous Gila far to the south. It may be said that his course along this stream, on his return from the Apache country, was like the base of a triangle, while he was now following the hypotenuse. This latter route was preferable in every sense to that which he had been using for the last few days. The country itself was more varied, better watered and abounded with vegetation, its only drawback being the ever-present danger from the marauding redskins. Another advantage that belonged to the traveler over this path was that it was really a path—so clearly defined that a stranger could follow it without trouble. It was, in fact, the trail between Fort Havens and Santa Fe, over which, at certain intervals, messengers were regularly dispatched back and forth.

The money with which the soldiers at Fort Havens and several other posts were paid came down by express from Santa Fe over this road, in charge of a proper escort, and the coach which started from that city with little Ned Chadmund carried also one hundred thousand dollars in crisp, crackling greenbacks stowed away in the bottom of the vehicle. Consequently it will be seen that the Apaches, who understood very well the value of these printed slips, had every inciting cause to organize an overwhelming expedition against the coach and its escort.

The day is waning, but his steed was fresh and fleet, and had enjoyed such a long rest, that it would be a mercy to him to put him through his best paces. Tom did not hesitate to do it. The glossy black animal gave a neigh of delight as he felt the familiar hand of his master upon the bridle, and he stretched away like one of the Arabian coursers of the desert, fleet as the wind and capable of keeping up the tremendous rate of speed for hours at a time.

The greater portion of this journey led through the wildest mountain scenery, and the afternoon was scarcely half gone when a striking change in the surface was observable. Instead of that long, dreary expanse of endless prairie, the hunter was forced to make long detours to escape the obstructions constantly interposing in the way. Now it was around some pile of rocks, then winding among a mass of hills, then over a level plain for some distance, but with the scenery steadily increasing in ruggedness at every mile traversed. Far ahead could be discerned the chain of mountains, their peaks looking blue and misty in the distance. It was among these that the trail wound its way—one portion, in the very heart of the mountains, being known as Devil's Pass, from its wild and dangerous character; and, as the scout strained his eye in the direction and contemplated the blue waving line against the sky, he almost fancied he could see the smoke from the rifles of the vengeful Apaches.

"Shouldn't wonder if they are at it this very minute," he muttered, as he glanced down at the ground in front of him.

All the afternoon, as he sped along, he saw constantly in front of him the footprints of another mustang, such as are made by an animal when under full speed. So they were, as he knew very well. Dick Morris had been over the same trail a few hours before, at scarcely less speed than his own.

Every time Tom came in sight of an elevation he looked hastily at it in the hope of catching sight of some signal from his friend. In such a desperate enterprise as this he felt the need of companionship, especially of such a tried and daring man as Dick Morris. But the sun gradually went down in the western sky without bringing him the coveted sight, and he began to believe that he would not be overtaken before reaching Devil's Pass, which he hoped to reach on the morrow. Then, as the sun disappeared and darkness crept over mountain and prairie, Tom turned the head of his animal in the direction of a clump of trees where he knew there was an abundance of grass and water, and where, in all probability, something in the way of food could be had for himself. The mustang needed rest and refreshment, and the rider required them scarcely less.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

The hunter was within a hundred yards or so of the clump of trees, when he suddenly checked his mustang, or rather the mustang checked himself, at the light of a camp fire, which all at once flashed out from among them.

"That's either Dick or a lot of varmints," he muttered. "I think it's varmints, for I don't b'lieve he meant to wait there."

However, it was a question easily settled. He slid from his horse, and, rifle in hand, stole forward in the direction of the grove, moving as silently and stealthily as a shadow, while his beast stood as if he were an equestrian statue awaiting the placing of some metallic hero upon his back. A phantom itself could not have glided forward with less noise than did he, and yet he was fully twenty yards away from his destination, with his eyes fixed upon the point of light, when he was discovered by some horse that belonged to the stranger, or strangers, which gave out a loud neigh, as a signal to his friends of the approach of danger. At that moment, Tom dropped flat upon his face, as he had done before at the approach of the Apaches, and the luxuriant grass gathered about his form in such a way that he could not be seen by anyone at a moderate distance. But close upon the heels of the neigh came a low, tremulous whistle, scarcely uttered when Tom replied in a precisely similar way, leaped to his feet and trotted toward the grove.

"That's Dick!" he exclaimed to himself, the signals which they had used being the same that they had adopted years before, when approaching each other in a dangerous neighborhood.

The next minute the two met and shook hands. There were many points of resemblance and difference between the two comrades. Each was in middle life, embrowned, hardened, and toughened by years of exposure and the wild life of the border; but Tom Hardyng was taller, more sinewy and active than Dick Morris, who was below the medium stature, with a stunted appearance; but he was a powerful man, wonderfully skillful in the use of the rifle, and the two friends together made the strongest possible kind of a team.

"Ah! that's the talk," exclaimed Tom, as he snuffed the odor of the cooking meat by the camp fire. "I'm hungry enough to chaw up my moccasins. What have you there—buffalo, mule or grizzly bar?"

"Neither one," replied the other. "I fetched down an antelope a couple of hours ago, and as I was expectin' you, I cooked enough of it for both."

"You had to cook his hoofs and all to do that; but why don't you spread the dining table?"

Little ceremony was indulged in at such a time. The toasting meat, brown, crisp and juicy, was served in two equal portions, each of immense size, and then, with no culinary articles but their keen hunting knives, and their incisors, almost as keen, they went at the business with the gusto of famishing wolves. Meanwhile the two mustangs were feasting upon the rich grass which grew abundantly about them, and so all members of the party were enjoying themselves to the fullest extent.

The two hunters scarcely spoke while this piece of mastication was going on. They understood each other so well that there was no necessity of any hurry in the way of inquiry or conversation. When at last they had filled themselves to repletion, they drew their fingers through their bushy hair, using the latter by way of napkins, and then, after a good long draught from the brook running near at hand, lit their pipes and leaned back in the very acme of bliss.

"How soon shall we start?" asked Tom.

"In a couple of hours," was the reply.

"Think the Apaches are through by this time?"

"No doubt of it."

If the hunters seemed to exhibit indifference in referring to the terrible occurrence, it was not because they felt thus; but the lives which they led had accustomed them to such frightful experiences.

"S'pose they've spared the younker?"

"Guess they have."

The conclusion to which both came was that the Apaches were incited to this attack more by the desire to get possession of the lad than by anything else, in view of the intense hatred with which Colonel Chadmund was viewed by the hostile Indians of the Southwest. He had been stationed over two years at Fort Havens, during which his administration had been marked by extreme vigor, and he had retaliated upon the Apaches especially in the severest way for many outrages committed by them.

"Yas, they've gone for that little younker," added Dick Morris, after the discussion had been continued for some time. "Of course they haven't killed him; for that would have sp'iled their game. The colonel, finding what they'd done, would come down on 'em harder than ever, and you kin make up your mind they'd get the worst of the bargain before he was through with 'em; but as long as they hold the boy, you see, they've got the hands of the old fellow tied, for he thinks a heap of his boy, and he'll do anything to save him."

"And that's why he sends us arter him," said Tom.

"He knows that if he let a lot of the men go, they might get all chawed up, and it wouldn't help the boy any, so he thinks we kin get him out of their hands by some hocus pocus or other."

"And what do *you* think, Tom?" asked his companion, in a confidential voice. "Is there much show for ever saving the skulp of little Ned?"

His brother hunter looked into the fire for several minutes, with a very serious expression upon his countenance. He was thinking intently upon the situation, and trying to extract some comfort from the prospect.

"Wal, Dick, you know as well as me that it's mighty hard to tell in such a case. We've both got the best of hosses, that kin hold thar own agin anythin' the reds can scare up; but if they go to such pains to get the chap into thar hands, they'll take the same pains to keep him thar."

"Exactly; but they won't be expectin' any such move as we're at so early in the day, don't you see? and there's where we gain the advantage by hurryin' on, afore they kin get off in the mountains with him."

There seemed to be reason in this conclusion, and both agreed upon it.

At the end of a couple of hours their horses had rested sufficiently, and they were mounted again. They had trusted to the mustangs to act as sentinels while they spent their time in eating and talking, and, no alarm having been given, they were satisfied that there was no one in the vicinity, and they rode off toward the northeast, without any concern of present danger threatening them. By this time the moon was in the sky; but a few clouds were occasionally scudding before his face, so that the prairie was not illuminated with as much clearness as upon the preceding night. The two hunters galloped along at a swinging gallop, a rate of speed which their mustangs were capable of continuing for hours and which it was the purpose of the riders to keep up until their destination was reached. Now and then, through the stillness of the night, the cries of wild animals came to their ears, and once or twice these sounded very much like signals from parties of Indians.

Tom and Dick never once relaxed their vigilance, but, as far as the gloom would permit, scanned the country about them in every direction. Besides, they occasionally caught the glimmer of camp fires, but they were all at such a distance that they paid no attention to them, but continued on the even tenor of their way.

Just as day was breaking, they found themselves fairly among the mountains. The wildest crags and peaks were all about them, and they were compelled to keep close to the pass they were following. This wound in and out among the fastnesses, not more than a hundred feet in width in some places, while in others it was fully a quarter of a mile broad. Here they were in constant apprehension of meeting with their old enemies; but there was an air of solitude and desertion about them that was impressive in the extreme. They halted but a short time to let their animals "blow," while they themselves made an observation. Still nothing new or alarming was discovered, and they hurried forward as before.

Just as the sun reached meridian, the two hunters came upon that place known as Devil's Pass, which they were certain had witnessed a fearful tragedy during the previous twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAVALRY ESCORT.

The stage which left Santa Fe on that beautiful spring morning, bound for Fort Havens on the journey heretofore referred to, carried two passengers. One was Corporal Hugg, a soldier who had been engaged a dozen years upon the plains—a rough, good-natured, chivalrous fellow, who, having lost a leg in the service of his country, enjoyed a pension, and had become a sort of family servant in the employ of Colonel Chadmund. He was devotedly attached to little Ned and his greatest delight was in watching or joining him at play, exercising a surveillance over him something like that which a great, shaggy Newfoundland holds over a pet child. The corporal was able to stump about upon his cork leg, and when the time came for the lad to make the journey through the mountains to Fort Havens—a journey which he had been looking impatiently forward to for fully a year—it followed as a natural sequence that the corporal should bear him company.

Ned bade his mother an affectionate good-bye, and she pressed him to her breast again and again, the tears filling her eyes, and a sad misgiving chilling her heart. The reports at the time were that the Indians to the southwest were unusually quiet, no word having yet reached the capital of New Mexico of the formidable raids that were being organized in the Apache country. Besides this, the stage, which was properly an ambulance, drawn by a single powerful horse, was escorted by twelve Indian fighters armed to the teeth, every one of whom had performed similar duty before, and so, according to all human probabilities, there seemed to be less cause than usual for fear. Yet the mother felt a woeful sinking of the heart, natural, perhaps, under the circumstances; but she could not break the promise of herself and husband to the boy, who was overflowing with joy at the prospect of that long journey through the mountains, and a several months' sojourn at the fort in the far Southwest.

Finally, the cavalcade lost sight of Santa Fe, and the first night they encamped a good distance away from that historic, then primitive, town. The lieutenant who had charge of the escort was more concerned about the treasure in their possession than he was about the Indians. So far as possible, the fact that he was carrying a large sum of money to one of the frontier posts had been kept a secret from the general public; but he was apprehensive that they might be followed by some of the desperate characters which infested Santa Fe at that time. But nothing of danger or lawlessness was seen during their first day and night, and when they resumed their journey on the morrow, they began to dismiss all thoughts of danger from that direction.

As they progressed toward Arizona, the country gradually grew wilder and more rugged, but the trail was followed without trouble, and when they encamped the second night, they had the satisfaction of reflecting that they had progressed much further than they had counted upon at first.

Those were days of delight and happiness to young Ned Chadmund. The weather was not oppressively warm, and the ever-changing scenery was like the most entrancing panorama passing before his eyes. Sometimes he rode upon one of the horses with the lieutenant or one of the soldiers. Then again he ran along-side the ambulance until he was tired, when he climbed within, and seated himself beside Corporal Hugg, and listened to his tales of battle and adventures.

On the second day the Indians began to show themselves. A party of horsemen would be seen upon the top of some hill or bluff, apparently contemplating the little cavalcade, or they would circle around at a distance upon the prairie, whooping and indulging in all sorts of tantalizing gestures, in the hope of drawing out a portion of the party in pursuit. Their hearts' delight would have been to get them into some exposed position, where they could be cut off to a man—and had the cavalry been unaccustomed to border life, the artifice would have succeeded; but they were not to be seduced to their ruin by any such transparent stratagem.

Now and then these redskins, a number of Comanches, sent in a rifle ball or two by way of reminding the cavalry that they were accustomed to that business. The lieutenant commanding permitted his men to reply occasionally, but no thought of pursuit was entertained. None of the soldiers were injured by these shots, although a number passed uncomfortably close, and the ambulance was pierced several times.

At one time Corporal Hugg checked his horse, and pointing his gun out of the stage, took deliberate aim at the nearest redskin, who was displaying his horsemanship by shooting from beneath the neck and belly of his mustang, and then, as the latter wheeled, flopping upon the other side of the animal, and firing as before. The corporal held his fire until he attempted one of these turn-overs, when he pulled the trigger and "took him on the wing." The result was a whoop, a beating of the air with a pair of moccasined feet, and the mustang galloped away without a rider.

This skillful shot was a good thing for the party, as it taught the Comanches the very lesson they needed. They instantly retreated to a further point upon the prairie, and finally vanished from view altogether.

The company had been on the road for nearly a week. Six of them, including the lieutenant, were riding at the head, and the remainder were in the rear of the ambulance. Corporal Hugg was holding the reins of his horse, who was stepping along with his heavy, ponderous tread, while the driver was drowsy and indolent from the long, monotonous ride in which he had been engaged for so many days, and for so many hours during this last day. It was near the middle of the afternoon, and Ned Chadmund was the only one of the company that seemed to be full of life and spirits. He had run along by the side of the vehicle, until he was pretty well jaded; he had crawled in again, and was chatting away to the corporal in a fashion that left no room for his giving way to drowsiness. The men sat like statues upon their horses, indifferent and silent, and wishing, in a general way, that the day were over and the time had come for going into camp, where they might stretch out their legs and smoke their pipes to their hearts' content.

"Yes, that 'ere is the place they call Devil's Pass," said the corporal in reply to a question from the boy. "You see that it was so wide back there at the beginning that you couldn't see how wide it was, and it keeps geting narrower and narrower till it reminds me of the canyon of the upper Yellowstone."

"How is that?" was the question that came when he paused to take breath.

"So narrow that you could toss a ball from one side to the other, and a thousand feet from the top to bottom, clean and square, and there are some places where it is all of a half mile."

"But this don't seem as narrow as that."

"I don't s'pose it is; but don't you notice ahead, yonder, that it ain't more than a hundred yards broad? Well, it keeps it up for all of two miles just like that."

"Why do they call it Devil's Pass, corporal?"

"I suppose because, if the Old Boy wanted to gobble up a lot of folks, that is just the place. The walls on each side are straight up and down, and several hundred feet high, so that a man can't dodge to the right or left, unless he has a pair of wings to help him. The only thing he can do is to go forward and backward, and if he happens to have Injuns in front and rear, you can understand

what a purty muss he would be in. That, I s'pose, is the reason why it's called the Devil's Pass."

"Do you think they will attack *us*?" asked Ned, in a scared voice.

"I can't say," replied the corporal, striving to banish the expression of alarm from his face. "If they've got any idea of disturbing us, just here is where they'll do it. It's the worst place on the route, and if we can get through to the other side all right, I'll feel as safe as if we was inside the stockades of your father's fort."

"Have you ever been through here before?"

"Yes; all of half a dozen times."

"Did you ever get into trouble?"

"I never traveled through in all my life without having a scrimmage with some of the redskins. If you'll take a look round as we drive along, you'll see the bones of men scattered all along. Some belong to white, and some to redskins; but they all fell fighting."

"How far ahead is the worst part of the route?"

"We're close upon it now, and I may as well tell you, Ned, that I think we're going to have a fight."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN DEVIL'S PASS.

By this time Ned Chadmund was pretty well frightened. Corporal Hugg had said enough to convince him that they were in the greatest danger of the whole journey. The lieutenant drew his men close together, and two of the most experienced scouts rode a short distance in advance of the others, glancing from side to side, and on the watch for the first signs of the approach of Indians.

The sides of the pass as already shown, were high and precipitous, so that there was no possibility of escape except by going backward or forward. Furthermore, the canyon, as it must have been at some distant day, wound in and out in such a fashion that there were many places where it was impossible to see more than a hundred yards in front or rear. There was no conversation between the soldiers, and even the corporal spoke in a lower tone to his young friend.

"If anything *does* happen," he said, looking down in the handsome upturned face, "I want you to behave yourself, Ned."

"Don't I always do it?"

"I should say not!" was the emphatic response. "Haven't I ordered you to stay in the wagon, and then looked round to see you slipping out while I was talking to you? But things are different now. If you see anything unusual, or hear rifle balls whizzing about you, don't go to poking your head out to see what the matter is."

"What shall I do, then?" asked the boy, who was really desirous of following the directions of his friend.

"Just lie down in the bottom of the ambulance and wait till I tell you to get up again. The sides are bullet-proof, and there ain't any danger of your getting hurt there."

The afternoon was drawing to a close, and the high walls, rising up on each side, so shut out the rays of the sun, that a somber twilight gloom filled Devil's Pass; a deep, oppressive heaviness was in the atmosphere, that seemed in keeping with the place which had been the scene of so many tragedies, which was now entered with more or less misgiving upon the part of the entire company.

"I'd make a journey of two hundred miles extra if there was any way of getting around this infernal place," said the lieutenant; "but as there isn't, all we can do is to push ahead."

It was about half an hour after the warning words of the corporal to the lad, and the eyes of the entire company were fixed upon the lieutenant and his comrade, who were riding a short distance in advance. All at once they were seen to rein up their horses simultaneously, as if something in front had caught their attention. As by a common impulse, the others did the same, and breathlessly awaited the next signal. It came in a dozen seconds. While the hunter and his mustang remained motionless, the lieutenant wheeled his horse about, and rode back and the others noticed that his face was pale and expressive of great alarm.

"I knew we shouldn't get through here without a fight. There's a whole pack of Indians ahead of us. Jake, take a turn back a short distance and see whether they have fixed it so as to shut us in."

The man addressed turned to do as ordered, while the others anxiously awaited his report. He

was another Indian fighter, who knew precisely what to do, and he was gone but a short time when he came thundering back, calling out the instant he came in view around a curve in the pass:

"We're in for the biggest scrimmage of our lives! There's five hundred Apaches coming up the pass, and they'll be here inside of ten minutes."

The man who made this terrifying announcement was not one given to exaggeration, and, although he might have overestimated the number in this case, every one of his hearers knew that an overwhelming force was in their rear, and, whatever they did to save themselves, the last thing to be thought of was to turn back.

Scarcely had the news been announced when the scout from the other direction galloped back.

"Well, what is it?" asked the lieutenant.

"Some of the redskins are ahead of us, that's certain."

"What tribe?"

"The Jicarilla Apaches, I think; the worst set of scamps this side of the Llano Estacado."

"How many?"

"I can't make out more than a dozen, and there may be less."

A hasty consultation was held, and all agreed that the appearance of these few Indians in front was for the purpose of turning the party back upon the main force in the rear. Consequently, the proper course was to charge ahead, fighting their way, if necessary, through those before them, and keeping all the distance possible between themselves and the war party coming down from the opposite direction. Only a few seconds were necessary to form this decision, and the cavalry started at a gallop down the pass, Corporal Hugg lashing his powerful steed into a much more rapid pace than he was accustomed to, or was agreeable to him.

"Now, Ned, keep your head down," said the wooden-legged soldier to the boy. "The bullets will soon be buzzing all around us."

As he spoke he stretched out on the flat bottom of the ambulance, allowing his head to be elevated just enough to permit him to peer over the foreboard and guide the horse, which was now forced into a furious gallop. Earnest in his desire to obey, Ned Chadmund did the same, awaiting the result of this desperate attempt to escape from a most perilous position.

The bottom of the pass was quite level and hard, but the ambulance bounded and leaped from side to side in a way that threatened to overturn it, and made anything like connected conversation impossible. The speed of the party was about the same, the horsemen retaining their position a short distance in advance of the vehicle and all nerved to the fiery charge they believed to be inevitable. The lad, still lying flat on his face in the bottom of the ambulance, raised his head just enough to peer over the shoulder of the corporal at the galloping horse and the figures of the cavalry beyond.

Suddenly the reports of a score of rifles sounded in the pass, and the horrified lad saw fully one half of the soldiers topple out of their saddles, riddled by the balls that had been fired from a skillfully arranged ambush. At the same time several horses reared, plunged and fell, fatally wounded by others of the missiles.

"Down!" shouted the corporal to Ned, who, in the excitement of the moment, had placed his hands upon the shoulders of his friend and risen to his knees. "Down, I say! Don't you see that they are firing at us?"

The rattling sound of the returning fire of the cavalry was heard, each man being armed with a rifle, and the corporal rose to his knees and lashed the galloping horse to a still greater speed.

Instead of a dozen Apaches, fully a hundred came swarming toward the little band of soldiers, the painted warriors seeming to spring, like the dragon's teeth of old, from the very ground. Hemmed in on every hand, the cavalry, throwing away their rifles, which were useless in such an emergency, and drawing their revolvers, charged straight through the yelling horde closing in around them. Fascinated by the terrible scene and scarcely conscious of what he was doing, Ned crawled forward again and stared out from the front of the ambulance, while the corporal added his voice to the terrible din by shouting to his horse, which was plunging forward at a rate that threatened to overturn completely the bounding vehicle.

The horsemen that were left were comparatively few and they fought like Spartans; but Ned saw them drop one by one from their animals, until there was only the lieutenant left, and he, poor fellow, was lying upon his steed, both badly wounded, as they strove with the madness of desperation to escape. But it was useless. The Apaches were all around them, pouring in their shots with such precision that a moment later the dying horse sank heavily to the ground and the wretches that dashed forward to slay his rider found that he was already dead.

Corporal Hugg saw all this as a huge warrior dashed forward and seized the rein of his own horse; but the next instant he dropped to the earth, was trampled upon by the iron hoofs and run over in a twinkling. Still the Indians swarmed in around and ahead of the team, against which all the avenues of escape seemed hopelessly closed.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE APACHES.

Having run down one Apache warrior, Corporal Hugg, unmindful of his own personal danger, leaned forward out of the ambulance and shouted and lashed the furious horse, which was already on a dead run.

"Go it, good fellow," he yelled, his voice rising above the horrid din of cracking fire arms and whooping assailants. "Keep it up a little longer, and we shall be clear of the whole crew."

They were the last words the brave soldier uttered. Ned Chadmund, who had again crouched back in the swaying vehicle, was horrified to see his friend pitch forward upon the foreboard, and then, as the carriage gave one unusually violent plunge, he went out head foremost, and vanished from sight. He had been pierced by a dozen balls, and was dead before he reached the ground.

The horse, like his human assailants, was frantic, and abated not a jot of his tremendous speed, though the reins fell slack and dangled around his feet, and the familiar voice was heard no more. He, too, was wounded by more than one cruel rifle ball, but he seemed capable of undergoing far more than his comrades that had fallen at the first fire.

The situation of the lad was fearful, and he was in imminent danger from more than one form of death. He was cowering in the bottom of the ambulance, too much terrified to speak or to attempt to help himself in any way. Bruised and stunned by the terrific bounds of the vehicle, he was dazed, bewildered and only dimly conscious of the awful pandemonium reigning around him. Suddenly he felt himself lifted in the air; then there was a crushing and grinding, as if he was being ground to atoms between two millstones, then another terrible crash and his senses forsook him.

The ambulance had overturned and smashed. It was dragged a short distance, when the infuriated steed broke loose, tore a short distance further down the pass and fell dead.

When the boy recovered his senses, his eyes opened upon a very different scene. The sounds of strife had ceased, and the struggle was ended, for the reason that there were no men left to resist the victorious Apaches. It was night, and a company of something like fifty were encamped in a gorge in the mountains. The attacking party, which, including those who had followed the escort into the pass, but were not in time to participate in the engagement, numbered several hundred, and had, after the contest was over, separated and vanished, leaving the chief, Mountain Wolf, with half a hundred of his best warriors gathered about him. After securing the treasure in the ambulance, and taking three horses of the company, which had escaped harm during the massacre, the Apaches moved on in a westerly direction through the pass for half a mile, and turned to the left in a sort of ravine or gorge. Several hundred yards up this the gorge widened into a valley, wherein were a number of trees and a small stream of water. There they went into camp. An immense fire was kindled, and as it roared and crackled in the night, it threw out a glare that made it like midday for many feet away.

Ned Chadmund had been picked up, limp and apparently lifeless, by the chief, Mountain Wolf, and carried to this spot with as much care and tenderness as if he were a pet child of his own. The boy still showed a certain stupor upon reaching the camp, but after he had lain a short time upon a buffalo robe he revived, and, with wondering eyes, looked around upon the strange and weird scene. The Indians were passing to and fro, as if making preparations for some sort of festivity. There was little noise, but a great amount of activity. Close by the fire were a half dozen warriors, engaged in cooking several carcasses, and had the persons concerned been civilized instead of savage, the scene would have suggested an old-fashioned barbecue.

When the lad arose to a sitting position upon the buffalo hide, he became sensible of a sharp, stinging sensation in the head, and a sore, bruised feeling along his side, both caused by the shock received at the overturning of the ambulance. His action was observed by a number of the Apaches, but none approached, nor did they pay the least attention to him; so he had every opportunity for a careful observation of what was going on around him.

After recovering from the first sensation of terror and amazement, his thoughts naturally reverted to the tragedy that had been enacted a short time before in Devil's Pass. It was a fearful scene for a lad like him to look upon, and he was sure it must remain vividly impressed upon his memory so long as he lived.

"I'm the only one alive," he repeated to himself, with a shudder. "Poor Corporal Hugg was the last man left, and I saw him killed. I wonder why they spared me?"

He had no suspicion of the intention of the Apaches in preserving his life, and which has already been hinted at in another place; so it was very natural that he should feel puzzled to understand why it was that he had been selected from such a party to escape the hatred which these wild Jicarillo Apaches had shown toward the whites ever since the latter encroached upon their domains.

"I guess they're going to make an Indian of me," was his conclusion. "I wonder what father will

think when he hears of it? Poor mother! I know how she was worried when she bid me good-bye. I hope she won't hear anything till I carry her the news myself."

Fortunately for his peace of mind it never occurred to Ned that he might have been spared for the purpose of torture and indignity. There was no fear of present danger, as he sat upon the buffalo skin, viewing the strange scene about him. Something like fifteen minutes had passed while thus engaged, when the figure of a tall, athletic Indian strode slowly toward him, apparently attracted by the interest which the boy showed in the proceedings. This warrior was fully six feet in height, magnificently formed, with long horse-hair like shreds hanging from his crown, which, like his face, was daubed with startling colors, giving him the appearance of a variegated zebra of the hues of the rainbow.

It was Lone Wolf, one of the most famous leaders of the Jiccarilla Apaches.

But the most noticeable feature about this warrior was his dress. He was enveloped from head to foot in a sort of cloak, of a greenish tinge, which rattled and crackled as he walked, as if made of paper. And so it was; for, as he approached, Ned saw that his outer garment was composed entirely of greenbacks, carefully stitched together in such a way that they made a blanket of half a dozen feet square. No redskin probably ever paraded so costly a blanket as this, which included several hundred new and crisp bank notes, varying in value from twenty to a hundred dollars each.

They had been united in such a careful manner that he was able to handle it with as much ease and facility as if composed of a single sheet of paper of the tough texture of which our national issues are made. He seemed quite proud of his novel garment, so unique of its kind, and strode forward with the pompous tread of an Indian chief until he was within a few feet of where Ned sat, when he paused a few moments to give the latter full opportunity to admire his envelope.

"That must have taken a good deal of the money that belonged to the soldiers," was his reflection, "but the country can lose it better than it can the soldiers themselves."

Lone Wolf was one of the most dreaded, because he was one of the most skillful and treacherous, of the Apache chiefs. He went to Washington twice during his life with a delegation from his tribe, visited the principal cities in the North, was treated in the most hospitable manner, and professed the most unbounded love for his white brothers. He announced his deliberate intention of making all haste back to his tribe, and henceforth devoting his life to peace. He would summon his brother chiefs about him, he said then, and make known to them the goodness and love of the whites for the red men. He would explain to them their invincible power, and make very clear the folly of attempting to resist their wishes in any way. Furthermore he agreed to show the numerous gifts that had been showered upon him, and he would explain that if they conducted themselves aright a similar future was before them as well. All this Lone Wolf promised; but he had no sooner got among his own people again than he chose to forget his promises and went upon the warpath.

CHAPTER X.

LONE WOLF.

Lone Wolf spoke English like a native; and, having waited until the admiration of Ned Chadmund had been given time to expend itself, he spoke in a deep, guttural voice:

"Does the child of my white brother mourn for those who have fallen?"

The lad was so surprised at hearing himself addressed in this manner, that he stared wonderingly at him for a moment without making reply. Then he rose to his feet, and, looking up in the painted face, replied:

"I am all alone, and long to go to my father."

"What is the name of your father?" asked the chief, in the same excellent English.

"Colonel Edward Chadmund."

"Is he at the fort, yonder?" continued Lone Wolf, stretching out his hand so as to point toward the southwest.

"Yes; he is the commandant there, and has a large number of brave soldiers, and will send them out to take me to him."

Had Ned been a few years older, he would not have made this reply. It was not politic to threaten the chief; and he had no suspicion that the confession of the identity of his father only intensified the hatred of these redskins before him. But perhaps, after all, it was as well; for Lone Wolf was sagacious enough to recollect that he was talking to a child, from whom he was more likely to hear truth than from an older person.

"He has sent some brave soldiers to take you to him," said the chief, with a wolf-like grin, displaying his long, yellow teeth. "But they have left you on the way; they have given you to Lone

Wolf, and they will not go back to the fort, nor to Santa Fe. If he sends more, they will do the same."

"There were only a dozen of them, while you had hundreds. If they had had anything like an equal chance, not one of the Apaches would have been left alive! We would have killed them all!"

This was a brave answer, in a certain sense, but it was not a very prudent one; for Lone Wolf was known to be the possessor of a fearful temper, easily excited into a tempest of passion; and the words of the boy were not calculated to be very soothing to him. There was too much paint upon the face of the chieftain for the boy to observe the flush which overspread it at hearing himself addressed in this manner, but he could understand the lowering of that gruff voice and the quickening of the utterance.

"Lone Wolf and his brave Apaches care nothing for the soldiers of the Father at Washington. His agents deceive us; they make treaties and do not keep them; they lie to us, and then we turn upon and rend them. Do you see that?"

As he uttered this inquiry in the fiercest kind of language, he whipped out from beneath his blanket the reeking scalp of one of the soldiers that had fallen in the gorge a short time before, and shook it in the face of the terrified lad. The latter could not fail to see what it was, and drew back in horror and disgust, realizing what a bloodthirsty monster stood before him. He saw that it would never do to excite the other's anger, and he endeavored to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Do you and your brave warriors mean to stay here till morning?"

"It is as Lone Wolf wills," was the instant answer, in a voice not quite so severe, indicating a subsidence of the troubled waters.

"And what are you going to do with me?" was the next question, which no one besides a lad of Ned's age would have dared to put, when placed in a similar position.

"That, too, is as Lone Wolf wills," was the rather non-committal answer.

"And that is the reason why I asked you. How soon can I return to my father? When I reach him I will tell him that it was Lone Wolf that sent me back and he will be friendly toward him."

"Lone Wolf asks not his friendship," said the chieftain, with something of the old fire gleaming in his eye. "He has killed our bravest and best warriors. He has followed them to the mountains and slain them by their camp fires, when they dreamed not that the white man was near. He has murdered their squaws; and Lone Wolf shall not die until he tears his scalp from his head."

The poor boy was horrified. He was too young to understand fully the causes of such deep enmity upon the part of the chieftain, but he was not too young to understand that his own life had been spared through no sentiment of mercy. The leader had some other cause, but Ned did not see much hope of making a favorable impression upon this intractable chief, and he would have been very much relieved had he taken himself off and left him alone.

Some fifteen minutes had passed since the lad had opened his eyes upon the strange scene by which he was surrounded, and the preparations which seemed to be going on were completed. The entire Apache troop suddenly broke out in a series of whoops and yells that would have appalled a hundred famishing wolves. At the same instant they began dancing—not a motion of the feet, such as we are accustomed to see in civilized regions, but a series of demoniac gymnastics, risking the dislocation of all the bones in their bodies. They leaped up and down, swung their arms, threw out their legs, and circled around each other—the whole forming a wild and appalling revelry more like that of wild beasts than of human beings.

Boy-like, Ned Chadmund forgot everything else for the time but the scene which was passing directly before his eyes. There was a weird attraction in watching the flitting, fantastic figures, whose hands were yet reeking with the blood of innocent men and whose greatest delight would have been to scalp every man, woman and child in the territory.

This hullabaloo lasted all of half an hour, when it died out as suddenly as it began. It was not from exhaustion, for Indians have been known to keep up such a performance through the entire night; but it was in obedience to a signal from Lone Wolf, whose imperious will no one dared defy. He had simply raised his arm, and, giving utterance to a single whoop that rose above the horrid din, silence "fell like a blessing." This lasted but a few minutes, when the bustle began in a lesser degree, and the Apaches fell to eating the meat which had been abundantly prepared for them by several of their number. They continued to act like wolves as they did so, using hands and knives, but more frequently tearing the meat to shreds without the aid of any implements except such as nature had furnished them in the shape of teeth.

The terrific strain, mental and physical, which Ned had undergone during the last few hours, was succeeded by a reaction which made him feel weak and faint. He was conscious of the need of food, and was feverish and thirsty.

"I don't see as I'm likely to get anything to eat," he muttered, as he sat down on the blanket, and looked upon the glittering scene. "I ain't so very hungry, but I would like a good drink of water."

The firelight shone upon the small stream which ran through the middle of the valley; and, as it was so near at hand, he thought there would be no harm in walking to it, and helping himself to a

refreshing draught. He had walked but a few steps, however, when he became aware that some one was following him. A careless glance over his shoulder showed that it was Lone Wolf. The lad concluded at once that he suspected an attempt at escape, and he thought he might do himself some good by a faithful return to his former position after he had helped himself to a drink, without appearing to notice that he was watched. This was the more easy of accomplishment, as the Apache moved off to one side, as if his desire was to conceal his real purpose. Accordingly, Ned walked quietly forward until he reached the stream, where he knelt down and took one long, refreshing drink, which seemed to give him new life and strength. Then, rising to his feet, he started back to the camp fire. As he did so, he found himself face to face with Lone Wolf.

"What do you mean?" demanded the latter, gruffly.

"I was thirsty and went to get a drink. I thought I would not bother you."

"When you try to run away, then you will die!"

"What's the use of trying to run off, when there isn't any show?" asked the young prisoner, with a laugh, an assumption of jollity which was far from genuine.

CHAPTER XI.

SURROUNDED BY DANGER.

Lone Wolf no doubt meant to warn Ned against any attempt at escape; for, where the surveillance was relaxed, as it would probably be now and then in his case, he was certain to see many occasions when he would be tempted to give them the slip.

On the way to this place, Corporal Hugg had given the lad an insight into the ways of the redmen, and the boy began to use his knowledge. The perilous position in which he was placed helped to sharpen his wits, for he began to see things in their true light. The chief had expressed his hatred of Colonel Chadmund in too vigorous language to be mistaken; and Ned now believed that in sparing his life the Indian had been actuated by some other motive than mercy because of his age.

"He means to strike father through me," he concluded, as he sat upon the blanket in deep thought. "He will kill me in some way more horrible than the rest, and he is waiting until he has a good chance to do it, so that father will be sure and know it. He thinks he has scared me out of trying to get away, but the next chance I get I'll do it. I believe I can dodge him. But I'll have to shut his eye up, so as to have the better show."

At this juncture Lone Wolf came toward him, bearing in his hand a large bone, rather bountifully covered with meat, which he was gnawing as he walked, grasping either end of it with his hand, and fixing his black eyes upon the lad as he advanced.

"Do you want something to eat?"

"I should think I did," replied Ned, with a laugh which he forced so well that no one would have suspected its sincerity. "I'm about half starved to death, and was afraid I was not going to get any supper at all!"

"Take that, and go to sleep."

The large bone was given a flirt by the huge warrior, and fell directly into his lap. It was not very pleasant to take it second-hand, but a boy in his situation could not be very fastidious, and, thanking the chief for his princely liberality, Ned fell to and gnawed away like a famished dog. It struck him as curious that none of the warriors appeared to note his presence, but he knew better than to believe that such apparent blindness was real. He was as securely within their power as if bound hand and foot.

"He told me to go to sleep," he said, as he stretched out upon his blanket; "I guess I'll try and do it. I don't see any use of sitting up and watching such a set of wretches as they are. I'd rather have a pack of wolves about me than such as they."

The night was too mild to require the blanket wrapped over him; besides which the warmth from the camp fire was very perceptible; so he lay upon his back looking up at the stars and endeavoring to shut out from his thoughts the hateful beings gathered around, and whose grunting voices and loud exclamations were never quiet, but continued so long that they acquired a certain monotony, like the rattle and hum of the mill, which lulls the miller to sleep.

"It's strange," he murmured, as his imaginings became as wayward as a boy's will. "Father is off yonder, I don't know how many hundred miles, and mother is just the opposite way in Santa Fe, and here I am about half way between them. We were never so scattered in all the world before. I wonder what father will do when he finds out about Lone Wolf? The chief has put his blanket of greenbacks away somewhere, and I guess he knows how to take care of them. I declare, but that was a big haul—one hundred thousand dollars at a lick! I should think Lone Wolf might afford to retire now on what he has made. But the poor men," added Ned, with that sudden throb of the

heart which always came when he recalled the fearful attack and massacre in Devil's Pass. "Not one of them left alive! Oh, I wish I could forget it all! but I never, never can. The Indians have done such things many a time before, but I never saw them. It'll kill me if I don't keep it out of my thoughts."

There seemed to be less moon that night than on the previous evening, and as the boy lay looking upward, he could see a number of stars twinkling in the sky. He reflected that beyond them was One who could not forget his pitiful condition, who could bring him out of all his troubles, and who was the only Being unto whom he could go in this dark hour. Ned prayed to Him, as he had been taught to pray at his mother's knee, and, recalling the words which he had so often heard from her dear lips, he believed that God could not forsake him, but that all would come out right. He had lain thus perhaps an hour, when he turned upon his side for the greater comfort of position. As he did so, he was reminded of Devil's Pass by a sharp twinge in his side. It was sharp enough to make him gasp with pain; also to put an idea into his head.

Having fully made up his mind to attempt to get away from the Apaches at the very first opportunity which he could seize, it struck him that he might help himself by engaging in a piece of deception, justifiable under the circumstances. The bruise which he had received was not severe enough to interfere with his walking, but Lone Wolf might as well believe that it did. If he thought his prisoner was too lame to do much in the way of locomotion, his watchfulness would be certain to become quite lax, all of which would be a great point in favor of the one mainly concerned.

"At any rate, I'll try it on," he said, as he shut his eyes.

The excessive fatigue of the lad caused him to drop off into a sound slumber—a slumber filled with sweet dreams of home, father and mother and all that was pleasant. But it was interrupted in the rudest possible way.

The night was nearly gone, when a terrific uproar aroused him as suddenly as if a cup of cold water had been dashed in his face. Looking around, he saw two warriors, within six feet of him, engaged in a savage dispute. From some source, a number of the Apaches had obtained a supply of fire-water, and several desperate fights had already taken place. A swarthy redskin, daubed with paint and intoxicated to that degree which brought to the surface all the deviltry in his nature, was striving, with knife in hand, to get at the sleeping boy, while another, in about the same condition, was disputing his right to do this, and claiming that it was peculiarly his own province to slay the young prisoner. Both agreed that death should be awarded, and each claimed that justice demanded that he alone should do the righteous deed. This difference of opinion had already produced high words, the warriors pulling and shoving each other, and threatening each instant to go at each other with their knives.

Ned could not understand the words spoken, but the actions of the redskins needed no interpretation. The affrighted boy sprang to his feet, and, forgetful of the lameness which he had arranged, ran back several yards to a group of redskins who were squatted upon the ground, smoking.

At this instant, the two disputants, wearied with hurling words at each other, went in with their knives, and the conflict became of the most desperate and sanguinary nature.

"Where is Lone Wolf?" was the question he asked, as he paused by the group of smokers and looked inquiringly at them.

But if any of them understood the words uttered, they did not choose to give the information sought, and smoked away as placidly as if seated around their own firesides at home.

Just beyond were two other warriors engaged in conversation, and Ned was sure he had heard one of them speak in broken English during the earlier part of the evening. Hoping to gain the knowledge he desired, he went to him.

"Where is Lone Wolf, the chief?"

"He go way—much time ago—off in the mountains."

"When will he come back?"

The redskin shook his head to signify that he did not know; but added, the next minute:

"Be back to-morrer—mebbe—don't know—can't say."

This rather indefinite information was all that could be obtained by the lad, who was in a shiver of terror; for he believed now that his life was not safe for a single moment.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE HOUR HAS COME."

Ned Chadmund was too terrified to think of further sleep, nor did he dare to return to where he

had been lying upon the blanket when aroused in such a startling manner. As he turned his horrified gaze in that direction, he saw the two combatants clutching and striking each other upon the ground, their blows growing feebler as their strength rapidly departed. The most alarming thing about this revolting contest was the fact that it did not attract the interest of a single spectator beyond the little fellow. There were plenty of Indians around, some of whom were within a dozen feet, and yet they paid no more attention to it than if the two were quietly smoking their pipes.

This showed, as a matter of course, the indifference of the others as to what befell the defenseless prisoner. The next Indian who advanced upon him with drawn knife would not be so likely to find himself disputed by another, anxious to perform the same job. It seemed certain that no one would interfere in the interests of the prisoner himself.

The latter stood debating what he should do, if, indeed, he could do anything at all. He turned his head and looked back in the gloom, which appeared so inviting that he was tempted to turn and make a dash for freedom. If he could only secure a start of a hundred yards, it seemed to him that he might escape. That would give him a chance to steal away and hide until he could renew his flight, with a prospect of eluding them altogether. He glanced at the darkness and then again at the Apaches. Not a single one of them, so far as he could see, showed any consciousness of his presence, and none were between him and the gloom in which he meant to take shelter.

His heart throbbed with excitement as he stood debating the question, and he hurriedly concluded to make the attempt. But on the eve of starting, his straining vision detected the faintest shadowy outline of a figure, which silently receded in the gloom as he looked toward it. Ned understood on the instant what this meant. It was Lone Wolf who was waiting to receive him, whenever he should choose to make his attempt to get away.

The whole trick flashed upon him at once. Lone Wolf, with a view of thoroughly testing the lad, had purposely thrown this opportunity in his way, and was waiting beyond in the gloom to receive him with open arms. Poor Ned's heart sank as he realized more vividly than ever that he was as much a prisoner as if immured within the walls of Sing Sing. Still, he affected not to notice the presence of the sentinel, but walked back toward the camp with that affectation of indifference which he had used on more than one occasion before. He recollected this time to put on the limp—his lameness being of such a decided character that there could be no mistaking it by any one who happened to look in that direction.

"Never mind, I'll get the chance yet," he muttered, putting himself upon his mettle. "I'll play lame till they think there is no need of watching me at all, and then, before they know it, I'll be off."

The knowledge that Lone Wolf was so near at hand gave him enough courage to go back to where the blanket lay, and seat himself upon it. He had sat thus but a few minutes, when he noticed that it was growing light in the East. The night was gone and day was breaking.

"I'm glad of it, for I'm tired of this place," he exclaimed. "I'll never get any chance to do anything for myself here."

Before it was fairly light, the Apaches began their preparations for leaving the scene of their encampment. Their mustangs were picketed at some distance up the stream, under charge of a couple of sentinels, where they had not been disturbed during the entire night.

"I wonder if they'll give me a horse?" was the next thought of Ned, as he watched these preparations.

In a few minutes all were mounted upon their animals, which seemed in a splendid condition. Among them were three that had belonged to the cavalry, and which were easily identified by means of the saddles, bridles and accoutrements. Ned hoped that one of these would be placed at his disposal, and he looked around for the chief only to find him at his elbow.

"You walk or ride?" he asked, his painted countenance as cold and hard as steel.

"That depends upon you," replied Ned, "but I do hope you will let me ride upon somebody's horse for this is mighty rough, I can tell you," and he emphasized his complaint by limping, apparently with great pain, for a few steps. The chief looked at him very sharply for a few seconds, and then showed that he believed him, if indeed, he held any doubt at all. He motioned to one of the warriors who was leading a captive horse, which was brought immediately to the spot. The stirrups were shortened, so as to be in place for the boy's feet when he was helped into the saddle.

"Oh! my leg! my leg!" he screamed, with an expression of intense agony, when, actually, he felt not a particle of pain; "it seems to me, you would rather hurt a chap than not."

No attention was paid to his complaint, and a minute later the whole cavalcade was in motion.

The boy was a skillful horseman, having been taught to ride from the time he could walk, and he found himself astride of one of the best steeds that had belonged to the cavalry, although he could not identify it. As he looked about him and examined the saddle, he caught sight of the handle of a revolver in the holster, jammed down in such a way that it had escaped the notice of their captors.

"That's to be mine," he whispered to himself, not a little pleased at the discovery he had made.

He knew if this caught the eye of Lone Wolf or any of his warriors they would not permit him to retain it, and he was so fearful that they would see it that he began maneuvering with a view of getting it into his possession. No one is more skillful at this sort of business than a boy about his age. Ned groaned, and twisted forward and backward, as if to seek relief, and when he finally secured a little more comfort and resumed his upright position the revolver was safely hid beneath his waistcoat, he having placed it there without attracting the eye of any one. The little fellow felt braver on the instant. He suspected that if he encountered Lone Wolf alone, and the chieftain dared to bar his passage, he could use the revolver upon him with the same coolness that Corporal Hugg would have done had he been alive.

"None of them suspect that I've got such a thing about me, and that gives me the better chance," was his very sensible conclusion, as he endeavored to put on an expression of blissful serenity.

When the sun was fairly up, the fifty Apache warriors were galloping in a direct line toward the south, Lone Wolf at their head, and Ned Chadmund riding at his side. The lad had made several inquiries of his leader, but the latter repelled him so savagely that he wisely held his peace. He supposed the Indians were going southward toward their village. He remembered hearing his father speak of Lone Wolf as dwelling pretty well to the southward, and that he had pronounced him to be one of the most dangerous leaders among the fierce tribes of the Southwest.

The Apaches were now in a mountainous region, following a sort of trail that was generally wide enough to permit a dozen to ride abreast if they wished to do so. Occasionally it was rough and precipitous, winding in and out, and now and then difficult to travel; but the wiry little mustangs went along as unhesitatingly as mountain goats. Although they were among the mountains, at times the air was oppressively hot, not a particle of breeze reaching them.

It was little past noon when the party drew rein in a place very similar to that wherein they encamped the night before. As the mustangs came to a halt, their riders leaped to the ground, and, turning them over to the care of a half dozen of their number, they refreshed themselves at a stream running near at hand, the water of which was clear and cold, and equally inviting to man and beast. Ned climbed down from his horse, apparently with great difficulty and pain.

"May I go and get a drink?" he asked of Lone Wolf.

"Go," was the savage reply; "am I a dog to help you?"

"No; you're a dog without helping me," muttered the lad as he limped away toward the wood, seeking a point a short distance below where the others were helping themselves.

It took but a minute to reach a spot where for the time he was beyond observation.

"The hour has come to make a stroke for freedom!" he exclaimed, suiting the action to the word.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT.

Ned had enough sense not to undertake to run away from the Apaches until there was a reasonably good chance of succeeding. He had played the game of lameness so well that he had secured considerable liberty thereby; and when, therefore, he went limping beyond the further limit of the Indians, no one supposed he had any other purpose in view than to obtain a better place in which to help himself to water. The trees among which he entered were almost without undergrowth, and, fortunately, were in exactly the opposite direction from where the mustangs were grazing. This left the way entirely open for him to do his utmost in the way of his dash for freedom. It may seem to have been unfortunate in the one thing, that it caused the lad to go away without his horse; but he would have left the latter had he been given his chance, for he believed that while the trail of the animal could be followed without trouble, and might secure his being run to the ground in the end, yet he could readily find the means of hiding his own footsteps from the most skillful of the Apaches.

It is hardly necessary to say that the instant he found himself beyond the immediate sight of his captors, his lameness disappeared as if by magic, and he dashed down the stream with all the speed at his command. After running nearly two hundred yards he suddenly paused and listened. Nothing could be heard but his own hurried breathing and throbbing heart.

"They haven't found out anything about me yet," was his hurried exclamation, as he started off again, continually ejaculating a prayer that he might succeed, for he needed no one to tell him that it was really a matter of life and death; for, if Lone Wolf should place hands upon him again, he would never forgive the attempt.

A hundred yards further in this headlong fashion, and all at once he found himself at the termination of the wood, which had been such an advantage to him thus far. On the right and left, over the high, precipitous mountains back of him, was the small wood, on the other border of which was the Apache camp. The gorge or valley, in the center of which he found himself standing, wound in and out among the mountains before him,—a Devil's Pass on a smaller scale,—so sinuous in its course that he could trace it only a short distance ahead with the eye. Directly

at his side flowed a mountain stream, varying from a dozen to twenty feet in width, so clear that in every place he could see distinctly the bottom. The current was quite swift, and in some places it dashed and foamed over the rocks almost like a cascade.

Ned dared not hesitate, but, pausing only an instant to catch breath, he dashed away again until he reached the curve in the ravine, beyond which he would be hid from view of the encampment. The moment this was reached he paused long enough to cast back a searching glance. But all looked as calm and peaceful as if no human being had ever entered the ravine.

"They haven't found it out yet! They haven't found it out yet!" he exclaimed, his heart rising with hope. "That was a pretty smart thing in me to pretend to be lame, and if it hadn't been for that I wouldn't have got half the start."

Passing the turn in the ravine, he felt that it would not do to wait any longer without some effort to hide his trail. There was but one feasible way of accomplishing this, and that was by entering the stream and keeping along it far enough to throw the wolves off the scent. It was not a very pleasant task to enter the water and move along, where, at any moment, he was liable to drop down over his head; but he did not dare to stand upon trifles, and in he went. By keeping close to the shore, he managed to avoid any such unpleasant ducking, while at the same time he effectually hid his footsteps from the eyes of the keenest-sighted Indian. A short distance ahead he found the trees were growing fully as thickly as in the grove which he had left but a short time before, and he made all haste thither, continually glancing back, dreading least he should catch sight of some of the Apaches on the hunt for him.

Imagine his consternation, when, on the very margin of the wood, he looked back and saw the forms of two Indians only a short distance away! They were mounted upon their mustangs and riding at a walk almost in a direct line toward him, and, as he stared at them he was sure that their slow pace was due to their careful scrutiny of the trail which he was satisfied he must have left.

"They have found me out," he gasped, as he turned and hurried down stream again.

Ned was too frightened to reflect that their actions were such as to indicate that they were hunters, who were out merely for game, and there is no telling how far he would have kept up his flight in the stream, had he not been checked by what he believed to be a providential interference in his behalf.

The water was broad, moderately deep, and quite clear; but the overhanging trees threw out so much shade that the bottom was invisible, so that, scrutinize as much as they chose, the redskins could not detect the slightest trace of his footprints upon the bed of the stream. The only difficulty that remained was to leave the water in such a way that his pursuers should be baffled in any attempt to discover the point. This was an exceedingly difficult question to solve, and while he was searching for some suitable place, and growing terribly frightened lest his two foes should pounce down upon him, he noticed a large tree that projected over the water. The foliage was dense and the tree seemed to be hollow. Besides this, one of the limbs hung so low that, by making an upward spring, he was able to catch it with both hands. He then drew himself upward, and carefully crawled along until he reached the trunk. To his surprise and delight, he found it the very concealment he needed above all others. The trunk was large and hollow, and on the upper side was an aperture, probably caused by the rotting away of a limb, large enough to permit the passage of his body.

After peering for a few seconds into the impenetrable darkness, Ned shoved his feet through, and carefully followed with his body. He cautiously shoved himself along, until his head was below the level of the opening, when he paused, believing that he was concealed in the best manner possible. The lad had absolutely left no trace behind him; the searching Apaches were without any means of discovering what he had done, and all he had to do was to remain where he was until the hunt was over. The tree, slanting out over the water, made his posture a half reclining one, and as comfortable as it is possible to imagine. His limbs were somewhat chilled by the wetting they had received, but that troubled him very little, his whole thoughts, naturally, being centered upon the one of getting away from the Apaches. It seemed to him that his senses were preternaturally sharpened, and the rustling of a fallen leaf startled him into the belief that one of the redskins was crawling out upon the trunk; but a full half hour passed without presenting anything of a tangible nature, and hope became very strong in his breast again.

"I wonder whether those horsemen were hunting for me?" he muttered, as he became more deliberate in his speculations. "I was sure a little while ago that they were, but it may be that I was mistaken. I don't think they would come on their mustangs if they wanted to find me, for they couldn't make much use of them in following me to a place like this."

Whether or not these two men were his pursuers mattered very little; for there could be no doubt that his absence had been noticed or that the most skillful trailers were in pursuit. They could not fail to learn that he had taken to the stream and would naturally hunt along the shore to discover where he had left it. This would be likely to bring them very close to where he was hidden, and he trembled as he reflected upon the possible, if not probable, result.

The sun was going down in the west; the shadows in the wood gradually deepened; in his reclining position, Ned Chadmund found a heavy drowsiness stealing over him. The afternoon was no more than half gone when his eyes closed in a refreshing sleep, which continued several hours, and might have lasted still longer had it not been broken. It was far into the night when

the sleeping lad suddenly opened his eyes without understanding the cause of his doing so. Something had aroused him, but he could not divine what it was. His posture had become somewhat cramped from his long continuance in it and he shifted about so as to rest upon the other side. As he did so, he became aware that some one or something else was near him. The slightest possible rustling at the base of the trunk directed his attention there, but there was too much intervening shrubbery for him to detect anything at all. Everything in that direction was shrouded in the densest gloom. The moon was directly overhead, and shining so that he was able to see for some little distance when he turned his glance from the trunk. Remembering his revolver, the boy reached down and drew it from within his waistcoat, where he had concealed it.

"If anybody wants to run against that, let him do so," he said to himself. "It has five good charges which I will use up before they shall lay hands upon me or Lone Wolf shall call me his prisoner again."

It seemed to him that, in case of discovery, his position might place him at a great disadvantage, so he carefully drew his head and shoulders out of the trunk, so as to leave his arms free to use. This was scarcely done when he caught the same sound below him, repeated so distinctly that he knew on the instant what it meant. It was a scratching, rattling of bark, such as would be made by the claws of an animal in picking its way along, and as he strained his eyes through the gloom, he saw very faintly the outlines of some wild animal approaching him, a low, threatening growl at the same time establishing the identity of the bear beyond question.

Ned was about to give him the contents of one barrel, when he was restrained by the recollection that his ammunition was exceedingly precious and that the report of the pistol was likely to bring some one whom he dreaded more than the fiercest wild beasts of the forest. So he decided to try milder means at first. Accordingly, the endangered lad tried to see whether the animal could not be frightened away without really hurting him. Breaking off a piece of bark, he flung it in his face, giving utterance, at the same time, to a growl as savage as that of the beast himself. The latter instantly paused, as if puzzled to understand what it meant, but he did not retreat. He merely stood his ground and growled back again. Encouraged even by this dubious success, Ned threw more bark, made more noise, and flung his arms so wildly that he came very near throwing his revolver out of his grasp into the creek.

But it would not work. The bear was not born in the woods to be frightened by any such trifles, and, halting for scarcely twenty seconds, he advanced with the calm deliberation of a brute bent upon clearing up the mystery without any unnecessary delay. Instead of giving him the contents of one of the chambers of the revolver, the young hunter drew back within the hollow of the tree, as a turtle is seen to retreat within his shell when affrighted at the approach of some enemy. It was a tight squeeze, but he insinuated himself along the open space until quite sure that he was beyond the reach of the monster. There he found he had barely room to use his arms, but, pointing his weapon toward the opening, he awaited the action of bruin.

There was sufficient moonlight to perceive the opening, but he had scarcely time to glance at it when it was darkened by the bear, which thrust its head in with a thunderous growl that made the lad shiver from head to foot. Certain that it would not do to wait any longer, and believing that he meant to force his entire body through, the sorely frightened Ned discharged one barrel squarely in the face of the bear.

This settled matters. The latter had his snout and enough of his head shoved into the opening to receive a bad wound from the weapon, discharged within a foot or two of his face. He gave a sort of snarling howl, and jerked out his feet so suddenly that he must have injured himself still more by doing so, and, with a relief that can hardly be understood, Ned heard him clawing hastily along the trunk until he reached the land, when he scampered away into the woods, and nothing more was seen of him.

"If I had plenty of ammunition, I would not begrudge that shot," muttered Ned, as he carefully worked his way along the hollow again. "But that leaves me only four shots, and there's no telling how soon I'll have to use the rest."

He found, upon reaching the opening again, that the night was past and the day was breaking. He had obtained a good night's rest, but he was anxious to get ahead.

"I wonder where Lone Wolf is?" he thought, hesitating whether he had better descend from his hiding place or not. "It is all of twelve hours since I ran away and they must have done a good deal of hunting. Some of them have passed close to where I am, and they must be lurking about this very minute."

It was this uncertainty which caused the lad to wait some little time longer before venturing forth. He had been so fortunate up to this time that he could not afford to throw the chances away. When he found that the sun was far above the treetops, however, he began to grow impatient, and finally came to the conclusion that he was losing valuable time. So he began crawling carefully out, with the idea of resuming his flight homeward.

Ned was not yet fairly out from the tree, when he paused, for his ear detected something alarming. It was the soft splash of water, such as is made by a person who is carefully wading along, and it sounded fearfully near to where he was.

He assumed at once, because of the peculiar sound, that it must be caused by some one who was hunting for him, and no one could be hunting for him except some of the Apaches from whom he

fled. If any doubt remained in his mind, it was removed a moment later, when he heard a whistle from the same quarter whence came the sound of the wading. The signal was instantly responded to in the same manner by some one upon shore.

"They're Indians," he said. "They know that I must be somewhere in this neighborhood and they've made up their minds to search until they find me."

For two or three minutes all was as still as the tomb. It seemed as if the redskins were listening, in the hope of learning something of the fugitive through their sense of hearing when their eyes had failed them so long. If such were the case, they were disappointed, for the boy crouching in the gnarled tree would have suspended his very breathing, had it been in his power to do so, lest he should betray himself.

When the splashing noise was heard again, it sounded almost beneath him, and, yielding to a most dangerous curiosity, which, however, he could not restrain, he reached one hand into the foliage, drew it aside and looked down.

Not more than twenty feet distant he saw the figure of Lone Wolf, the Apache chief!

He stood in the water up to his knees, and, at the moment the fugitive looked, had passed a short distance beyond the tree, so that his back only was visible. Had it been a few minutes sooner, the warrior would have assuredly seen the white, scared face that peered upon him from among the leaves. But, as it was, he was all unconscious of the fact that he was so near the prize for which he and several of his best warriors had been searching for hours.

Two of them had paused beneath the tree and carefully examined the branches without discerning the hiding place, and they were now moving forward again, carefully examining everything on each side of the stream where it seemed possible for a cat, even, to conceal itself. Lone Wolf would have given his right arm, almost, rather than have his prisoner elude him. He had been completely deceived by that little artifice of lameness, and it was not until a full half hour after Ned's disappearance that he began to suspect that something was amiss. The trail was taken up at once and followed without trouble to where it entered the water. Here the real task began, for the hardness of the bed of the creek prevented them from tracing the footsteps where the clearness of the current would have enabled them to do so, had the circumstances been otherwise.

Consequently, the only thing possible for them to do was to find the place where he had taken to the land again. For this they hunted until dark and renewed the work again in the morning. But as Ned had not yet placed his foot upon dry land, the enterprise up to that moment was not a success.

CHAPTER XIV.

PURSUED.

Ned Chadmund's only fear was that the chief would hear the throbbing of his heart. He dared not draw his head into the tree, fearing that the action would attract the notice of the Apache; so he remained as motionless as the trunk of the tree itself, waiting for the danger to pass. Finally, the Indian was heard moving forward again, and the cramped and aching fugitive began to breathe more freely. He could detect that soft rippling through the water, such as is made by an angler who is hunting some choice place in the brook, and who examines every foot of the water which he passes. At last it was beyond hearing, and all was still again; but our young hero, impatient and anxious as he was to get forward, dared not leave his concealment while so many of his enemies were in the immediate neighborhood. He was confident that if he attempted flight and escaped running against some of these dusky wretches, they would speedily detect his trail and run him to the ground. He concluded to remain where he was until dark, when he would make another start, confident that by traveling all night, and taking advantage of all the means that came in his way, he could place a goodly distance between himself and the perilous neighborhood.

Nothing more was seen or heard of the Apaches during these long waiting hours, unless the distant report of a gun could be construed as their work, and the summer day gradually wore away. By this time the condition of the boy was truly pitiable. He was thirsty and nearly famished, feverish from his long abstinence. Yet with water within a few feet of him he refrained, for the reason that he was fearful of imperiling his safety.

"I'll wait till it is nearly dark," he said, as he looked down at the cool water flowing beneath; "for this is the only chance I shall ever have of giving them the slip."

The time he had fixed upon to venture forth had not yet arrived when he observed a large tree floating along below him. It had probably become displaced at some point up the stream, and would drift along until it should again catch some obstruction, and remain moored for an indefinite time. Yielding to a sudden inspiration, Ned crept hastily out of his concealment, and dropped lightly upon the trunk, which was heavy and buoyant enough to bear his weight without sinking below the surface.

The course of the stream was such that this proceeding carried him back directly over the ground that he had passed, and, in case the Apaches were in camp, would take him near it. But there was real woodcraft in this act, imprudent as it seemed; for nothing could be conceived, which, if successful, would more effectually throw the Indians off his trail. Knowing that he had gone northward, what inducement could there be for looking toward the south for him? The next thing after getting upon his raft was to stoop over and get a drink from the stream, which, having its source up among the mountains, was cold, clear, and pure.

Oh! the refreshing draught! None but those whose frames have been consumed with flaming fever can appreciate the delicious nectar, the invigorating, permeating life that lay in that wonderful fluid, which is without smell, taste or color, and to which no other liquid can be compared.

"Oh dear!" groaned the lad, as he raised his head. "Another drink like that and there'll be nothing left in the creek."

But thirst satisfied left him with such a tormenting sense of hunger that the question of something to eat speedily became paramount to all others. He almost ceased to think of Apaches in his wild desire for something with which to satisfy the cravings within.

The heavy trunk, covered with a few knotty protuberances, kept very nearly in the center of the stream and shifted on below the wood, across the open space and around the curve which has been already referred to, by which time it was fairly dark. Beyond this he could discern the outlines of the grove in the encampment of the day before, and where his own rush for liberty had been made. Were the Apaches still there, awaiting the conclusion of the hunt for him? This was the question, and, in his desire to answer it, he carefully steadied himself until he stood upright upon the log, so as to look across the intervening space to the wood beyond.

"If they're there, they'd be sure to have a camp fire," was the truthful conclusion; "but I can't catch sight of anything."

Had a point of light twinkled through the foliage, it is doubtful whether he could have had the courage to continue on down the stream to the point where it passed so close to the camp. No doubt he would have dodged it. But all continued dark and silent, and he was quite confident that they had gone. He crouched upon the raft again, and drifted with the current.

As he neared the rapids and narrow places where the water dashed over its rocky bed, it looked as if he would be unable to keep his seat upon the raft; but as this was the very section, where, above all others, he wished to keep his feet off the ground, he grasped the limbs and held on. He went safely on, although considerable water was splashed over him, and in a few minutes was in the broad, smooth current below, and so close to the grove that he trembled with fear.

In the dim moonlight he easily recognized the place, and for a few seconds he believed he had committed a fatal error in retracing his route in this fashion; but the silence remained unbroken, and he began breathing more freely, when all at once one end of the trunk struck the shore; the other end swung round, but it remained fast, and his journey for a time was at an end.

Ned was dismayed and at a loss what to do, for the only way of breaking loose that he could see was to step ashore and shove off. He remained quiescent a moment or two, in the hope that the raft would loosen itself; but, as it did not, he sprang ashore for that purpose. As he did so, he looked around for some sign of his enemies, but there was none, and the fact gave him assurance that they had really gone.

"They must have had dinner there," was his conclusion, "and maybe they have left something that I can make use of."

Encouraged by this hope, he moved over the intervening space, and speedily reached the spot where Lone Wolf and his band had encamped twenty hours before. As he had taken his departure from the savages before dinner, he was not really certain that that important meal had taken place; but he made diligent search, resolved that he would find out beyond all peradventure. The very best good fortune attended him. He had hunted but a few minutes, when he trod among the ashes where the camp fire had been burning. This proved that a meal had been partaken of, and in this country, so prodigal in the different species of game, the Indians were not economical in the use of food. Groping around in the dark, his hands soon came upon a goodly-sized bone, plentifully covered with meat, which had not been cooked so that it could be called overdone. A starving wolf could not have devoured this with greater gusto than did he, nor could a dozen starving wolves have enjoyed it more than did the poor fellow who had been so long without any nourishment.

When it was gnawed clean he hunted around for more. There was no lack of the material, and Ned was thankful beyond expression for this wonderful piece of good fortune, by which he had escaped from Lone Wolf and his warriors, and then, when starving, had obtained the food he needed from them. He ate and ate, and then rested and ate again, until he had gormandized himself to his utmost capacity, when with a sigh of happiness, he rose to his feet, and stole back toward the stream where he had left his craft. It was found there as if waiting expressly for his return, and, shoving it loose, he made his way to near the middle, where he crouched down and looked around with a feeling of misgiving and fear.

"I wonder if it can hold me after such a supper? It is a little lower in the water, but I guess it can

stand it."

Whither the stream was tending was a question for the wanderer to consider; but as he was without any possible means of determining, he did not devote much time to the consideration thereof. His purpose was to get ahead without leaving a trail behind, and that was what he was doing.

CHAPTER XV. IN THE SOLITUDE.

Ned designed to drift down stream for a mile or so, by which time he expected to be at such a distance that there was no further possible danger of pursuit. It would then be necessary for him to get forward as fast as he could, taking care to avoid the redskins who were in front, rather than those in the rear.

He was a little alarmed to find, after going scarcely half that distance, that the stream was broadening very rapidly. The current as a consequence, became slower, and when he descried seemingly a large forest looming up before him, he concluded that the time had about come for him to disembark, and use his heels. But, prompted somewhat by curiosity, he remained a while longer, until, before he was aware, he discovered that the stream had debouched into a lake, nearly circular in shape, and fully a couple of hundred yards in diameter. The impetus of the current kept the tree moving slowly and still more slowly, until it had reached a point near the middle, when it gradually settled down to a complete standstill.

"That's odd!" exclaimed the lad, looking about him, and seeing the broad sweep of water on every hand. "If I knew this I think I should have got off."

It only remained for him to work his way to land, and this he began doing by using his hands as paddles. It was slow progress; and he was of the opinion that he had made a rather foolish blunder in permitting himself to be "carried out to sea" in this fashion. He was disturbed still further by the appearance of the sky. Dark, threatening clouds were gathering and sweeping across it, frequently shutting out the light of the moon and causing the most grotesque shadows to whisk over the surface of the lake.

The indications were that a violent storm was close at hand, and he used both hands with all the vigor at his command, and saw himself gradually nearing land—the rate being so moderate that it could not keep pace with his impatience. He was tempted more than once to leap into the water and swim or wade ashore, but he restrained himself. On one of these occasions, just as a heavy cloud approached the moon, and while his raft was a dozen yards or so from shore, he was alarmed at sight of something approaching him through the water. What it was he could not conjecture, as it was low down, and very indistinct on account of the gathering gloom.

As the cloud touched the moon and obscured the light, this suspicious object disappeared, and he awaited with no little alarm the outcome of the mystery. He was sitting motionless, looking and listening, when the end of the tree was suddenly elevated a full foot, while the other correspondingly descended.

With a gasp of terror, Ned clutched the limb near him and held on, not knowing whither he was about to be flung. A muttering growl at the same instant explained what it all meant, and he hastily retreated still further upon the tree, expecting every moment to feel the claws of the wild animal fastened upon him.

"It seems to me that these beasts are after me more than the Indians," was his thought, as he drew out his revolver, and awaited the necessity of using it.

Further than placing his paws upon one end of the trunk, and giving out a threatening growl, the animal did nothing for a few minutes, while the boy, fully sensible of the value of his ammunition, was equally lacking in offensive proceedings. Thus matters stood, while the great heavy cloud floated slowly by the moon, and the head of the unwelcome stranger gradually came to view.

It was some wild beast, beyond question, but it wasn't a bear. Its eyes, shining with a phosphorescent glow, and the cavernous growling that issued from the red jaws, made it seem the most frightful kind of a monster. Hoping that it was not particularly hungry, Ned tried the scare game again, flinging up his arms and shouting, and making noises horrible enough to frighten any one to whom they remained unexplained. In this case it succeeded admirably. The creature, whatever it was, must have concluded that it was something besides a boy with which it had taken passage, and, after indulging in one prolonged stare, dropped back into the water and paddled straight for shore.



NED TRIED THE SCARE GAME AGAIN, FLINGING UP HIS ARMS AND SHOUTING

"I don't think Lone Wolf can follow me all along this route," concluded the boy, as he resumed his paddling toward shore, and reached it in the course of the next ten minutes. He had been cramped up in one position so long that he felt the need of exercise, and started off at a rapid pace, with no more idea of the precise direction he was following than if he were blind.

The clouds sweeping across the sky grew heavier and darker, and the wind, strong and chilling, soughed through the trees of the forest with a dismal, wailing sound that would have frightened one of more years than young Chadmund. Even he would have shrunk from the task of going through the wood had the circumstances been different, but he was so actuated by the one all-controlling desire of escape that he forgot the real danger which encompassed him. Besides the risk of encountering the Apaches, there was the ever-present peril from wild beasts and venomous serpents. None of the latter as yet had disturbed him, but he was likely to step upon some coiling reptile, unseen in the dark, whose sting was certain death.

It soon became apparent that a storm of a most violent character was about to burst forth. The wind grew stronger and colder, lightning flashed athwart the darkening sky, and the thunder boomed with an increasing power peculiar to warm countries. The wanderer had been fortunate thus far in preserving himself from a ducking, and he was still desirous of doing so. There was nothing to be gained by pressing forward, and he began groping around for some kind of a shelter. This was difficult to find, as the gloom was so dense that eyesight was useless, and he could only use his hands.

"I guess I'll have to climb a tree," he thought, running his hand along the bark of one.

But at this juncture he ran against a rock, striking with such violence that he saw stars. As soon as he recovered he began an examination, and was not a little pleased to find that under one portion of it there was a hollow big enough for him to crawl in and protect himself from the tempest. He had scarcely done so when the storm burst forth.

First a few large drops pattered upon the leaves, and then it seemed as if the windows of Heaven had been opened. The rain descended in torrents, the firmament flamed with a blinding intensity—and the earth trembled with the reverberating thunder. The vivid sheets of electric fire made the darkness and gloom deeper by contrast. The trees, with their swaying branches, and the spear-like columns of rain, stood out and vanished again so rapidly that the vision of the appalled lad was dazzled and bewildered. The terrific shocks coming simultaneously with the lightning, proved that the thunderbolts were falling all around him, and again and again he thanked that Providence which had dissuaded him from taking refuge in some of the trees.

Crash!

Directly in front of him, an immense giant of the forest was smitten from top to base, the limbs, leaves, and splinters hurled in every direction, as if a thousand pounds of powder had been exploded within. The air was so surcharged with electricity that Ned felt the effect. A prickling sensation down one entire side of his body was followed by a partial numbness and paralysis that alarmed him. With his other hand he hastily rubbed his limbs, and turned and twisted, fearing that he was becoming helpless.

In a few minutes he regained the strength which had temporarily departed, and then noticed that the storm was subsiding as rapidly as it had arisen. The thunder died out in sullen mutterings; the lightning flashed fitfully, often without any perceptible report following, and the deluge

diminished to a few drops.

"The storm is over, thank heaven!" he exclaimed. "As I have such a good bed, I may as well stay here till morning."

But at this instant his blood almost froze at the sudden discovery of a new and deadly peril.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

Young Chadmund heard the unmistakable warning of a rattlesnake that was somewhere near him, and on the very point of striking. Precisely where it was, it was impossible to determine with any certainty; but there was no time to consider the matter. It seemed to him in that brief second he devoted to thought that the venomous reptile lay a little to the left, and he scrambled out of his place with all the celerity at his command.

The wonderful quickness of this usually sluggish snake, when about to deal its deadly blow is well known, and, had the boy moved with twice the rapidity that he did, Ned could not have escaped that lightning-like dart of the snake, which was aimed straight at his foot, that being the part of the body which was nearest his coil. The fangs struck the side of his shoe, which happened to move at the very instant the blow was made, and, piercing the leather, held the reptile fast,—“Hoist by his own petard,” as it were,—so that, when Ned scrambled out from his shelter, he felt the horrid thing dangling at his heels.

With presence of mind hardly to be expected at such a time, he arose to his feet, and holding the attached foot motionless, with the other he hastily stamped all the life from the writhing rattlesnake. This done he freed the shoe by a jerk, although it tore the fangs of the reptile from its jaws.

"I think I'd better dust out of here," said the lad, breathlessly. "I remember that Corporal Hugg told me that where you found one of those things you are pretty sure of running against another close by, and I don't care about seeing any, especially when it's so dark you can't see at all."

He stepped carefully forth in the darkness, and, moving a few feet, paused to listen. The rain had ceased falling entirely, and only the faintest mutter of the distant thunder reached his ears. The darkness was absolutely impenetrable, and the wind, as it souged through the wet branches, made the most dreary and dismal wailing—enough to strike despair to the bravest heart.

The boy had listened but a moment when a slight rustling among the leaves at his feet filled him with a sudden conviction that a second rattlesnake was after him. He left the spot expeditiously, not halting until he was sure that he was beyond reach of the unwelcome visitant, which, it is well known, is not much given to pursuing its prey.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed, "there ain't much fun in this. I wish daylight would come, so that I could see what to do."

His situation was exceedingly uncomfortable. Everything was soaked with water, and he could not walk without shaking down the moisture from the laden branches and undergrowth. He knew of but one place wherein he could secure protection and that was beneath the rock where he had so narrowly escaped the rattlesnake, but he was not very anxious to make his way back there.

While he stood debating what to do, he noticed that the sky was rapidly clearing, the black, tumultuous clouds rolling away from the face of the moon, which soon shone out with all its wonted power. This was a vast help, for, despite the dense shadows made by the heavy branches overhead, he was able to see enough to pick his way and noticed that the forest directly in front was quite open, indicating that he was close to the termination. Thus encouraged, he pressed ahead and soon had the satisfaction of finding that he was through the woods and on the border of an open, rocky ravine, through which he could hear a stream rushing with great violence, and which he took to be the outlet of the little lake that had been overcharged by the recent severe storm. So far as he could see by the moonlight, great masses of rock, boulders and broken prairie stretched out before him, and he asked himself how he was to make his way.

He concluded not to make the attempt just then, but, hunting out a place among the rocks, he crawled into it, first making sure, by a careful reconnaissance that no rattlesnakes had crept in ahead of him. He was permitted to remain undisturbed through the night, and when he opened his eyes the sun was shining directly in upon him. The boy then hastily sprang up, his heart full of gratitude to God for the wondrous manner in which his life had been preserved, and the remarkable success which had followed his attempt at escape from the Apaches.

With the coming of the glorious sunlight, Ned naturally felt buoyant and hopeful. He was not without considerable appetite, but he had eaten so heartily, on the previous evening, that he felt that he could afford to wait until night again; and he still had that impatient, almost unreasoning desire to get forward, which made him feel like breaking into a run, and keeping it up until he was out of breath.

But, young as was the little fellow, he was old enough to feel that the time had come when he must use all the brains in his command. Up to that hour, as will be understood, he had been journeying entirely at random, his sole purpose being to get beyond reach of Lone Wolf and his band. He had accomplished this, and a radical change of tactics must be made.

If Ned Chadmund had been a half dozen years older, he would have recoiled at the prospect before him; but he was so young and full of animal spirits that he did not really comprehend the difficulty and danger. He had traveled very little more than half the distance between Santa Fe and Fort Havens, and his purpose was to press ahead until the latter was reached. To do this, it was necessary that he should make his way through the mountains in which he now found himself, and then to journey a couple of hundred miles through or over prairie, and across streams, before he could reach the frontier post, where his father was so anxiously awaiting his coming. The project seemed nothing short of madness; but its justification lay in the fact that the wanderer had the choice of attempting that or lying down and dying where he was. He could do nothing but choose the former.

Ned climbed up to an elevated position and took an observation—his purpose, after learning whether any present danger threatened, being to learn the direction it was necessary to follow in order to reach Fort Havens.

"Corporal Hugg told me that after we reached Devil's Pass, it was in a straight line West. The trail winds in and out, as it has to do, but all one had to do was to dig ahead, and he would be sure to come out right in the end—that is, if the Indians and wild animals would only let him. Well, right yonder rose the sun," he continued, very carefully continuing his observation. "That must be the east, and all I have to do is to keep that at my back until it gets over my head and wears round to the front. So off we go."

There was one favorable accompaniment of this first thoughtful effort to reach home. The valley-like depression that had caught his eye upon rising ran precisely in the direction to be desired—due east and west—so that he had the best facility in the world for getting through the mountains. Still another favorable augury was that the general direction pursued by the Apaches was the same, and the fact was, there was very little still intervening between him and the open prairie beyond. Should his progress remain uninterrupted through the day, by nightfall he would be close to the prairie, which stretched away so many miles in the direction of the frontier post.

"I don't think it's as much as two hundred miles," he said, as he started off at a rapid walk. "I can make thirty miles a day, so that I will be there at the end of a week, if nothing unexpected gets in the way. Won't father be surprised when he sees me walk up, and won't I be surprised if I manage to do it, also!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A MYSTERIOUS CAMP FIRE.

For a couple of hours young Chadmund had difficulty in traveling. Despite the fact that he was in a sort of valley, with towering peaks and bluffs upon either hand, a great many boulders and obstructions obtruded themselves in his path, and he did some climbing, clambering, and jumping that would have reflected no discredit upon a mountain goat. The forenoon was about half gone, and he was felicitating himself upon the excellent progress he was making, when he was brought up all standing by finding himself upon the bank of a mountain stream, which crossed his route exactly at right angles, issuing from the mountains on the left with a rush and roar and pouring tumultuously forward with irresistible power and velocity.

"I can't wade that," said the lad, scratching his head in perplexity, "and it won't do to try and swim it. If I once got in there it would be the last of me."

There could be no doubt of that, for the stream was fully twenty feet in width, very deep, and sped forward like the volume of a river when suddenly compressed into a mountain canyon. It was walled in on either side by solid rock, the surface of the water being a couple of yards below the level where he stood.

"I wonder whether I can't go round it?" he said, after spending some time in mental debate. "It can't run all the way through the mountain, but must start somewhere not very far away."

This was not a very plausible theory; but as nothing was to be gained by standing still, he started out upon his tour of exploration. Better success followed than he expected. He had started toward the head of the stream and had clambered along less than a hundred yards, when he reached a place where it was so narrow that he was confident of his ability to leap across.

"Yes, I can do that," he said, approaching close to the edge and looking over the boiling abyss to the solid rock upon the other side. "But suppose I should miss my footing, wouldn't I catch it!"

It was a pretty good leap, but Ned was active, strong and swift, and he had made many a longer leap than the one before him. For a minute longer he stood, measuring the distance with his eye. Then going backward a few steps, he suddenly ran forward with all the speed at his command,

and, concentrating all his strength, made such a leap that he cleared the chasm by a couple of feet.

"There!" he exclaimed, with some satisfaction, "if none of the streams are broader than that, I'll jump them all."

Still full of hope and in the best of spirits he pressed forward until the sun was at the meridian and the heat became so oppressive that he concluded to rest awhile. He was in a section of country where, at certain seasons, the heat is like that of the Desert of Sahara. There are portions of Arizona and Lower California where the fervor of the sun's rays at noonday smite the earth with the withering power of the sirocco.

At times, when Ned was down in the lowest portions of the valley, the heat was almost intolerable; and then, again, when he clambered to the top of some elevation, and the cool breezes from the upper regions fanned his cheeks, it was like a draught of water to the fever-parched patient.

He had lain on the ground under the protecting shadow of a rock but a short time when his eye rested upon something which convinced him that he was not the only one in the valley. Looking dreamily off toward the west, up the valley, with the mountains sloping down on the right and left, he noticed what at first seemed a thin bluish cloud, resting against the sky. Then he observed that its form was a little out of the usual order, it being column-shaped, tall, and like a shaft of almost invisible vapor, thrown against the white background beyond.

"That ain't a cloud," he suddenly exclaimed, starting to his feet and scrutinizing it more closely. "It's the smoke from a camp fire and I've got to go right by it."

There could be no doubt of the truth of what he said, and he became deeply interested.

"I wonder whether they're Indians or white men? I suppose it's most likely they are Apaches, and they may be Lone Wolf and his companions. I've got to keep a sharp lookout and keep from running into them. If they are white hunters, that I've heard are sometimes in these mountains, it will be a lucky thing for me."

Somehow or other he became impressed with the idea that the camp fire ahead of him was that of friends instead of enemies—that the assistance which he so sorely needed was thus placed within his reach. He had learned, long before, that one is apt to miscalculate the distance when placed as he was; but, making allowance for all that, he was confident that the camp fire was not more than a mile away. Yielding to a natural curiosity to learn its meaning, he shortened the hour which he had intended to devote to rest, and started ahead again.

Once or twice it seemed to him that he had dropped into some sort of trail, which he was following. Here and there were traces showing that the route had been traveled before. It seemed to be one of those natural roads or passes which are found at intervals in all great mountain chains, and without which, many of them for vast distances would be literally impassable for man or animal.

The conviction that he was not the pioneer over that section caused the young wanderer some misgivings and suggested several discomfiting questions. If Apaches had used the trail already, might not some of them be upon it? If some of them were coming from the opposite direction, how was he to avoid running into their arms? These queries were not of the most cheerful character and they served to tone down the enthusiasm which had marked his start in the morning. They also caused him to examine, more times than was really necessary, the revolver which had already done him such good service, and he went through a preliminary drill, consisting of placing it inside his waistcoat, a couple of buttons being left carelessly unfastened; next thrusting his hand within, in an indifferent manner, then instantly jerking out and pointing the weapon at an imaginary foe in front of him. This maneuver he repeated scores of times, narrowly escaping the firing of the weapon, until he satisfied himself that he could do it to perfection.

"Now, if Lone Wolf comes at me alone, I think I can manage him. He won't suspect that I've any weapon, and so won't be prepared for it; but I hope he won't show himself," he added the next minute. "If there's any way of avoiding him, I'll do it."

However, he was bent upon solving the mystery of the distant camp fire, which he still hoped might belong to some party of white hunters, who would take him under their protection and conduct him safely over the wide and dangerous stretch of territory which still intervened between him and his destination.

In spite of the careful calculation he had made, he soon learned that he had committed an error. Although the tell-tale smoke at first seemed scarcely a mile away, it was more than three times that distance. The way being more obstructed by rocks and the sinuous winding of the trail, he saw the sun sinking low in the west and found that he had still no little traveling to do.

"It can't be that they are shifting that camp fire all the time," he growled, as he clambered upon an elevation, and was again disappointed to find it so far away. "Blamed if it don't look as if somebody was playing a trick on me. I've heard of a jack-o'-lantern bobbing around in that style, but nothing else."

He finally concluded that the laws of nature were not violated in this case, and with renewed

courage pressed ahead again. The sky was clear and cloudless, the weather remained oppressively warm, and poor Ned was so jaded that he felt scarcely able to drag one foot after the other, but he was stout-hearted, and, just as the sun dipped out of sight behind the mountains, he found himself within a hundred yards of the mysterious camp.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INDIAN FIGHT.

In spite of his great anxiety to learn all there was to be known about the camp fire, Ned remained where he was for half an hour, until he had rested somewhat from his severe labor.

The place in which the fire was kindled was elevated, rocky, uneven, and inclosed by a few stunted trees and undergrowth, so that while the young scout could catch a glimmer, now and then, of the fire, he could see nothing more. The only way in which he could perfect his information was to crawl up still nearer. This he proceeded to do, using all the care and caution possible, until, after the lapse of nearly an hour, he reached a point where his view was unobstructed and perfect.

A severe disappointment awaited him. He saw four Indian warriors grouped around the fire, their dress, and the peculiar manner in which they were painted, proving that they belonged to some tribe other than the Apaches. Three of them were occupied in cutting up and preparing the carcass of some animal, which they had shot, while the fourth was on his knees in front of the fire, carefully doctoring it for culinary purposes.

Succeeding Ned's first feeling of disappointment was an undercurrent of hope that he was in a fair way to obtain another good meal.

"It isn't likely they'll eat up all they've got," he reflected, "and I don't suppose they're going to settle down there for life. All I've got to do, then, is to hang round until they go away, and then, if I can get the chance, I'll stuff enough to last a week."

Having made his reconnaissance he withdrew to a more secret place, where he would not be seen in case some of the warriors should take a look around before retiring for the night. It was fortunate that he did so, for he had scarcely crawled away beneath a dense mass of undergrowth when he made the discovery that he had placed himself in a curious and singularly dangerous position.

Twice he fancied he heard a faint rustling in the rear of where he was crouching, and he was puzzled to know what it meant. He was sharp enough to protect himself from observation from this direction as well as from the front, and was no more than fairly secure when he caught the slight sound again, and the next moment detected the figure of an Indian stealing along, with his gaze fixed upon the camp fire and the forms around it.

The lad was naturally puzzled to understand the meaning of this. There was just enough fire light penetrating to where he was to show him that this redskin belonged to a different tribe from those in camp. Only a few minutes passed when he caught the glimpse of another warrior on the left, crouching along in the same manner as the other. Then followed the softest possible hiss, such as is made by the disturbed serpent, and, at that moment, the truth of the whole matter suddenly broke upon Ned Chadmund.

The strange Indians were quietly preparing their supper, unaware of the fact that, while they were thus employed, a party of Apaches, their deadly enemies, were closing in upon them. Thus, it was, too, that, without the knowledge of either side, the lad was directly between them, where it would seem impossible that he should escape being involved in the conflict that was rapidly drawing to a head.

There was no hope of withdrawing, for the slightest movement would be sure to make known his position, and he could only wait, therefore, the issue of the encounter with an intensity of interest which it is impossible to imagine. What could be more painfully interesting, for instance, than to watch the movements of the strange Indians as they engaged themselves in preparing their supper, conversing with each other in their grunting fashion, and to note their unconsciousness that a circle of death was slowly but surely closing in around them; to know, which they did not suspect, that the most deadly kind of encounter was close at hand? The endangered party certainly showed a lack of precaution which belongs to their people in the most ordinary cases when they went into camp in this fashion, and left the way open for such a deadly and fatal assault to be made upon them. It must have been that while engaged in the chase during the day they had made their observations, and satisfied themselves that none of their enemies were in dangerous proximity.

The odor of the cooking meat crept through the bushes to the nostrils of the hungry lad, who was almost maddened into charging upon the party himself in quest of some of the brown, crisp, roasting meat; but he restrained himself, in the hope that the issue of the unpleasantness would furnish him an opportunity to procure something for the inner man.

An Indian upon the warpath is as patient as the Esquimau who watches for a dozen hours beside the airhole, waiting for the seal to come to the surface. According to all human reasoning, there was no earthly necessity for any delay upon the part of the attacking Apaches, and yet, for full an hour longer, they maneuvered and reconnoitered, without striking a blow. Despite the tense condition of the lad's nerves, he began to grow drowsy and weary at the prolonged delay, and had the attack been deferred a short time longer, he would have dropped into a sound slumber.

The four strange Indians were permitted to finish their supper, and to engage in a comfortable smoke. This, however, was never completed. They were stretched out upon the ground in the most indolent manner imaginable, when several rifles suddenly broke the stillness, the Apache war whoop rang out with startling power, and a number of figures charged through the bushes like a horde of demons, all converging upon the group around the camp fire. Two of the latter had been instantly killed by the first volley poured in upon them. The others were wounded, but they were on their feet in an instant, fighting with the fury of tigers.

The battle was of the hurricane order, the third defender going down within a minute after the assaulting party closed in about them. The fourth, who was only slightly hurt seemed to have been caught at less disadvantage. He was a warrior of wonderful activity and strength, and used his hunting knife with good effect upon his first and second assailants with lightening-like quickness. Then as they began to crowd in upon him faster than he could provide against he circled his weapon around his head several times, so as to clear a brief open space, when, with a yell of defiance, he bounded high in the air, and vanished in the forest, his speed so amazing that it was vain for any one to think of pursuing him.

The battle ended as abruptly as it began. It was over in an instant, and the petrified spectator could scarcely realize what had taken place directly under his own eyes. He lay motionless, peering through the leaves that shut him in, scarcely daring to breathe as he watched the movements of the victors. He could scarcely suppress an exclamation of terror when he recognized among them his old captor and enemy, Lone Wolf.

"Just think of it," whispered Chadmund. "I have spent hours and hours, and have traveled night and day to get away from him, and here he is, within fifty feet of me again. How can I keep him from seeing my trail again in the morning? It does beat everything how this thing is getting mixed."

He took heart again, however, when he came to reflect that the greater part of the night was still before him, that Lone Wolf had undoubtedly given up all expectation of finding him, and, by using ordinary caution, he could still keep clear of him.

The Apaches did not remain long upon the scene of the encampment. The two of their own number that had been killed were lifted up, and then Lone Wolf and his few intrepid warriors took their departure. Thus it happened that within fifteen minutes after the first gun had been fired, and the first yell uttered, the boy found himself alone upon the scene of the terrible fight. Dreadful as were the place and the associations, he could not forget that he was nearly famished, and stealing his way to the fire, he hunted around until he found enough to satisfy the cravings within. This done, he made up his mind that it was best for him to do some traveling during the darkness, without waiting for the rising of the morrow's sun.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE MEETING.

As he moved along, weary and worn, the memory of the horrid fight he had seen by the camp fire, and especially the picture of those three stark, bloody forms that lay stretched upon the earth, seemingly watching every movement he made, followed and weighed him down like some smothering incubus. Then he saw, more vividly than ever before, the mountainous task ahead. With no horse, and the hundreds of miles of mountain and prairie, with the dangers besetting him on every hand, what possible hope had he for believing he was ever to reach his destination? The gloom of the night, the shadow of what he had so recently witnessed, and his own exhausted condition, no doubt had much to do with the distress; for his prospects were certainly as good as at morning, when he was so full of enthusiasm.

"I can't travel any further," he finally exclaimed, "and what's the use? It won't do any good."

When he paused in his wearisome tramp, he happened to be close to a tree, quite lofty, with numerous limbs, some of which were quite near the ground. It struck him at once that it would be a good plan to climb into this, and ensconce himself among the branches. At any rate, he was certain to be out of the way of the crawling snakes, and no wild animal could steal upon him while he was unconscious.

Without pausing more than a moment to consider, he ascended the tree, and, a short distance from the ground secured the very position he wanted. Here the limbs crossed and recrossed, and gnarled themselves in such a way, that the most pleasant kind of bed imaginable was found, and he stretched out his weary limbs upon it, thanking Heaven that had guided him to such a favorable place.

"I hope Lone Wolf won't be able to follow me here," was the wish he expressed, as he resigned himself to slumber.

But gentle sleep had not yet closed his eyelids when he was alarmed by hearing something beneath him. His first supposition was that it was Lone Wolf, for the sound resembled the stealthy tread of some person upon the soft earth; but after listening a few minutes he became satisfied that it was some animal instead.

"It's a wolf or panther that has scented my trail," was his conclusion, as he leaned over and peered cautiously down among the branches.

The moon shone more brightly than upon any night since he had started, but the shadow of the trees themselves obscured his view so much that his vision was of little use to him. It seemed to him, however, when he looked downward in this fashion, that once or twice he caught sight of a shadowy creature, whisking back and forth, leaping about like a dog, and apparently ready to make a bound upward among the branches.

But he could not make certain of what he saw, although there could be no doubt but that he heard something, and that some kind of a dangerous creature was close at hand.

"I guess he isn't going to hurt me," was his conclusion, after watching and listening a half hour, and after finding a heavy drowsiness was stealing over him. In this comfortable state of mind, he soon closed his eyes, and relapsed into a deep, refreshing sleep, which lasted an hour or more, when it ended in a peculiar manner. Very few boys are apt to lie quiet in their beds, and Ned Chadmund, in turning over upon his side, turned completely out of bed, and dropped through the branches to the ground.

The fall was so slight that it did not hurt him, except in the disagreeable shock that was inevitable. It flashed on him on the instant, and, recalling those stealthy footsteps that had so frightened him, he instantly sprang for the trunk, and began climbing with all the haste at his command. He was almost within reach of the limbs, when he heard a growl, and some denizen of the forest came plunging toward him.

With a thrill of terror, the lad made a tremendous effort, caught the limb with one hand, swung his leg over and drew himself up. As he did so, he felt distinctly the wind made by the body of the beast, as it leaped upward, and snapped with his huge jaws at his legs, which were withdrawn from its fangs just as they closed together. The creature, whatever it was, made a running leap, that carried him some distance beyond, when he struck the ground and ran a few leaps before turning about and retracing his steps.

Without waiting to gain a more distinct view, the lad crept back to his perch, where he tremblingly awaited the moment when it was to bound up among the limbs and attack him. After gaining his former position, he sat for a few minutes shivering like one with the ague, forgetting even to think of the revolver with which to defend himself in case the brute assaulted him. But it may have been that the dumb creature believed that he was already frightened to death, and there was no occasion for attempting anything further. At any rate nothing more was seen or heard of him.

Ned had been too thoroughly shaken up to gain any more sleep. He sat through the remaining hours of the night without closing his eyes a moment in slumber. They were the longest and the dreariest that he ever spent, but when the welcome light of morning came his foe had departed.

The wanderer waited a half hour or more, and carefully reconnoitered the grounds before descending; but, assured that the coast was clear, he came down to *terra firma* again and took up his line of march. His fear now was that his presence in the neighborhood might be discovered by Lone Wolf or some of his band, and, scarcely pausing long enough to swallow a few mouthfuls of water from a stream near at hand, he hastened forward, with his face toward the west.

It became evident, after journeying a short distance, that he was again following a distinctly-marked trail, one that was originally made by animals, most probably buffaloes, in their migrations from one section to another, and had been taken advantage of by men whose business or inclinations called them in the same direction. Here and there he saw marks that had been made by the hoofs of horses, and more than once he was certain he observed the trail of moccasins. The path was more direct and less laborious to travel, and he began to believe that, if he were left alone, he might succeed in reaching safety at some time or other.

For some two hours he tramped along through a section that gradually lost its mountainous character as he neared the rolling prairie beyond. He kept continually looking back and around him, on the alert for Indians; but not a sign was discovered, until he approached an exceptionally rocky place, where the trail wound round the masses of stone at such a sharp angle that the view was less than a dozen feet.

With no thought of danger, Ned walked around this corner, and on the instant found himself face to face with a swarthy Indian warrior who must have seen him approaching, and, dismounting from his horse, stood back and awaited his approach. That astounded look revealed not only this, but that the Indian was Lone Wolf.

Fate had brought the two together again, at the very time the heart of the weary fugitive was beating high with hope. There was no chance for retreat or hope of avoiding him. The eyes of the painted Apache glowed with a demoniac light, and his fingers twitched as he placed his right

hand upon the buckhorn handle of a knife at his girdle.

"You run away—you see well—you lie—now I will cut out your eyes, and you will not see to run away again!"

There was no doubt that such was the purpose of the warrior, as he advanced upon the lad, who suddenly thrust his hand into his waistcoat for his revolver.

It was gone!

During the night it had dropped out without being noticed, and he was absolutely defenseless. He was breathless, paralyzed with terror.

"Yes, I will cut out your eyes, and then you will not see to run away," added the chief, striding toward him.

"Hold on thar, my copper-colored friend! This 'ere is a little row you kin settle with me, instead of that boy thar. Try that knife on my eyes, and while you're doing it, I'll try mine on yourn."



"THIS 'ERE IS A LITTLE ROW YOU KIN SETTLE WITH ME, INSTEAD OF THAT BOY THAR."

It was Tom Hardyng, the scout, who spoke thus opportunely.

CHAPTER XX.

WHITE VS. RED.

The hunter seemed to step forth from some crevice in the rocks, wherein he had been concealed, and strode forward in such a manner that Lone Wolf saw him at the very instant the first word was uttered.

The latter withdrew his gaze from the boy and turned with lightning-like swiftness upon his adversary, while the latter, as cool and self-possessed as if he were about to slice up an antelope or buffalo, continued approaching with his hunting knife firmly clasped in his right hand. The Indian, perceiving the character of the fight, flung his rifle several yards from him, where it was beyond the reach of both, and recoiling a single step, put himself in form to receive the charge of his assailant.

"Ned, my boy," said the latter, without looking at him, "get back. There's no telling what may happen."

This was no more than a prudent caution. The fight was over the boy, and if Lone Wolf should find the battle going against him, he would resort to any treacherous trick by which to destroy the prize,—such, for instance, as a sudden dart upon the unsuspecting spectator and the plunging of his knife to his heart before the active hunter could thwart him. Ned obeyed his rescuer, whom he had never seen before, and stepped back full a dozen yards from the combatants, but with his eyes intently fixed upon them.

Tom was not the man to advance blindly to the assault, for none knew better than he did the character of the foe he was about to assail. When, therefore, he was just within striking distance, he paused, and, with his grey eyes centered upon the black, snake-like orbs of the chief, began circling around him in a stealthy cat-like movement, on the lookout for some opening of which he might take advantage.

"Lone Wolf is a coward and a dog," he growled between his set teeth. "He fights with papposes, but he is afraid of men."

This was said with the sole purpose of exasperating the warrior, who would thus have been placed at a slight disadvantage; but he was already like a concentrated volcano—calm outwardly, but surcharged with fire and death within. The taunt did not move his nerves an iota, and he replied in words which were scarcely less irritating.

"It is the boasting dog which never hurts. If Lone Wolf is a dog, why are you so afraid to come within his reach?"

The words were yet in his mouth when the scout dashed forward like a catapult and struck a tremendous blow, driven with such directness and swiftness that it could not have been parried. At the very instant Hardyng made the charge, Lone Wolf did the same, and the two similar blows, aimed at the same moment, encountered half way with such terrible violence that both knives were hurled twenty feet beyond over the cliff at their side, and irrevocably beyond their reach. This left them with no weapons except such as nature had provided them with, and, now that their blood was up and each was smarting under the pain of the first collision, they immediately closed in and grappled each other like a couple of infuriated gladiators.

Hardyng was a marvel of strength and activity, and so was the Apache. The two were nearly evenly matched, a slight superiority in wrestling attaching to the white man, who, after a furious struggle of a minute or so, flung his antagonist as flat as could be, upon his back. He struck like an India-rubber ball, and, before Tom could fasten him down, so as to hold him, bounded up again and renewed his fight without a second's hesitation.

"The devil take you!" growled the maddened hunter, as he let drive a sledgehammer-like blow straight from the shoulder.

It encountered the chief fairly upon the forehead, with a force apparently sufficient to crush his skull, but it only sent him reeling back several paces, when his sinewy activity saved him from falling. With the same unhesitating promptness he charged as before.

"If that skull ain't more than six inches thick, it'll go this time," muttered Tom, as he gathered all his strength and sent out his fist like the thrust of a piston rod.

But Lone Wolf was expecting it and a quick flirt of the head to one side let the mallet go harmlessly by, while the impetus of his own blow threw Hardyng forward several steps, and narrowly escaped carrying him off his feet altogether. With an exasperating taunt the chief landed a blow upon the face of his antagonist as he shot by, and, catching him about the shoulder before he could recover, flung him to the ground with great violence, falling heavily upon him.

Had the knife of the Apache been in his hand at this juncture he would have ended the struggle in short order; but he was without the means of improving his advantage, and before he knew it he was turned from the chest of the prostrate man. And this critical moment, when the issue of the contest was very doubtful, a second figure came out from the rocks, and approached the combatants. It was that of Dick Morris, who coolly asked:

"Sha'n't I knock him on the head, Tom, and end this little row?"

"No," fairly shouted the enraged hunter, as they hammered away at each other. "If you do it, I'll knock you on the head. This is a fair and square fight in which the best man wins. If I can't knock thunder and lightning out of this redskin, let him knock it out of me. Stand back!"

"All right," replied Dick, very contentedly, walking to where the enthralled Ned Chadmund stood and asking him whether he wished to stake a little wager on the result.

The appearance of this third party ended the contest in a manner neither of the whites anticipated. The words of Tom Hardyng, declining the assistance of his friend, were understood by Lone Wolf; but, treacherous and faithless himself, he regarded them as only a part of a trap in which he was to be caught, and his whole purpose was to get out of the dilemma as quickly as possible. However hopeful he might be in a single hand-to-hand encounter with one of the men, he was not vain enough to think that he could master both. In their struggling they had approached quite close to the cliff, and Lone Wolf made a determined attempt to throw Tom over. By a little feinting and dodging, he managed to get him between himself and the edge and then began pressing him furiously.

"That's your game, is it?" exclaimed the scout. "If it is, sail in, and may the best man win."

Both were striking very wildly, when, hastily parrying several blows, Hardyng made a sudden rush, closed in, grasping the chief around the waist, and, lifting him clear of the ground, ran to the edge of the cliff and flung him over!

But Hardyng was outwitted. This was the very thing for which Lone Wolf had maneuvered so slyly. The cliff was not more than twenty feet in height, and when the hunter peered over the

margin, expecting to see his enemy dashed to pieces at a great depth below, he saw him land as lightly as a panther upon his feet and then whisk out of sight among the rocks.

"Thunder and blazes!" he exclaimed, when he comprehended the little trick that had been played upon him. Jerking off his hat, he slammed it impatiently to the ground, and turning to his comrade, said:

"Did you ever see a bigger fool than me?"

"Don't think I ever did," was the serious reply.

"Never thought what the Injun was after till it was too late to hinder him."

"I knowed it all the time. This ere little chap could have seed as much himself," was the tantalizing reply.

"Why didn't you sing out, then, when you seed me pick him up and start to throw him over?"

"'Cause I thought you was only fooling. Do you know there's a reward of five hundred dollars offered for Lone Wolf, dead or alive? See what you have lost?"

"Who offered it?" demanded Tom.

"Colonel Chadmund told me that old Captain Alvarez, that owns a big ranch near Santa Fe, lost a thousand cattle by a stampede that he had got up, and he's the man that has promised a hundred times to give that reward to whoever wipes out the chief."

"Anything else to tell?" said Hardyng, disgustedly.

"Yes. When Colonel Chadmund told me that, he punched me slyly in the side, and says, 'And yes, Dick, I'll put another five hundred on top of it.'"

"Hain't you got a little more such news?" asked poor Tom, who was wondering whether it was possible to feel any more angered or disgusted with himself than he now felt.

"No—that'll do just now. I think you've had enough."

CHAPTER XXI.

FRIENDS TOGETHER.

Up to this stage the two hunters had found no opportunity to pay much heed to Ned, who had been rescued so narrowly from horrible cruelty. Tom Hardyng now advanced to where he stood, and thrust out his hand, his face one broad grin.

"How are ye, my lad? We've had a long tramp for ye, and come mighty nigh bein' too late."

"Have *you* been looking for me?" asked the boy, in amazement.

"Yes, sir, we've been on the hunt for some days."

"How is that?"

Dick Morris briefly explained how Colonel Chadmund had received warning through a friendly Indian runner of the projected massacre of the cavalry escort. Knowing that it was impossible to forward reinforcements to them in time, and that Lone Wolf was aiming specially to get his hands upon his little boy, he had sent Dick post-haste with orders to intercept Tom, if possible, and both had been instructed to secure possession of the lad by any possible means in their power.

After a cautious investigation at the outset, when they arrived at Devil's Pass, they found that the massacre had taken place almost twenty-four hours before. The sight was a terrible one, such as made even them shudder. The horses and soldiers lay scattered here and there, just as they fell. The beasts of the forest had offered them no disturbance, probably because there were more inviting feasts elsewhere. But in the warm summer air the bloody, hacked faces were discolored and swollen beyond recognition. The hunters rode carefully along, and counted the whole thirteen, and when they found the overturned and wrecked ambulance and the dead horse a short distance beyond they were able to hit the right theory. It was in this carriage that young Chadmund had been riding when he was captured, and the scouts set out at once upon the trail of the Apache war-party.

It was all easy enough to follow the warriors, but Tom and Dick were hopelessly puzzled when they came up with the redskins, saw Lone Wolf and his brother warriors, and made the discovery that the boy was not with them. It was a most trying problem to them—the only solution being that they had grown impatient with the boy and put him to death; and yet, as the trail had been followed and narrowly watched, it seemed impossible that such a thing should have taken place without the pursuers finding it out before this. Dick Morris suggested that the captive, by some providential interference, had managed to give them the slip, but Tom could not believe it among the possibilities. If such were the case, there were no means of learning when or where it had been done, and the scouts were as completely cut off from pursuit of the boy as were the Apaches

themselves.

In this dilemma there was little to do except to make a general hunt for him, keeping all the time within striking distance of the Apaches, as they did not think that the fugitive could have gotten very far from them. The hunters carefully secreted their animals, and tramped over the mountains and through ravines, gorges, and woods, until, on this eventful forenoon they discovered Lone Wolf ahead of them, acting as though he had detected something particularly gratifying. The shrewd scouts suspected the truth on the instant. The Apache was also searching for the lad, and, guided by a greater knowledge, had discovered him. And so he crouched down in the rocks, not knowing that two other figures shortly after crouched behind him. Then, after the story had been told, as the three moved off together, Dick Morris having picked up the rifle which Lone Wolf cast from him as the contest was about to open, Ned Chadmund gave him his version of that terrible attack and slaughter in Devil's Pass, and of what had followed since. When he came to explain the clever manner in which he dodged the Apaches, his listeners were delighted. Dick slapped him upon the back, and Tom insisted upon shaking hands again. It was a favorite way the old fellow had of expressing his overwhelming delight at anything he saw or heard.

"If you'll put yourself under our trainin'," he added, "we'll make a hunter of ye in the course of a dozen or fifteen years, more or less."

But Ned had no interest in hunting matters just then. He wanted to get out of that dangerous neighborhood, and to reach Fort Havens with as little delay as possible.

"How far is it?" he asked, as the trio moved along the trail.

"We can make it in two or three days, I think," said Tom. "Some parts of the way, though, is rather rough, and it may take us longer."

"You don't expect to walk it, do you?"

They assured him that they had no intention of doing any such thing. Their horses were secreted in a gorge about three miles distant, and as soon as they could be reached they would mount them and speed away for Fort Havens.

"And we'll do it, too, at a gait that'll beat any mustang that Lone Wolf has ever straddled," added Dick, exultingly. "When a chap goes into the Injun country, he must fetch the best hoss flesh he can steal."

"But I haven't any horse," said Ned, with a laugh. "What's to become of me when you're riding?"

Tom explained that there could be no difficulty about that. Such a trifling additional weight would not be suspected by either of the animals.

"Where do you suppose Lone Wolf is?" asked the boy, looking furtively around, unable to free himself of the belief that they were not through with him yet.

"He's gone back to his party; they've split since you left 'em. About thirty started yesterday forenoon for the Apache villages to the south'ard, and the tother twenty are in camp off here a mile or so."

As Tom spoke, he pointed to the west, in among the mountains, and in a direction at right angles to what he was pursuing himself.

"Our road twists round a little," he added, "and when we get to where we left the animals, we'll be 'bout as far away from the Apaches as we are now. What's better, there's some mighty rough travelin' between us and them, such as no hosses can git over."

"But Indians can, can't they?"

"I rather guess so. What's the matter, my boy?" asked Tom, looking down upon him as they picked along. "You're talkin' as if you was thinkin' 'bout Injuns all the time."

"That's what I've had to do for the last three or four days. Lone Wolf managed to get away from you, and where do you think he is? What do you think he means to do?"

As the boy asked this question, he glanced around in such a timid, apprehensive way, that his companions laughed. It was natural that the lad should have these misgivings, especially as it seemed to him that his friends were using no precautions at all to prevent a treacherous surprise upon the part of the Apaches. To relieve his fears, they convinced him that they were on the alert, and did not fail to note everything.

They expected, in the natural course of events, that Lone Wolf would make all haste back to camp, and take every means of revenging himself and securing possession of the boy again. Indeed, this was all he could do. He had no rifle with which to fire a stealthy shot at them, and it was necessary that he should first return to his warriors before striking a blow. To do all this required time sufficient to permit the three to reach the gorge, mount their animals, and get fairly under way before he and his warriors could possibly put in an appearance. Tom and Dick, therefore, could not be accused of undue recklessness in taking matters in such a leisurely fashion. They assured their young friend still further that they were on the eastern margin of the prairie, and, after starting with their mustangs, had a clear, open course before them.

It was somewhat past noon when they entered the ravine, which had already been described to Ned, and, while the latter remained to talk with Morris, Tom moved on further and down in a more secluded place, in quest of their mustangs, which had been left grazing upon the rich, succulent grass, beside a running stream of mountain water. All were in high spirits, and our hero was as buoyant and cheerful as the others, when they saw their friend returning empty-handed.

"What's up?" asked Dick.

"The Injuns have stole our mustangs!"

"Sure?"

"Yes—plenty of moccasin tracks—but not cussed sign of a single hoss," was the sour reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANXIOUS WAITING.

This was astounding news, indeed, and for a few minutes the two veteran hunters were completely taken back. They had considered the place where their animals were picketed as being so secure that the contingency of losing them was not thought of until it came upon them with the suddenness mentioned.

"They didn't find them themselves," growled Tom, as if determined on finding consolation in that fact; "they've stumbled onto 'em accidental-like, and then rid off, as though they were smart enough to be reg'lar hoss-thieves."

"Have you seen the trail?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

"Whereaway does it lead?"

The hunter replied by pointing toward the northwest, among the hills and mountains in the wildest portion of the country.

A hurried consultation now took place between them, and it was resolved to recover the two mustangs. They counted it easy to secure a couple of the Indian ponies; but among them all were none which, in their own estimation, could compare with their own, and they were determined not to leave the country until they were regained. The most skillful Apache may succeed in hiding his own trail at times, but he cannot cover that of his horse so that the trained scout will fail to find it.

It was found that the mustangs had been ridden away without being accompanied by other animals. The number of moccasin tracks at a certain point showed that a party of warriors had accidentally detected the animals, each of which was mounted by a single Indian and ridden away, the warriors taking altogether a different direction. This simplified matters, and was not displeasing to Dick and Tom, for two of these active redskins could, as a matter of course, be circumvented with much more ease than could ten times that number.

Accompanied by Ned, the hunters led the way up out of the hollow, crossed as it was by the stream of icy cold and clear water and covered with the richest grass, and entered a more rocky section, where the horses must have experienced considerable difficulty in traveling, as numerous places showed where their hoofs had slipped upon the stones.

"We can beat them on that," said Dick, when they had trailed them for a short distance. "They can't be many hours ahead of us, and when we do catch up with 'em, Tom, we'll warm 'em; what do you say?"

Tom nodded his head to signify that he agreed with these sentiments exactly, and the trio pressed forward harder than ever.

There were many places in which the thieves had progressed with no little trouble, and their pursuers, unimpeded by the mustangs, were gaining rapidly upon them; but this by no means insured success. A hundred difficulties remained in the way, and the most that the two hunters could hope was that the two Apaches had no suspicion of being followed. If they believed themselves secure, it followed as a matter of course that they would take no precautions against any surprise from the rear. The hunters went forward at a rate which was exceedingly trying to Ned, but he bravely held up until something like a mile was passed, when Tom, who acted as a leader, suddenly paused.

"We must wait here till we make an observation," said he, in a low tone. "I take it that we aren't very far from the scamps, and we must look out and not spile the whole thing when we've got it all in shape."

For the entire distance they had been steadily advancing upon higher ground, and having now reached the culminating point, it was necessary to look ahead and learn whither they were going

before making any rash venture into an entirely different section. While Dick and Ned, therefore, remained where they were, Tom stole cautiously forward for some distance further, until he reached a high, flat rock, the edge of which he approached on his hands and knees, and stealthily peered over.

Only a few seconds did he spend thus when he began retrograding, like a crab.

"I think I've hit the spot," he said in an undertone, as he rejoined his friends. "There's a sort of path which leads down into the lower country, and as that's the only way the hosses can travel, it follers that they must have gone that way. That 'ere place that I was speakin' of goes down into a spot a good deal like the one where we expected to find the animiles and didn't, and there's where I think we'll find 'em awaitin' for us."

"Do you see any sign?" inquired Dick.

"Not yet; they wouldn't be likely to kindle a camp fire at this time of day, and afore they jined the others. Come ahead, we must be mighty keerful now, when we're gettin' so close."

As before, Tom took the lead, and they advanced with the greatest caution. If the Apaches had any fear of being followed, they were very likely to detect the men stealing down upon them; but much reliance was placed upon the likelihood of their holding no such suspicion.

The afternoon was half gone when the locality pointed out by Hardyngge was reached, and the three halted again. As soon as they had concealed themselves Tom continued his reconnaissance, making it with such care that he consumed fully a half hour before concluding it. When he reappeared, with the silence of a shadow, he whispered:

"They're there—both of 'em."

He explained that he had approached close enough to recognize his own animal as well as Dick's. He saw nothing more, not even an Indian, but it followed, of course, that they were near at hand. From this point forward, therefore, the presence of the lad could be nothing but an incumbrance, and it was agreed that he should stay where he was until the animals were recaptured, when he could ride away with one of them.

"Remember, the varmints are close onto you," said Tom, by way of caution; "and you must keep mighty shady. Don't go to crawling about, and trying to peep into what's none of your business."

The boy promised obedience, and the two left him. As near as he could judge he was within a hundred yards of the camp of the horse thieves, and there was no certainty that, if they discovered the approach of the hunters, they might take a course which would bring them back over the same path. So, to avoid any unpleasant discovery, he crept in beneath some dense shrubbery, where he felt secure against observation, and anxiously awaited the result.

Ned had not been in this place of concealment five minutes, when he was startled by a slight noise behind him, such as would be made by the cautious approach of some person or creature. He turned his head, but his view was too much obstructed by the vegetation around him. The slight disturbance continued until Ned's curiosity got the better of his judgment, and he stealthily parted the leaves with one hand sufficiently to permit him to see out.

As he dreaded, he detected an Indian warrior, whose actions indicated that he knew what was going on. He was stepping along as if fearful that the slight rustling would catch the ears of parties who were far beyond the range of hearing. Fortunately for Ned, at the moment he looked forth in this stealthy manner the Apache afforded only what may be termed a three-quarter view, having passed slightly beyond where he was hidden; and, as he continued to move in the same direction, nothing but his back was visible a few minutes afterward. But the lad saw enough to render him uneasy. At first glimpse he took the Indian to be Lone Wolf, but he caught sight of enough of his visage to make certain that it was another warrior altogether; but he was large, powerful, and very formidable looking, and Ned dreaded an encounter between him and one of the hunters.

Curiously enough, he carried no gun with him, and, as the boy still retained possession of Lone Wolf's, it seemed to young Chadmund that he could want no better opportunity of wiping out one of those pestilent redskins. With this purpose in view he cautiously shoved the end of the weapon through the bushes and aimed at the back of the warrior, who, at that moment, could not have been more than a dozen yards from him. There could be no mistaking a target so conspicuous and so close at hand; but when the aim was sure and Ned's finger was pressing the trigger, he restrained himself by the self-imposed question whether it was right to pick off a foe, savage though he was, in that fashion. He was well aware that no mercy would have been shown him had the position been reversed; still, he could not justify in his own mind an act that looked so much like murder.

"No," said he, when this inward conflict had continued a minute or so. "I s'pose Tom and Dick would laugh at me if they knew how I acted: but I don't believe father would like to have me fight that way. Anyhow, my conscience don't, so I won't."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH SHOT.

It took Ned about a minute to reach his merciful conclusion and to lower the hammer of his gun. This done, he looked out to see how the Indian was getting along. To his amazement nothing was seen of him. He had vanished as suddenly as if the ground had opened and swallowed him up. Wondering what it all could mean, the boy rose to his feet, and peered out, parting the bushes still more and advancing a little from his concealment. The ground was quite level, covered here and there with boulders and a scrubby undergrowth, but there was nothing to be seen of the warrior. During the second or two occupied in lowering the hammer of his rifle, the Apache had disappeared, flashing out, so to speak, into nothingness.

"That's mighty queer," reflected Ned, as he resumed his seat under the bushes. "I know those redskins are pretty lively, but I didn't think they could get up and leave as fast as that."

There was something in the manner of this thing which alarmed him. The Apache, when last seen, was advancing carefully in the direction taken by the scouts. Why this sudden diversion? What did it mean but that the redskin had made an important discovery, and what could that discovery be but that he was threatened by danger from the rear? Such being the case, it followed that the peril had been transferred from one to the other. Instead of the lad threatening the Indian it was *vice versa*.

"I bet he'll be back here," was the conclusion of our hero, as he once more raised the hammer of his gun. "He must have heard me when I moved the bushes, and he'll be trying some of his tricks upon me."

He concluded that if the Indian made him a visit it would be from another direction, and so he shifted his position somewhat, managing to face the other way, while he kept all his senses on the *qui vive* for the hostile visit which he was confident would not be long delayed. At the same time he had a strong hope that the scouts would return in time to prevent any such encounter as he pictured in his own mind, and which he thoroughly dreaded.

In his excited mental condition it was impossible to judge accurately of the passage of time, but it seemed to him that he had been in waiting fully fifteen minutes, yet not the slightest sound reached him from that direction. The lad remained in a state of suspense which was intensified by his fears of a flank movement upon the part of the Apache whom he had seen but a short time before.

"It must take them a long time to make a reconnaissance—"

He suddenly ceased, for his ear, more than usually alert, caught a slight but suspicious sound, and quick as a flash he turned his head. He was not an instant too soon, for there was the crouching figure of the Apache warrior, no more than a dozen feet distant, his gleaming knife clutched in his right hand, and his eyes fairly aflame with passion. He was not moving along inch by inch, but with that soft gliding motion, which was more like the approach of a serpent than of a person.

Ned still held his rifle with the hammer raised, and ready for just such an emergency. Partly expecting the visit, he was fully prepared. When he turned his head and encountered the gaze of the Indian, the latter gave utterance to a low guttural exclamation, and started more rapidly toward him.

"If you must have it, there it is."

The flash from the muzzle of the rifle was almost in the face of the Apache, who, with a death-shriek horrible to hear, threw both arms above his head, and, with a spasmodic twitching of the limbs, breathed his last in a single breath.

Ned was scarcely less terrified than the redskin must have been at the first flash of the gun; and, forgetful of the warning of the scouts, he leaped out from beneath the bushes, and dashed away in the direction taken by his friends.

He had run but a rod or two when he suddenly found himself face to face with Tom Hardyng, who demanded, in a hurried undertone:

"What's up, now?"

"I've just shot an Indian."

"Did you wipe him out?"

"Oh, yes; oh, yes."

"Then what are you running away from him for? If you've wiped him out, he can't hurt you."

"But I don't want to stay near him," added the lad, who was in a distressing state of anxiety; "take me away."

"That's just what I'm going to do," replied the hunter, turning about and hurrying off. "Keep close to me and I will take care of you."

Instead of retracing their steps, they kept ahead, and a short distance further on made an abrupt turn and suddenly came upon Dick Morris, seated upon the back of his mustang, with

Thundergust, as Tom called him, standing near, and a third one visible in the background.

"Whose is that?" asked the astonished boy.

"We fetched him for you. Come, bounce upon his back and let's be off."

The animal alluded to was a handsome black pony, spirited and fleet, with a valuable blanket strapped to its back, and a leathern bridle-rein. He showed some opposition to Ned's mounting him, but with the assistance of Tom he quieted down and showed as much docility as the others.

The hunters, in approaching the camp, used as much care and deliberation as if they were certain that there were a hundred of the fiercest warriors there. They speedily learned, however, that there were but the two Indian horse thieves, who, in bringing the plunder to that place, had returned to the spot where their own animals had been left previous to their starting out upon the raid.

The Apaches were entirely unsuspecting of any pursuit, and they were lolling upon the ground at such a distance from the mustangs, that the three were secured without much trouble. Dick Morris insisted upon sailing in and clearing out the two marauders; but Tom was equally strenuous in demanding that they should not be disturbed. He was certain there were other warriors near by, and any such attempt would complicate matters. Accordingly they stole away with their recaptured animals and the one which was not exactly recaptured, and as soon as a convenient spot was selected Hardyng turned back for the boy, encountering him on the way.

Since all three were mounted upon good beasts they made all haste possible to leave the section, which beyond all question was a most dangerous one in every sense.

The trio had several important advantages on their side. Although the Apaches were on every hand, and doubtless would make an attempt to revenge themselves upon the hunters, yet it was already growing dark, and between now and morning the Caucasians could accomplish a great deal. Furthermore, they were close to the prairie, reaching which, they had all the opportunity they could desire to leave their enemies behind. In a fair trial of speed, neither of the hunters had any misgivings as to the fleetness of their animals, even if it should become necessary to place the additional weight of the lad upon one. Still, the route was difficult, and in many places it seemed almost impossible to make their way along, the horses stumbling, and on one or two occasions the party came to a dead halt.

But Tom Hardyng had been there before, and insisted each time there was some way out of the difficulty without turning back. Dismounting from his animal he groped around for a few minutes in the dark, and on every occasion called out in an undertone that he had found the path. In this manner they kept it up for a couple of hours, when the route became much more easy to travel. Occasionally they paused and listened and looked, but nothing threatening was discovered. Quite a distance on the left, the twinkle of a camp fire was discerned, but it was so distant that it gave no concern. All remained quiet in the rear, though pursuit from that quarter was to be expected.

The three rode along in silence for something like half an hour longer, when Hardyng, who was slightly in advance, abruptly reined up his steed and said:

"We're through the mountains. There's the prairie afore us."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BUFFALOES.

The moon was now well up in the sky, and the members of the party were enabled to discern objects at a greater distance than at any time since starting. When Tom Hardyng announced that they had passed through this spur of mountains, the three instinctively turned their eyes to the westward, where the prairie stretched away until it vanished in the gloom.

"There's a clean hundred miles or more of level plain," added the hunter. "I've traveled it many a time and I ought to know."

"You're right," said Dick. "That's a good sweep of prairie, and we ought to make good time over it, for our horses have had a long rest."

"There's only one thing that troubles me," ventured Ned Chadmund, when the heads of all their animals were turned westward; "I'm so hungry and faint that I can hardly sit on my horse."

"That's bad," said Tom, feelingly. "I never thought of that when we had a good chance among the mountains to fetch down some game. We ain't apt to run agin anythin' in the hash line while riding along on the prairie; but we'll try it, and if we don't we'll turn off to a little spot where I know we shall hit it."

Ned expressed his willingness to do this, and the company started. Instead of going in Indian file, as they had done while among the mountains, they rode side by side at an easy swinging gallop, the prairie lightening up as they advanced, and the surface continuing of the same impact character, which rendered it the most favorable possible for horseback riding. To one who, like

the boy, had tramped and trudged along until scarcely able to stand, this change was of the most pleasing character. He felt comfortable and anxious to ride ahead for hours, the only drawback being that gnawing hunger, that weary faintness, which could only be dissipated by food.

Occasionally, while riding along in this manner, the three would halt and listen, and then, when certain that they heard nothing, move on again. This was repeated several times, until the two hunters remained motionless longer than usual. When Ned asked the cause of this, Tom replied by asking him whether he heard anything. He answered that he did not.

"I hear it," added the scout, as he dismounted and applied his ear to the ground.

"What do you make it?" inquired Dick.

"Can't tell."

Hardyngge remained standing beside his steed for several minutes, looking off to the southward, and then he knelt down and bent his ear to the ground again.

"It is off yonder," he added, pointing to the southward, and leaping at the same time upon the back of his mustang.

Ned listened to catch some explanation; but at this interesting juncture, for some reason only known to themselves, the two men began talking in the Indian tongue. It was interesting to hear their guttural exclamations, but it would have been much more interesting could he have understood what they were saying, and to know why it was, when talking, that they laughed and looked meaningly toward him. The lad affected not to notice all this, although it piqued his curiosity not a little.

A half mile more was ridden at a leisurely gait, when all three drew up their mustangs, and Dick Morris looked meaningly at their young comrade.

"Do you hear anything *now*?"

Yes, there could be no mistaking it, faint though it was. All three sat motionless and listened. At first, it might have been taken for the far-off rumble of thunder—a fluttering, distant rattle, such as is occasionally heard during the hot summer months. It was not exactly of that character, either, being more like a continuous rattle, coming from some point many miles away.

"What do you suppose it is?" asked Tom, of the lad.

"I never heard anything like it before. What is it?"

"Does it sound like the tramp of animals?"

"Not much, it seems to me. It can't be that."

"That's just what it is."

Ned started.

"So it is—so it is. I can notice it now. I hear the sound of horses hoofs on the prairie. The sound is growing more distinct, too, and they must be coming this way, Tom. Is that so?"

"That's just what's the matter. We'll see 'em all inside of half an hour, unless we turn tail and run."

"Let's do it, then, for there can't be much time to spare."

The hunters showed no disposition to flee from the danger approaching, and Ned began to grow alarmed.

"Why do you stay here?" he asked. "If your horses are so fleet that no one can catch them, what is the use of letting them do it?"

"Don't get scart, my boy," returned Tom Hardyngge. "We'll take care of you."

He much preferred that they should all take care of themselves by giving their animals the rein and permitting the Apaches to make no nearer approach. But the scouts were obstinate and remained as motionless as statues. The tramping of myriad feet came nearer and nearer, until the sound partook of one general, thunderous undertone of the most trying character to the lad. It seemed to him so much like suicide—this waiting for a terrible danger as it steadily approached—that he was strongly tempted to start his horse away on his own account.

"Look!" called out Morris, pointing toward the southwest.

Following the direction indicated, the lad saw what appeared to be a heavy cloud lying low down in the horizon, but creeping slowly upward, like the sulphurous vapor that sometimes hovers over a battle field.

"What is it?" he asked, terrified, knowing that it was not the presage of a storm such as sometimes sweeps over the prairies.

There was something strange and unnatural in its appearance, accompanied, as it was, by the tremulous, thunderous rumbling. By and by, as this uproar came nearer and nearer, a still more curious sight presented itself. The prairie seemed agitated, trembling and quivering with a

peculiar, wave-like motion, such as the ocean shows when it is subsiding after a severe storm. There was a sea, a living sea, spreading tumultuously over the plain. Dark, heaving masses were constantly verging nearer, as they moved rapidly toward the northeast. Suddenly light broke in upon the mind of Ned Chadmund.

"I know what it is!" he exclaimed. "They are buffaloes."

"Correct," assented Tom, with a laugh. "They are passing pretty close, but we're out of their way."

The buffaloes surged so near to where the three horsemen stood that more than once Ned started with a fear that they would be overwhelmed; but the hunters showed such calmness and self-possession that he was reassured. All at once a furious trampling was heard, and two of the animals that had become separated from the others in some way, dashed directly by the horsemen and out upon the prairie.

"Now, Ned," called out Tom; "there's your chance! Take that head one! He will make you a good supper if you can fetch him down!"

The lad and his animal were seized with a sudden inspiration seemingly at the same time. Just as the heart of the young hunter swelled with a wild desire to bring down the noble game, the mustang bounded away in pursuit of the very buffalo which had been indicated by the trapper. As the rider saw himself drawing rapidly near the huge body, lumbering awkwardly but rapidly along, he was seized with a fluttering which, perhaps was natural, but which, unless overcome, was fatal to any hopes of procuring any supper. The mustang drew steadily nearer, Ned's agitation increasing every minute, until pursuer and pursued were running side by side.

This was the critical moment when the rider should have fired, and when the horse had been taught to expect him to do so; but when our hero raised the heavy Indian gun to his shoulder, his trembling, together with the jolting of his mustang, now upon a dead run, told him that it would be useless to fire, when the only chance of hitting his prey was by the merest accident. Accordingly, he lowered his gun, in the hopes of quieting his nerves, so as to bring himself up to the self-appointed task. As he did so, his horse began shying off from the buffalo. He was afraid of the horns of the enraged creature, and having given him all the opportunity he could expect, he was not willing to keep him company any longer. The paths continued to diverge until they were twenty yards apart, when the mustang appeared to think all danger was passed. By this time Ned Chadmund felt that he was master of himself, and he turned the head of his horse toward the immense fugitive, still gliding forward at the same terrific rate.

"I'll fetch him this time," he muttered, with a determined air.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALONE AGAIN.

The mustang, trained as he was to this sort of hunting, steadily drew up again to the buffalo, which was plunging forward with unabated speed, while Ned held his rifle ready to fire whenever the critical moment should come. He concluded that the proper place at which to aim was the head, and, drawing his gun to his shoulder, he did not hesitate, although he knew the aim was anything but a good one. It struck the bison beyond all question, but did no more than irritate him; for, without any other warning than a sudden lowering of the head, he wheeled, and turned directly upon the horse, with the evident purpose of disemboweling him.

But the latter had seen this sort of business before, and was prepared for it.

Without attempting to turn to the one side or the other, or to check his speed in the least, he made a terrific flying leap upward, going clear over the head of the buffalo, landing upon the other side, and continuing his flight at his leisure, as it may be said.

This was a clever trick of the mustang, but it proved the undoing of his rider, who had no other saddle than the Indian blanket strapped to the horse's back. This was good enough, except in such a sudden emergency as the present, when Ned was entirely unprepared for it. It was done in a twinkling, the end of it being that he found himself lying upon the green sward of the prairie, considerably bruised, and with horse and buffalo rapidly speeding from view.

"This is a go," said the lad, rising to his feet and looking about him. "I don't see where the fun of buffalo hunting comes in."

During the minutes of excitement when the mustang was coursing with such speed over the prairie, the rider had no idea of the direction taken, nor could he conjecture how far he had gone; but the result was that he was separated by a much greater distance than he supposed from his friends. Ned stood and gazed carefully about him. Off to the west were the dust, and thousands upon thousands of buffaloes. The latter were too far removed to be distinguished, but that tramping and the heavy cloud indicated where the mass of life was plunging tumultuously forward toward some destination unknown even to themselves. Nothing was to be seen of the hunters. They had sent the lad off on this hunt on purpose to give him a taste of buffalo hunting,

not supposing, of course, that any accident would result.

"What shall I do?" was the question the boy asked himself, as he stood, rifle in hand, and looked around him. "If there was some way in which I could get a good supper, I wouldn't mind this camping out, for Tom and Dick will be sure to find me in the morning."

Looking toward the north, he fancied that he dimly discerned the dark outline of something which resembled a grove of trees, and he turned his footsteps in that direction.

"If they are trees," he reflected, as he trudged along, "it's more than likely there's water there, and now that I've got a gun, I've some chance of shooting something; and that reminds me of poor Corporal Hugg's warning, always to reload my gun the first thing after firing it."

He had enough sense to carry out this resolution on the spot, and then he resumed his journey in the direction of the object that had attracted his attention. A short distance further he was pleased to find his first impression correct. He was approaching a clump of trees where he could rest with a much greater sense of security than upon the open prairie. Thoroughly weary and worn out, faint with hunger, he felt like throwing himself upon the ground and sleeping for a week. But, continuing, he entered a grove of trees something like a hundred yards in extent, through which, in the stillness of the night, he caught distinctly the ripple of flowing water. It required but a moment to discover this and he lay down upon the margin, quaffed his full and flung himself upon the grass to sleep until morning. Five minutes after his eyes were shut he was wrapped in a sound slumber which remained undisturbed until morning when, as he opened his eyes, he found the sun shining through the branches upon him.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed, starting up. "Where am I?"

It took several minutes before he could collect his senses and tell where he was; and then as he recalled the separation from his friends, he hurried out to the edge of the wood in the hope of discovering them somewhere near at hand; but, look in whatsoever direction he chose, nothing was to be seen but the broad sweeping prairie, stretching away until sky and earth joined in the distance. Far off, low down in the horizon, the blue wavy outline of a mountain spur was to be seen. Miles and miles away, it would probably require days of traveling before it could be reached.

"That's strange!" murmured Ned, as a feeling of alarm began stealing over him. "Where can Tom and Dick be? They must be somewhere in this neighborhood, and yet I cannot see any signs of them."

He moved around the grove, carefully gazing in every direction; but after making the complete circuit he came back without having detected anything that told him what had become of his friends.

The grove in which he had taken shelter abounded with undergrowth, so dense in many places, that he made his way with considerable difficulty. He had no thought of any one else being in the same place, but, while moving along in his careless manner, he was aroused to a sense of imprudence by the sound of something on his right. Turning his head, his surprise may be imagined when he saw a solitary buffalo standing scarcely a dozen feet distant, and staring straight at him. Ned was so astonished that for the moment he forgot that he carried a loaded gun, and stared at the creature in turn, the two forming as striking a tableau as it is possible to imagine.

The buffalo may have known the capacity of the weapon which the boy carried in his hand, for, with a sniff of alarm, he wheeled and started away on a run. As quick as thought the lad seemed to awake to a sense of his situation, and, raising his gun, he blazed away.

The shot, fired at random, could not have been better aimed by the most veteran of hunters. The ball entered directly behind the fore-leg just as it was thrown forward in the act of running, and, penetrating to the heart, the result was that the animal never made another bound. His own momentum carried him a few feet forward, when he tumbled and rolled over in a heap.

"Now I'll have a meal!" exclaimed the delighted lad, as he ran forward to claim his prize. "I feel as if I could eat the whole buffalo."

There seemed to be no reason why he should not provide himself with the most substantial kind of dinner. He knew very little about a buffalo, but it was no difficult task to cut off a good sized piece, which he placed upon some green leaves, while he looked about for some means of starting a fire.

"Well, there!" he exclaimed in delighted amazement, "if that isn't the most wonderful thing yet!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of a smoking wad lying at his very feet, just as if Providence had sent it that he might be provided with the indispensable fire. Picking it up and blowing it, he saw that it was in a vigorous state, and could be utilized without trouble. A few leaves were hurriedly gathered together, dried twigs placed upon these, and then the tiny blaze that required considerable blowing to produce, was carefully nursed into a larger one until a good roaring, crackling fire was the result.

Leaving this to burn by itself, Ned took the meat to the side of the stream, where he carefully washed and dressed it, ready for cooking. When this was completed, he skewered it upon some

green twigs, and began toasting it. The process was rather tardy, but as soon as a bite of the meat had spluttered and crisped for a moment, Ned bit it off, and went to masticating it. The cooking continued rapidly enough to keep his jaws going, and was a good arrangement, for it prevented his eating too fast, and gave him the fullest enjoyment imaginable of the meal. All of an hour was occupied in this way, during which Ned was in as happy a frame of mind as can be conceived. For the first half of the time he seemed to be growing more hungry with each mouthful he swallowed. Then came a standstill, and soon he began to gain upon it, the end being that he thoroughly satisfied that appetite which at one time had seemed unappeasable. With no further necessity of thinking of the wants of the inner man, the lad began to debate as to what he should do to get out of the rather unpleasant position in which he was placed. There he was, his horse gone, his two friends missing, and himself still a long distance from home. He knew not in what direction to turn to reach Fort Havens, and, even if he did, he had little assurance of ever reaching it. Indeed, with the exception of the rather important fact that he had secured possession of a rifle and some ammunition, it may be said that his position was very similar to what it was before he came across Dick Morris and Tom Hardyng.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTURING A MUSTANG.

It struck Ned that there was something very strange in the continued absence of the two hunters.

In thinking over the particulars of that rather curious buffalo hunt, he could not believe it possible that he was more than two miles from where he had made his start after the creature, and where he separated from them. All three were upon the easterly side of the herd, so that the trail made by his own animal could not have been obliterated by the hoofs of the buffaloes, and nothing could be easier than to follow it. Where, then, were they? What was the cause of their absence? These were questions which he asked himself again and again, and which he was unable to answer in any manner satisfactory to himself.

Suddenly it occurred to him that by climbing one of the trees near at hand, he might extend his view, and perhaps gain a portion of the knowledge he was so desirous of obtaining. He acted upon the thought at once, and, selecting the tallest, first concealed his rifle, and then climbed to the very topmost branches. There he was rewarded by a magnificent view, and one which promised him some of the results he was seeking. With this extension of his field of vision he discovered more than one evidence that he was not in a solitude. In the first place, by looking to the southward, a mass of dust and vapor was visible, indicating the presence and progress of some sort of herd, perhaps a drove of sheep from New Mexico, under the convoy of Indians who had shot the rightful owners and stampeded their property. Looking westward, another clump of trees was discerned, from the center of which came just enough smoke to show that there must be a camp fire beneath.

"I'll bet they are there!" exclaimed Ned, to himself, "and it may be they have started the fire on purpose to guide me to them."

The point to which his attention was thus directed was no more than a mile distant, and he wondered that he had not noted it before. It resembled in many respects the one in which he passed the night, and he saw from the course of the stream which ran through the latter, that it most probably watered the former where he believed the hunters were in camp.

Turning his eyes in another direction, the young wanderer was greeted by a sight which agitated him scarcely less. There, no more than a quarter of a mile distant, quietly grazing beside the winding stream which flowed at the base of the tree, was the very mustang which had been captured by the hunters and from whose back he had been thrown when in pursuit of the buffalo. He instantly lost all interest in the smoke of the camp fire in the greater interest he felt in the question of securing possession of the steed. Could he but remount him he would not care particularly whether he met the hunters or not, for, once upon the back of such a steed, he would consider himself competent to make the rest of the journey alone.

"What's to hinder?" he asked himself, as he fixed his eyes longingly upon the steed. "Dick says none of the Apaches have any animal that can overtake him, and all I have to do is to keep his head turned toward the southwest. There is a trail through the mountains yonder, and Corporal Hugg told me that there is a trail all the way. But can I catch him?"

He enjoyed in anticipation the pleasure he would feel when, possessing rifle, ammunition and horse he should resume his journey westward and the delight and joy of his father when he should clasp him in his arms again. He could have spent several hours building his air-castles in this manner, had he not checked himself and resolutely faced the difficulty before him. Looking again at the mustang, he was to be seen with his beautiful Indian blanket somewhat soiled from contact with the dirt, but cropping the grass with the air of an equine which expected to spend the day at it.

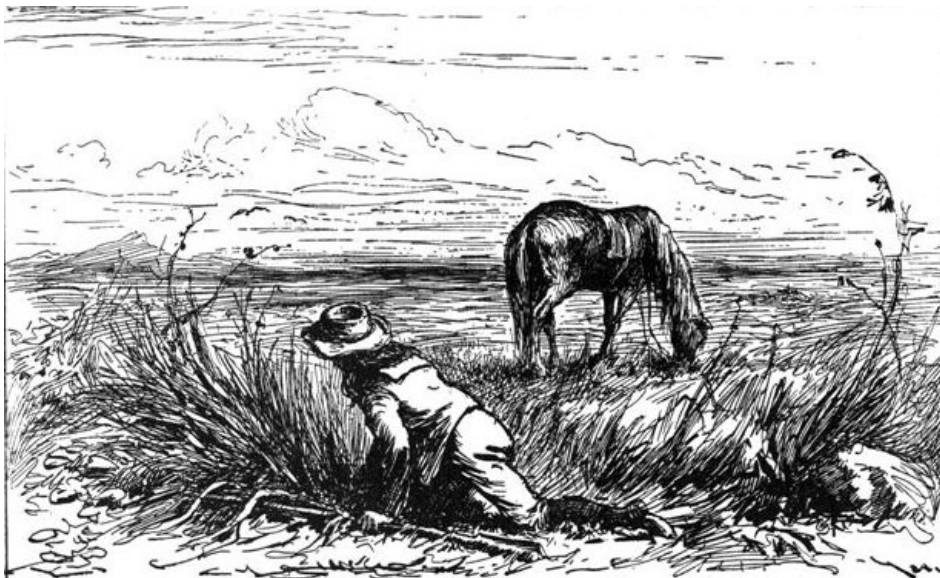
Ned decided to try and steal upon him from the rear, thinking, possibly, that he might get so close that when the frightened animal discovered him, he could step forward and grasp the bridle

before the mustang could gallop away. Accordingly, he circled out upon the prairie until he got directly behind the animal, when he began his approach. The horse continued quietly eating until he was within a hundred feet, when he shifted his position so that his side was exposed. Startled lest he should be seen, Ned dropped down upon the grass and waited for him to resume his first attitude. After crouching in this manner for something like ten minutes, without any change taking place, he decided that as "the mountain would not come to Mohammed then Mohammed should go to the mountain," and he began crawling through the grass, with his eye upon his prize. To accomplish this without attracting notice was a delicate task, but he succeeded perfectly. Getting the mustang in exact range, he resumed his advance upon him, advancing until he was within twenty feet.

This was more favorable than he dared hope, and his heart beat high with expectation. He almost felt the warm body of the noble steed beneath him. And now, inch by inch, he stole forward, like an Indian scout moving upon a sleeping enemy until he could reach a point where he could bury his tomahawk in his skull.

"I wonder whether he will use those heels upon me?" reflected the lad, when he had reduced the intervening distance to a dozen feet. "If he were only blind in one eye, and I could get upon that side; but then he isn't."

It seemed to him that the greatest danger was the mustang hearing the throbbing of his heart, which was now beating like a trip-hammer; but the horse was as unconscious as if he were made of stone. Still nearer, until it appeared as if he had to make but a single leap forward, and he could grasp the long, flowing tail, and he felt that the moment had come when he must make the attempt. Crouching with one hand thrust out, he lifted one foot and advanced a few inches. Another step, and he could lay his hand upon him. At this exciting juncture, the horse abruptly ceased eating and raised his head. Ned saw it, and paused in an agony of suspense.



STILL NEARER, UNTIL IT APPEARED AS IF HE HAD TO MAKE BUT A SINGLE LEAP FORWARD.

Looking straight off upon the prairie, the mustang gave a faint whinney, as if he scented danger from a point directly opposite to where the figure of the boy was stealing upon him. For a minute the two held these stationary positions; and then, as the lad moved a few inches again, the keen ears of the mustang told him the truth.

Pricking his ears forward, he turned his head half way round, so that he saw the crouching figure directly at his heels. Then he turned his head still further, and gathered himself for a leap. But Ned was expecting this; and, as quick as a flash, he leaped forward and caught the tuft of hair hanging over his forehead, dropping his gun and seizing at the same moment, with the other hand, the bridle-rein. The mustang made his leap, but the lad held on, and, by a quick, powerful effort threw one leg over his shoulders and slid upon his back in a twinkling. The horse was outwitted, defeated, and the boy was his conqueror.

"Hurrah!" shouted the latter, overflowing with exultation. "Thank the Lord! I've had better fortune than I expected."

The mustang was not an ugly-tempered creature, but would have given the lad the slip, could he have done so. It may have been that because he was nothing but a boy, he underestimated his capacity too much; but he had been fairly outgeneraled, and he submitted with a grace which cannot be too highly commended. He instantly became docile, and turned in ready obedience to

the rein, and trotted back to where the gun lay upon the ground. Here Ned was obliged to descend again, but he kept a tight grasp upon the strap, and scrambled back again as soon as he had recovered it. It seemed to him, as he did so, that there was something like a mischievous twinkle in the eye of the pony. He appeared to say:

"It don't do to trust my species too far, my lad; for we prefer to be free rather than slave. However, you are a brave little fellow, and have done so well that I think I must stand by you hereafter."

Now that Ned was himself again, he turned the head of his animal toward the grove, where the thin smoke could still be seen creeping up through the tree tops.

"I will have quite a story to tell Dick and Tom," he reflected, as he rode along at an easy gallop. "I killed my buffalo, lost my horse, and caught him again. I don't believe that they themselves could have done much better."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A RUN FOR LIFE.

A few minutes' ride at a swinging, easy, gallop brought Ned to the edge of the grove where the camp fire had first arrested his attention. As he reached the margin he threw himself from the back of the mustang, fastened the bridle-rein securely to a limb, and, with his rifle slung over his shoulder, strode forward toward the center. He was not yet in sight of the fire when it suddenly occurred to him that possibly he was mistaken. He checked himself and began moving very much as he did when approaching his mustang, and it was fortunate that he did so, for the next moment he discovered that he had committed a most serious mistake indeed. Instead of seeing the well-known figures of the hunters sitting by the camp fire and quietly smoking their pipes, he caught a glimpse of half a dozen warriors very similarly engaged.

Ned shuddered as he reflected how narrowly he escaped running into destruction, and then he crept forward until he could get a little better view. There they were, six Apache Indians lolling and lounging upon the grass. They had evidently returned from a long and wearisome ride, and were devoting the early portion of the day to rest, both for themselves and animals, which were picketed near at hand. The lad naturally wondered whether any of them belonged to Lone Wolf's band, and he crept nearer than was prudent in order to make certain.

"It may be that Lone Wolf himself is there," he reflected, drawn on by that strange fascination which often seizes a person at the proximity of some dreaded danger. "It would be queer if the chief had crossed my path again."

By and by, after moving along for some distance upon his hands and knees, he secured a favorable point, where, by waiting a few minutes, he was able to gain a view of all the faces. They were all strangers. He had never seen any of them before.

"That's good," he said to himself, as he began retrograding, "they won't be expecting me—"

At this juncture, one of the Indian horses, a short distance away, raised his head and whinnied. It was instantly responded to by the mustang which Ned had ridden to the place. The Apaches very naturally noticed this significant fact, and started to their feet to learn what it meant. Terribly alarmed at the unexpected mishap, Ned sprang up, not daring to trust the tardy, crab-like gait he was following, and, regardless of discovery, dashed away as hard as he could run in the direction of his steed. He could not mistake the true course, for the animal seemingly aware that something was wrong, kept up a continual whinnying, that guided him as unerringly as it did the Apaches who were hurrying after him. A few seconds and the boy stood beside the creature, which showed, by its excited manner, that he was as desirous as his master to leave the spot. He was tugging at the rein so lustily that it threatened to break every instant, and Ned trembled at the fear that he would be left alone.

The impatient, eager haste with which the rein was unfastened, the seemingly impossibility of getting the loosely fastened knot untied, the little obstructions that constantly obtruded themselves—these cannot be described nor imagined. It would have been unnatural in the highest degree had Ned not found himself "nervous." He was ready to yield to despair more than once, and what were really seconds were as many minutes to him. The Indians could be heard moving through the undergrowth, their progress cautious as it always is when they have reason to fear that enemies are close at hand.

It was this deliberation which gave Ned his only chance. The rein was unfastened at last, and, with a desperate effort he mounted the mustang, which came very near bounding from beneath him while in the act of springing upward, and, turning his head toward the southwest, the very direction he wished to follow, Chadmund struck his sides with his heels, gave a regular Indian shout and was off. The steed scarcely needed all this to incite him to his highest efforts. Stretching out his neck, he sped away like an arrow, while the young rider constantly urged him to still greater effort. But no urging was required. The fleet-footed courser was already going with the speed of the wind.

Scarcely had he gotten under way, however, when the crack! crack! of rifles was heard, and the singing of bullets around his ears told the fugitive at whom they were aimed. He instantly threw himself forward upon the neck of the mustang, and shouted again, in a voice that must have been heard by the redskins themselves:

"Go it, my horse! Don't let them catch us! We mustn't lose now!"

One or two more shots were heard, and then all was quiet again.

"We've got beyond their range," concluded the boy, "and there's no need of wasting their powder on us."

Still he remained with his head bent on the neck of his animal, the latter upon a dead run, until they had gone a considerable distance further. Then believing all peril past, he drew him down somewhat, for the gait was more trying to him than to the steed himself, and it was simply prudent to husband his strength, when there was no necessity of putting it forth.

For the first time since starting, Ned turned and surveyed the ground over which he had passed. The view was not a reassuring one by any means. Instead of seeing the Apaches standing in mute despair upon the margin of the grove, and staring in wonder at his flight, he saw instead the whole party mounted and in full pursuit. They were adopting what seemed to him a strange course. Instead of charging along in a body, they were separating and spreading out like a fan.

"I wonder what it is for," said the fugitive to himself, as he urged his horse to a renewal of the arrowy speed he had shown at the beginning.

When he came to reflect upon it more fully, he divined the cause. The Apaches had recognized in him a prize worth striving for, and had set about it in their usual cunning fashion. By separating in this manner, they could close in again whenever they chose, and at a time, too, when it might be out of the power of the fugitive to escape by means of the superior speed of his horse. If he should turn to the right or left, or to the rear, he would come in collision with some of them, whereas, if they remained in a compact body, and he should find his way shut in front, he might elude them by turning to either side.

Such was young Chadmund's solution of their actions, and such, undoubtedly, was the true one. He looked ahead; but all remained open and clear. Only far away in the very horizon could be seen that blue, misty outline of some mountain chain, seemingly hundreds of miles in advance.

"It can't be that *that* is the place," he mused, as he looked ahead; "that is too far to be reached before to-morrow, and between now and then I shall have plenty of chances to give them the slip."

But the mountains were to be crossed at some time or other, and those Apaches were likely to follow him with the persistency of bloodhounds. The mere fact that he had distanced them at the beginning, and obtained such a favorable start, was no evidence that he was to be relieved from further danger, even after the night should have come and gone. But Ned enjoyed to the full the thrilling pleasure of observing that he was steadily and rapidly drawing away from his pursuers. Every few minutes, when he looked back, he could see they were dropping further and further behind. His gain in this respect was clearly perceptible to himself, and when, at the end of an hour or more, he observed that the Apaches had ceased the effort to overhaul him, he could scarcely repress his exultation.

"They made a good selection!" he exclaimed, alluding to the steed which the hunters had taken from the Indians in the mountains. "They could not have done better."

Drawing his mustang down to a dead halt, he carefully scanned the prairie behind him. Only three of his pursuers were visible, and, if his eyes did not deceive him, they were turning back. A few minutes careful scrutiny assured him of the fact. He had outwitted the redskins again.

"Now, you may rest yourself, my pet," he said to his horse, fondly patting the neck of his steed.

"You have done nobly, and I feel like trusting you alone to graze."

As near as he could judge it was close upon noon, and his animal was in need of rest, although capable of continuing his arrowy flight until the sun should sink in the west. It was wise to indulge him all he could, and for the next two hours he was permitted to walk at a moderate gait. At the end of that time he headed toward a ravine, in which a few stunted trees were growing, and where he hoped to find grass and water. He did not forget the lesson he had learned, and before trusting himself in the inviting shade and coolness, he carefully circled about the place until assured that no peril lurked there, when he rode forward at the same leisurely pace.

He was yet a hundred yards distant, when his mustang abruptly paused of his own accord, pricking up his ears as if he scented danger.

Ned urged him, and he advanced a few steps, and then halted again, raising high his head and snuffing the air, accompanied at the same time by a peculiar stamp of the foot.

"There must be something wrong," thought the boy in alarm.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GREAT MISFORTUNE.

Ned Chadmund was too wise to go contrary to the instincts of the mustang, which, at such a time knew more than did he of the dangers of the country. The boy, however, supposed that it was some wild animal, probably a grizzly bear, which alarmed the steed. He wondered however, that if such were the fact, why the brute did not give some more tangible evidence of his presence. He sat for a moment debating whether he should make an attempt to enter the wooded ravine from another direction. He had fixed upon this place as the one in which to spend a couple of hours or more, and as no similar resting-place was in sight, he was reluctant to start ahead again. But something whispered to him that the best thing he could do would be to leave without an instant's delay. That strange stillness resting upon those stunted trees and undergrowth had a meaning more significant than anything in the shape of a grizzly bear.

"Come, Pet, we're off again."

The mustang wheeled to one side, and bounded away with the old speed, which was more enjoyable to him than a moderate pace. At the very instant of doing so, a mounted Apache shot out from the far end of the ravine, and his horse bounded directly across the path of the young fugitive. The steed of the latter saw the game so well that he needed no direction, and he turned with such suddenness that Ned narrowly escaped being thrown off his back. Quick as he was he had scarcely time to change the direction he was pursuing, when the rider, to his dismay, observed a second Apache issue from the other end of the ravine, and thus, in a twinkling, as it may be said, he was placed between two fires.

It all took place with such marvelous suddenness that the lad was completely baffled and bewildered, and, not knowing what to do, wisely left the course of action to the mustang. At the same moment, he comprehended how it was that, while he assured himself that he had outwitted the Apaches, they had completely checkmated him. Their falling back and giving up the chase was simply a ruse to throw him off his guard. It had succeeded to perfection. While he was plodding along over the prairie, the Apaches had circled around, gone ahead of him, and, ensconcing themselves in the woods, had patiently waited for him to ride into their arms.

The sagacious mustang made another quick whirl, and shot to the right, aiming to pass directly between the two horsemen. Seeing this, they both did their best to head him off. At the best it was to be a narrow chance, and Ned again threw himself forward and clasped his arms about the neck of the faithful pony. He could not shut out the sight of his ferocious pursuers, and as the three neared each other with the speed of the whirlwind, he observed that each was loosely swinging several coils of rope about his head. He knew what that meant. Determined upon capturing him, they were about to call the lasso into requisition.

But they could not "noose" him when his head was thrown forward in this fashion, and resting closely against the soft mane of the mustang. He was certain of that, for there was nothing for the spinning coil to seize. And yet he saw distinctly the warrior who was nearest him whirling the thong in swifter and swifter circles above his head in a way that showed that he meant to fling it at something.

What could the target be?

Whiz—whiz! Out shot the loop like the dart of a rattlesnake, not at the head of the frightened lad, but at that of the mustang!

Ah! but the animal was intelligent and equal to the occasion. That round, clear eye saw what was coming, and he was ready.

The loop, guided with unerring precision, and thrown with great power, was scarcely over the ears of the creature, when he dropped his head like a flash. The coil, instead of passing over his nose, dropped like a tossed wreath upon the top of his head, slid along his neck, and over the crown and back of Ned Chadmund, who shivered as if he felt the squirming of a cobra along his spine. The mustang burst into a tremendous gait at this moment, and was drawing away from his pursuers so rapidly that the lasso dropped off his haunches and the flying pony was almost instantly beyond its reach.

But the second Apache was near at hand and threw his thong from a closer point, and with a venomous spitefulness that would not be evaded. He evidently knew the horse, and was determined upon securing him. The wonderful mustang, however, was equal to the occasion, and, with the same flash-like motion, his beautiful head dropped still lower than before, and the same useless sliding along his back was repeated.

His speed was now tremendous, and he drew away so rapidly from both horsemen that neither of them gained a second opportunity to try the lasso upon him. Ned did not seek to control the motions or direction of the noble steed. It knew better than did he what to do, and the boy only clung to him the tighter, and prayed to Heaven to guard them both from harm.

It was not to be expected that the Apaches would submit quietly to be baffled in this manner. Unable to capture either horse or rider, they still had their rifles, and did not hesitate to call them into requisition the moment it became apparent that no other recourse was at their

command.

At the moment of firing perhaps fifty yards separated pursuer and pursued. The two guns were discharged so nearly simultaneously, that they might have well been mistaken for one. The escape of Ned was a narrow one. He felt one of the bullets pierce his clothing, and a sting in the hand told him that he had been slightly wounded. At the same moment he felt a peculiar twitch or quiver of the steed, which indicated that he also had been hit. It was like the jar of the smoothly-moving machinery when some slight obstruction gets into the works. Still there was no abatement of the tremendous speed of the magnificent little animal, and Ned concluded that the hurt was not a serious one. A minute later two more reports were heard, but they were faint and far away, and the bullets sped wide of the mark.

All danger was passed from that quarter, and once more Ned straightened up, and, looking about him, felt that the Indian mustang he bestrode had been the means of saving his life. But for him he would have been in the hands of the Apaches long since.

"I wonder whether there are Indians in every bush?" he said, as his eyes roamed over the prairie in search of some place of shelter. "They seem to be watching for me from every tree in the country. Well, my good horse, we shall have to keep on the go till dark comes, when we'll get some chance to creep off and hide."

Looking to the southward, a wooded section was to be seen, but Ned concluded to give all such places a wide berth for the present. He had missed recapture by too narrow a chance to risk it blindly again. A long distance to the northwest he discerned a range of hills of moderate elevation, and it occurred to him that there was a suitable place in which to spend the coming night. By journeying forward at this easy, swinging pace, he calculated upon reaching them about nightfall, and in the shelter which they offered he was confident of being able to hide away beyond the vision of the most vigilant Apache or Comanche.

"What has become of those fellows?" he abruptly asked himself, as his eye glanced hastily around in search of the hunters from whom he had now been separated the better portion of twenty-four hours. "I can't understand how we got so far apart. If they meant the whole thing as a joke, I think it is played out by this time."

He was a little nettled when he came to reflect that the parting was probably arranged by Dick and Tom for the purpose of giving him a lesson in prairie traveling and prairie life. Perhaps they believed that some amusement might be obtained in this way.

"If they think I can't get along without 'em, I'll show them their mistake," he said to himself. "There can't be many days' travel between me and Fort Havens, and so long as I've got such a horse—he knows better than they can how to keep me out of such scrapes—"

At this juncture he was startled by the action of the mustang. He was walking along, when he began staggering from side to side. Then he paused, as if to steady himself. A groan followed and he sank heavily to the ground, rolling upon his side so quickly that his rider narrowly escaped being crushed beneath him. And then, as the dismayed Ned sprang to his feet, he saw that his loved mustang was dead!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LONE CAMP FIRE.

When the pursuing Apaches first fired their two shots, one of them slightly wounded the hand of young Chadmund, while the other, unsuspected by the lad, buried itself in the body of the mustang and inflicted a fatal wound. It was characteristic of the noble creature that his indomitable courage should remain to the last. He kept up his astonishing speed until his rider voluntarily checked him, and then his gait remained his natural one until nature succumbed and he dropped dead.

It would be hard to say which emotion was the most poignant in the breast of the young wanderer. He had learned to love the noble mustang during their brief companionship, and he had discovered, too, how impossible it was for him to make any substantial progress without a good horse to ride. He had lost the best steed he had ever bestrode, and was again thrown upon his own resources. It was natural and creditable to the lad that, as he looked at the fallen steed, and reflected how faithfully he had served him, his hands should seek his eyes. So they did, and he spent full ten minutes in a regular old-fashioned cry, such as he had not enjoyed since receiving a good trouncing at the hands of his parent.

When his grief had subsided somewhat, he bade the unconscious form good-bye, and with his rifle over his shoulder started ahead again. He could not bear even to remove the blanket which was strapped around the body of the mustang, and which was likely to be of great service to him in his wanderings.

It was already growing dark, when he aimed for the hills, and, as his eye swept over the the prairie, he saw no Indian or sign of danger. He was hopeful that for the time being, at least, he

was free from molestation. His greatest trouble was, that he was ravenously hungry again, and he counted upon considerable difficulty in securing the wherewithal with which to satisfy his cravings. True, he had gun and ammunition, but the game which he wished to meet seemed to be, as a rule, reluctant to put itself within his reach.

After reaching the hills, the lad's next proceeding was to hunt up some suitable spot in which to pass the night. The air was so warm and sultry that he could have made no use of the blanket, had he possessed it. The place was full of stunted trees and undergrowth, with jagged, irregular masses of stone lying here and there, and constantly obtruding themselves in such a way that he received a number of severe bruises.

After tramping about for a short time he discovered that the hills were mainly in the form of a ridge, passing over the crest of which he went down the opposite slope and found himself among a mass of larger rocks, and in a still wilder section. There, while searching, it occurred to him that he might find a suitable retreat among the rocks. The sound of trickling water directed his steps a little to the left, where a tiny rivulet was found dripping down from the dark stones. After quenching his thirst he renewed his hunt.

Although he continued for some time, he was not as successful as he desired. Nothing in the shape of a regular cavern presented itself, and he finally nestled down beside one of the largest rocks which could be discovered, with the intention of sleeping until morning.

Ned thought it strange that he should feel so frightened. With the gathering of darkness he grew so nervous that all possibility of sleep was driven away. He examined his rifle several times—a curious mistrust taking possession of him—and then arose to his feet and listened.

All seemed as quiet as at creation's morn. There was a soothing influence in the faint sound of the dripping water, and an almost inaudible roar seemed to steal forth from the great prairie, such as is sometimes noted when in the vicinity of the becalmed ocean. Without any thought he thrust his hand into an inner pocket, when he felt a small package wrapped up in paper. Wondering what it could be, he drew it forth.

It was a box of matches!

Suddenly he remembered how they came there. On the day before leaving Santa Fe it occurred to him that he would be likely to need such a convenience, and he had carefully wrapped up a box and placed it in this out-of-the-way corner, where it had lain forgotten.

"That's lucky!" exclaimed the delighted lad, as he drew them out, recognizing them more by the touch than by sight. "Now I'll build a big fire, and fix things splendidly."

A fire was his great desideratum, and, had he believed it possible without great trouble and work, he would have kindled one before that. The capture of a new horse could have pleased him scarcely more than the discovery of the matches, and he set about reaping the advantage at once.

In such a place there was little difficulty in procuring fuel, and it took Ned but a short time to gather all he could possibly need; but, to guard against all contingencies, he continued collecting until he had a huge pile, made up of dead limbs, branches, and a number of green sticks thrown in. In a few minutes the flames were under way. He had kindled them against the face of a rock, and they burned with a cheery heartiness that did much to dispel the gloom which had begun settling over him. He seated himself as near the fire as he could without being made uncomfortable by the reflected heat, and then he assumed as easy a position as was possible in such a place.

"I wonder if anybody will see that?" he asked himself in a whisper, after it had continued burning some time.

Rising and reconnoitering the ground, he was gratified to learn that the light was better screened than he had reason to expect, considering the carelessness with which he had kindled it. The rock at the rear shut off all view from that direction, while the undergrowth was so matted and dense in front, that it seemed impossible for any one to see it from the prairie. Having made this survey, he returned to his position, feeling much easier in mind than before.

"Strange what has become of Dick and Tom," he muttered, following up this train of thought, as usual whenever he was left undisturbed for a few minutes. "Can it be that they have been killed by the Apaches? It might be, and yet I don't know how it could happen, either."

He was still meditating upon this ever-interesting query, when he was roused to a sense of his situation by the sound of something trampling through the bushes behind him.

"Indians!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet, rifle in hand, and casting his terrified glance in the direction from whence came the sound.

The words were yet in his mouth, when he felt that he had committed a blunder. No Indian would approach in that manner.

"It must be some animal," was his conclusion, as he stepped back, so as to bring himself as close to the fire as possible.

The next moment, a huge, dark, unwieldy body advanced from the gloom with a growl, and he saw an immense grizzly bear lumbering toward him. As quick as thought his rifle was at his

shoulder, and he fired full at him, the distance being so short that he could not fail to hit the mark; but the wound, however severe it might have been, was not fatal, and did not deter bruin's advance in the least. Knowing that it would be sure death if he were once seized by the powerful monster, and aware of the dread which all animals have of fire, he dropped his gun and caught up a blazing brand, which he flung in the very face of the brute.

This was more than a bear, as courageous as was this giant grizzly, could stand, and he retreated with an awkward haste which was ridiculous. For the instant he was panic stricken, and continued falling back until he was invisible in the gloom. But he was not disposed to give up the contest by any means. Ned knew he would be back again, and fortified himself as well as possible by hugging his own camp fire, stooping down and holding himself ready to hurl another torch in the brute's face if he should persevere in his attack.

For several minutes all was quiet, and he began to hope that his fright was such that he would keep at a respectful distance. Such was not the case, however. A growl from another direction warned him that the brute was about to advance from that quarter. The lad peered out into the gloom, wondering whether the creature would eventually overcome his dread to such an extent as to press him to the wall. At any rate, he was not disposed to wait and hastily ran around to the other side of the blaze, by which maneuver it was interposed directly between him and his enemy.

"I wonder what he will do now?"

CHAPTER XXX.

FIGHTING A GRIZZLY.

The grizzly could not fail to detect the ruse of the boy, and he countered by moving around to the other side of the fire, so that he regained his former advantage. The nocturnal visitor had evidently set his mind upon making his supper upon the little chap, whose plump, robust appearance must have been a very tempting bait to him. The latter was reluctant to repeat his maneuver, as, by doing so, he would be forced to pass so near his foe that a big paw might reach out and grasp him while on the way.

"I'll have to fight you with fire," he said, as he seized a large stick, one end of which was blazing.

In the hope that he might give him a greater scare than before, the lad swung it rapidly around his head until it was fanned into a roaring flame. While this was going on, he was surrounded, as it appeared, by a fiery circle, his appearance being such that the bravest quadruped living could not have been induced to approach within his reach. Not content with this, Ned assumed the aggressive. Stooping low, he emitted a wild yell, and repeating this, pointed the torch forward and toward him, moving it more rapidly and in a smaller circle, while at the same time he kept slowly advancing upon him.

No bear could be expected to withstand such a demonstration. The figure of the yelling urchin, with his head surrounded by a blazing serpent, must have struck terror to his very inmost being. Without pausing to do more than to utter a short growl, he wheeled around and went crashing through the undergrowth as if under the belief that a battery had been suddenly unmasked and was about to open upon him. When he had retreated a few rods he paused to see how matters appeared, when he again beheld the horrid figure closer than ever and drawing nearer every moment. It was appalling, and he plunged away at a greater speed than ever. Ned pursued him until he was fearful of getting so far away from the camp fire that he would lose it altogether. When he paused he could hear the bear still tramping off, as if he already felt the torch blistering his nose. Turning again, the lad ran with all speed to his "headquarters," where he flung down his torch and caught up his gun.

"Now I think I've got time to load it," he said, as he began the operation at once, a little alarmed, however, to discover that the supply of ammunition furnished him by Tom Hardyng was growing alarmingly small.

He succeeded in ramming the charge home, and then as he placed the cap upon the tube, he felt something of the old confidence that was his when astride the mustang and coursing over the prairie at a speed which no horse could equal. When first charged upon by the monster he had fired with such haste that he had no time to make any aim; now fortified by his camp fire, he meant to improve upon that. Everything being ready, he looked off into the gloom, but nothing was to be seen of the creature, nor did the slightest sound betray his whereabouts.

"He'll be sneaking back pretty soon," said the lad to himself, who was resolved to remain on the watch.

He was not kept waiting. A minute later he caught the slow crackling and trampling of some heavy creature through the undergrowth, and he was confident that his old enemy was close at hand. The lad sank down upon one knee, so close to the fire that it scorched him, and awaited his approach. But the grizzly had been so thoroughly scared that he hadn't entirely recovered from it. When something like twenty feet away he halted, and evidently began debating whether it

would be prudent to approach.

Chadmund could not make out his figure distinctly, although he knew precisely where he was; but, by and by, when the head moved a little, he caught the phosphorescent glitter of the eyes. As the fire light shone upon the gun-barrel he wanted no better opportunity, and, supporting the weapon upon one knee, he pointed it straight at the center—that is, directly between those glowing orbs, which remained stationary, as if in waiting for the fatal messenger. It came the next moment. True to its aim, the tiny sphere of lead entered the head of the bear at the most vulnerable point, and the life went out from that huge mass. A rasping growl, a few spasmodic throes, and it was all over.

Ned was naturally exultant over his exploit, and he reflected that if matters went on in the same fashion, he could soon lay claim to being quite a hunter. He had shot an Indian, a buffalo, and a grizzly bear, besides performing some other exploits not always accomplished by men.

"I guess the best plan is to load again," he muttered, as he adopted this precautionary measure. "That isn't the only grizzly bear in the country."

By this time the fire was running down, and the lad, throwing some more fuel upon it, seated himself directly in front, prepared to watch for further visitors. He had scarcely ensconced himself in this position when his hair fairly rose on end at hearing a low but distinct, growl, proving that some other unwelcome caller was about to pay him his respects.

He hurriedly looked in every direction, but could see nothing to explain the cause of this alarming manifestation. It was so different from the warning uttered by the grizzly that he knew it must be some other sort of creature. Holding his rifle ready for instant use, he glanced hurriedly about him, but, although the camp fire was throwing out a long stream of light, no sign of an animal could be detected.

"I'm sure I heard something," he repeated, still wondering and looking around in search of the cause. "Hello! there it goes again. It sounds as if it were somewhere up in the air—it is in the air!"

The fire had been kindled against the face of a rock. This rock rose perpendicularly a dozen feet above the ground below, where the fire was burning, and where the lad was standing. As he looked up he saw the gaunt figure of a large mountain wolf standing on the very edge of this, looking down upon him, its lank jaws distended, its eyes glaring, and its whole appearance that of a ferocious beast about to leap down upon his head. The suggestion was so startling, that Ned uttered an exclamation of terror, and leaped back several feet.

It must be that when a wild beast comes across a boy, he concludes that even though he carries a gun there is nothing to be feared from him. The grizzly bear had shown a sublime indifference to Ned's capacity, and his life had paid the forfeit. And now, although the mountain wolf must have seen him raise that rifle and point it as straight as the finger of fate directly at him, he paid no attention to it whatever; but there he stood, snarling and growling, and on the very point of leaping.

Suddenly there was a short, sharp crack, and it was all over with the wolf. He must have gathered himself for a leap at that very moment; for the bullet that bored his brittle skull through and through did not prevent an outward bound. A faint yelp and the creature bounded full a dozen feet directly out from the rock, and, owing to some curious quirk of the muscles, turned a complete somerset, and would have landed directly upon the head of Ned if he hadn't sprung to one side as the carcass fell to the ground.

"That settles your case," remarked the boy, with the indifference of an old hunter. "Now it's time to load up again."

This done he settled himself to watch and listen and play the part of his own sentinel for the rest of the night. A faint moaning of the night-wind was all that reached his ears. Once he fancied he heard the report of a gun far away in the distance, but it was so faint that he might have been mistaken. Then a cry, somewhat resembling that made by a panther, was borne on the wind, but that, too, seemed to come from the mountains that were miles away to the westward. No sound indicated the presence of any further danger close at hand. Everything was quiet, and seemingly at rest.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SLEEP.

The sentinel on his rounds, the watchman upon his beat, or the sailor pacing the deck of his vessel in mid-ocean, keeps his senses awake by the constant motion of his body. To sit down to rest for a few minutes only is fatal. Sleep has the power of stealing over the faculties, and wrapping them up in its embrace so insidiously, that no watchfulness can guard against it unless artificial means, such as walking, are resorted to. When Ned Chadmund resumed an easy position in front of his own camp fire, the inevitable result followed. He resolved to keep his ears

and eyes open, and almost immediately closed them. A few minutes passed and then his head began to nod. Several times he narrowly escaped tumbling over, and, finally rousing, he vigorously rubbed his eyes, yawned, and arose to his feet.

"My gracious! this won't do," he exclaimed, with a shuddering sense of the danger he was running. "A bear might steal right up to me and eat me up before I could help myself. If I'm going to play sentinel, I must do it like a man."

Straightway he began pacing back and forth in front of the blaze, his beat extending some twenty feet back and forth. He carried his rifle on his shoulder and proved the thoroughness of his vigilance by an occasional glance at the top of the rock, from which the mountain wolf had made its death leap. The coast remained clear. The far-off sounds which had attracted his attention a short time before were not repeated, and, as the labor of walking back and forth grew a little wearisome, he began to argue the question with himself.

"I wonder whether there isn't some way of resting without working? If I've got to walk all night, what shall I be good for to-morrow? I don't see any fun in this sort of business. Ah, I know how I'll fix it; I'll kindle two fires."

He acted upon the idea at once. He had gathered such an abundance of fuel that he had no fear of the supply running out. In a few minutes he had a second fire started, about a dozen feet from the other, while he stowed himself away directly between them. His position, he soon discovered, was rather warmer than he anticipated, but he speedily remedied this by permitting each fire to subside in a slight degree.

"This is nice," he muttered, shrinking up against the rock. "I don't think any wild creature would harm me unless he tumbled over the top of the rock there and dropped on my head. Even then I think I should wake up soon enough to use my gun on him. But then, I guess I won't go to sleep."

Five minutes later his head was nodding again, and utter unconsciousness speedily followed. But one of the brands in the fire on his right fell, and there was a slight crackling explosion of the embers—as is often the case. A glowing spark flew outward and dropped upon the limp hand of the sleeping youngster.

Simultaneously there was a yell, and the lad leaped several feet from the ground, dancing about like a rejoicing warrior and flinging his hand as if he were trying to shake off some clinging reptile.

"I should like to know who did that?" he exclaimed, a little confused by the startling manner in which he had been aroused. "I guess I understand how it all came about, though," he added, as he examined the stinging blister upon the back of his hand.

The pain from this little wound effectually banished all sleep for the time. Ned busied himself in replenishing the fire, and then walked out in the gloom and looked about. Everything was the same. The night was dark,—no moon being visible,—and an oppressive sultriness was in the atmosphere. It seemed as if some elemental disturbance were close at hand, but in looking to the sky no presage of it could be discovered.

After wandering about for some time, the lad spat upon some earth, and, plastering it over the smarting blister, succeeded in shutting out the air from it and secured considerable relief.

"It must be that I am all alone," he added, standing still and listening. "No one is near and no one sees me but God. He has taken care of me in the past, and He will not forsake me in future," he added, looking reverently upward.

The old feeling of drowsiness again stole over him and he determined to secure a night's rest—that is, during the portion of the night that remained. Still the fact that the fires had run down somewhat raised the inquiry in his mind as to what was likely to happen in case they went out altogether. If any more grizzly bears should put in an appearance, his situation would not be of the most inviting nature, but he had argued himself into the belief that no further peril of this character threatened. By placing a goodly amount of fuel upon the fires he hoped to keep them going until daylight, or until his slumber was over. Had he been able to find a suitable tree, he would have made his bed in that, even at the risk of another disagreeable fall, but nothing of the kind could be seen, and he had already grown weary of hunting for some hiding place among the rocks. Accordingly, the camp fires were replenished and he resumed his former position between them, covering his hands very carefully, lest another spark should drop in the same place.

"I wish it was colder!" he exclaimed, when he found the place growing uncomfortably warm. "If it was winter now, I shouldn't want anything nicer."

He stood it like a hero, however, and by and by his place became more pleasant, for the reason that the fuel was rapidly burning down. About this time sleep regained possession of his senses, and, cramped up though he was, with his back against the rock, his slumber was scarcely less sound than if he were stretched out upon his blanket beneath a tree in the forest.

At the time young Chadmund relapsed into unconsciousness it was nearly midnight, and for nearly two hours following there was scarcely the slightest change in the surroundings. The fires burned low, until the figure of the lad braced up against the rock grew dim and shadowy in the deepening gloom. Scarcely a breath of air stirred the vegetation about him, and everything seemed to be calculated to lull one into a deep, soothing, dreamless sleep. But at the end of the

time mentioned, something came out of the undergrowth and advanced stealthily toward him. It was vague, shadowy, and so dimly outlined that at first its form could not be recognized; but as it glided closer to the fire, there was enough light remaining to disclose the figure of another wolf.

Like a phantom born of the gloom itself, it moved toward the unconscious lad, until scarcely a dozen feet intervened. Then, as if directed by Providence, one of the embers snapped apart, throwing out a sudden flame, which momentarily lit up the surrounding darkness. Like a flash the wolf slunk back, and then, pausing, stood and stared at the lad, licking his jaws as if in anticipation of the feast he expected to enjoy upon him.

As the flames subsided again, and the same gloom crept over the scene, the hideous creature stole up again, resolved to have the meal displayed so temptingly before him. Once more he was within reach, still advancing with jaws distended—ready to leap upon him. The boy slumbered dreamlessly on. Still nearer crept the wolf until Ned was at his mercy.

At this critical juncture, something whizzed from the upper surface of the rock, with the velocity almost of a bullet. It was a tomahawk, which, speeding true to its aim, struck the unsuspecting wolf fairly and with such terrific force that his skull was cloven in twain as completely as if smitten by the headsman's ax. There was scarcely time for the wild yelp as he tumbled over backward. But, such as it was, it aroused Ned, who sprang to his feet and gazed about him with an alarmed and bewildered air. Before he could fairly comprehend what had taken place he saw figures descending and approaching. It was too late to retreat. He was surrounded.

"I'm a goner now!" he muttered.

But as the firelight brightened, he saw the kindly faces of Tom Hardyng and Dick Morris.

CHAPTER XXXII.

REUNITED.

"How was it that you came to leave me for so long a time?" inquired Ned, after he had welcomed his two friends with boyish enthusiasm and congratulated himself upon his timely deliverance.

"Wal," replied Tom, as the three took up a comfortable position before the fire, "we started you off on that hunt on purpose to give you a little taste of buffaler huntin', calc'latin' to foller on after ye in the course of an hour or two. Afore we could do so, a war-party of a hundred redskins got right atween us—didn't you see 'em?"

"No such party as that."

"In course they shut us out altogether. The worst of it was, we exchanged a few shots back and forth with 'em, and they give us a brush; so by the time we had dodged out of their way, we was a long ways off from you. We couldn't do nothin' till mornin', and by that time the buffaloes and Injuns had trampled out your trail, so that there was nothin' to be seen of it, and we had to go it on general principles. We had 'bout made up our mind that some of the varmints had gobbled you, when we put eyes on this fire, and there ain't any use of tellin' any more."

The lad now in compliance with their request, related his entire experience since their separation. Old and veteran hunters as they were, and chary of praise as was their custom, they did not hesitate to compliment him highly upon the courage he had displayed in the most trying emergencies in which he was placed. His experience had, indeed, been a most remarkable one, and Providence had protected him in a wonderful manner.

Everything being understood, and the past cleared up, it now became them to look to the future. There were only two horses to three persons, and as there were no means of obtaining one, it became necessary to divide the lad between the two hunters—an arrangement which was easily made.

But, although it might seem that the greatest danger of the company had passed, the truth was, however, that the greatest was still before them, and both Dick and Tom knew it. They were pursuing a journey in an almost due south-westerly direction—precisely the course necessary to take in order to reach home, as they had come to look upon Fort Havens. But directly in their path was a broad level patch of country, interspersed, here and there, with rocks and vegetation, over which both the Comanches and Apaches were so constantly roaming that it would be impossible for a white man to cross it without being discovered by some of the war-parties.

When Dick and Tom were coming from the other direction, they were seen, and escaped only by the superior fleetness of their horses. But the trouble was that while they were not expected and not watched for then, now they were. The redskins were cunning enough to know that if two hunters rode at full speed through their country in the direction of Santa Fe, they would be very likely to return again in the course of a few days, and, as Dick said, the reds "would be ready for 'em." Consequently, it became not a question of fleetness; for, if it were, the hunters could afford to have very little apprehension over the result; but Tom Hardyng was well convinced that the Apaches, to the number of a hundred or more, were distributed at different points, and on the lookout for them. Indeed, he had already seen such evidence of the fact that it could not be

doubted. He did not consider it necessary to tell their young friend all this, for he would learn it in due time.

Such being the case it would have been a waste of time for the three to remain where they were, while they had the sheltering darkness to screen them in their flight; but the two mustangs had done a good deal of traveling, and it was wise to give them the rest while it could be gained. Here were water and grass, of which the animals were taking the advantage. It was wise to husband their strength and endurance until the following day.

The hunters extinguished one camp fire entirely, and toned the other down so that there was no possibility of its attracting the notice of any one unless he passed very near at hand. Fortunately for Ned, they had some very good and substantial lunch with them, with which his hunger was fully satisfied. There still remained a little stock on hand, which was reserved more for him than themselves. They were accustomed to such privations and could stand it very well, but the lad was of too tender years not to suffer keenly.

The night was so far gone that no one attempted to obtain any sleep. The hunters went out and examined the dead grizzly, learning his dimensions by the sense of feeling alone. Tom picked up the tomahawk, and, wiping off the blade upon the grass, shoved it down in his belt, with the remark that it might come handy again before they reached Fort Havens. The two then made an observation for the purpose of learning whether any of the Indians were in the neighborhood. Nothing important was discovered, however, and in due time the night ended and the morning came again.

The sun was scarcely up when they were under way. Ned at first was placed upon the back of the mustang ridden by Dick Morris, and side by side, the two fleet-limbed creatures left the ridge and took the shortest route to Fort Havens. The gait was an easy, swinging one, which the horses were capable of keeping up from rise of morn until set of sun. The day was warm and sunshiny, but the air was so clear and pure that the oppressiveness was much less than would have been the case in a more northern latitude.

Beyond the ridge, the country remained open, as the prairie was inclined to be rolling than otherwise, but with a surface which permitted the utmost swiftness of which an animal was capable. Occasionally patches of wood and rocky elevations were discernible, but these were given a wide berth in all cases, as they were the very places where the treacherous enemies would have wished them to come. A herd of buffaloes, probably the same seen a short time before, was discerned far to the south, but they were passed by while still a long distance away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CLOSING IN.

The party pushed on until the greater portion of the forenoon was passed, when Ned was transferred to the back of Tom's horse. The lad had noticed that the hunters were acting in a strange manner, as though they were ill at ease, and were apprehensive that peril of some kind was approaching.

Dick Morris rode fully a hundred yards in advance of his comrade, and the motion of his head showed that there was no part of the horizon that was not under his surveillance. Tom was equally busy while riding in the rear. Neither of the hunters addressed a word to the other, but the boy detected a sort of telegraphy occasionally passing between them. They were working by a preconcerted arrangement, like corresponding parts of some machine, understanding each other so well that there was no need for explanation. The boy also used his to the best advantage possible, often turning his head and scanning the prairie and horizon, but not a single time did he discern anything that looked like Indians. Had he been alone, he would have journeyed serenely forward, certain that no danger of any kind threatened.

At noon, a brief halt was made as they struck the margin of a small stream, the water of which was rather warm and muddy, the buffaloes having probably disturbed it at some point above. The horses quaffed their fill, and upon the suggestion of Tom, Ned did the same. There was a good deal of significance when he uttered the words.

"It may be a good while before you get a chance at another."

It did not escape the notice of the lad, either, that both his friends filled to the full their old canteens, after which they repaired to one side, where they conversed for some time in low tones, and with such earnest, excited gestures, that it was plain they were in deadly earnest.

"I don't see why they keep everything from me," he muttered, as he observed this. "I think I've seen as big sights as they have for the last few days, and if there's any trouble coming, I wonder whether I haven't got to take my chance the same as them? But I'll let them alone till they get ready to tell me."

He was watching the two as they were talking to each other, when Tom beckoned to him to approach.

"There's no use of talkin'," said the hunter, in a low voice; "we're gettin' into the worst scrimmage of our lives. We're right in the middle of a dangerous tract. We've been seen by the Apaches and they're arter us."

"Why don't you wait until night and go through when they can't see you?"

The hunter shook his head at this seemingly reasonable query.

"The darkness is worse for us than it is for them. They can lay flat on the perarie and hear the sound of the hosses' feet a good deal further off than they can see 'em, and the scamps are so cunnin' they would have drawn us right into some ambush afore we'd knowed anythin' about it. No, we must try it with our eyes open and the sun shinin'."

"But what of it?" asked Ned, who did not see why their position need be looked upon as so critical. "Your mustangs are as fleet as theirs. How are they going to catch you?"

The whole difficulty was then made clear to the lad. If the Apaches were nowhere but in the rear, it would be an easy matter to give them the slip, but they were on the right and left, and in front, and signs that had been seen through the day indicated very clearly that the Indians were carrying out to the letter the plan of which the hunters had spoken, and which they dreaded so much. They had already surrounded them, the circle being quite a number of miles in diameter, and were now simply drawing in their lines.

This, as a matter of course, made a collision inevitable, unless the hunters could manage to steal between these redskins, and, by striking the open country beyond, place the entire company in their rear. Such a plan as this was scarcely possible of accomplishment.

If attempted during the daytime, it would be instantly detected by some of the redskins, who would notify the proper ones, when an immediate concentration would take place in front of the fugitives. If tried during the darkness of night, it would fail. The Apaches would take every imaginable precaution against it and there was no means of concealing the noise made by hoofs. By going on foot they could get through the lines without difficulty; but they could not commit the imprudence of leaving their horses. The situation, therefore, was critical. Tom made known two most important facts. The first was that beyond a doubt Lone Wolf was at the head of the whole enterprise, and they were likely to meet with this treacherous chief again. The second was that, in case they were driven to the wall, the hunters had determined upon taking refuge in a place known as Hurricane Hill.

"It's nothing more than a pile of rocks," added Hardyng. "I've been there before, and it's just the spot to make a desp'rit stand. Two men like us, if we can reach the right p'int, can keep a hundred of the redskins back."

"Won't they get there ahead of us?" asked Ned.

"I think not," replied the hunter, in that hesitating manner which showed that he had thought of the contingency before; "for the reason that I b'leve they'd like to have us run there; but, come, let's be off."

That the mustangs might be relieved, the lad was now taken on the back of Dick's, and the journey toward the southwest was resumed at the same sweeping gallop. Tom took the lead, carefully scanning the ground over which they traveled. For an hour all went well, and then he reined up his steed with startling suddenness.

"Look yonder!" he said, pointing to the south.

Glancing in the direction indicated, the boy saw a number of moving specks, apparently on the very horizon.

"Injuns," said Dick, in a low voice, although the boy scarcely needed the explanation to know they were their old enemies—mounted Apaches.

"Do you see 'em?"

"Yes."

"Now take a peep off there."

This time the hunter pointed exactly opposite, where almost precisely the same thing was visible.

"Now, I s'pose you understand how it all is? They've been keeping along with us all day, a little ahead, and all the time closing in a little. They've got things down to a dot, and mean bus'ness, you can bet."

"But are we anywhere near Hurricane Hill?"

"Yonder it is."

Several miles in advance, a dark, mound-like obstruction appeared against the sky. It was so far away that it was seen only indistinctly, but its character was evidently such as described by the hunter.

"Are you going for it?"

"We are."

And, suiting action to his words, they immediately broke into a gallop which was more rapid than before.

The situation, especially to the boy, became painful in its thrilling intensity. He required no telling to know that the dreaded programme described by his friends was being carried out to the letter. The Apaches were steadily closing in upon them, and it was evident that, if they chose to do so, they could effectually shut them out from reaching their vantage ground. Young Chadmund dreaded such a course upon their part. Somehow or other he had grown to look upon Hurricane Hill as their haven of safety. The few words of recommendation that Tom Hardyng had given it caused this belief upon his part. He did not pause to ask himself what was to be done after reaching it.

Suppose it could be gained in perfect safety, what then? If they should prove themselves fully able to keep a whole host of Apaches at bay, how was the siege to end? If the Indians should content themselves with merely waiting until hunger and thirst could do their work, what more? These questions naturally occurred to the men themselves, but it came back to Hobson's choice after all. And so they dashed ahead, gradually increasing their speed, while the Apaches, with the regularity of machine work, as gradually drew in upon them.

"Will they cut us off?" inquired Ned, when the chase had continued for some time.

"Guess not," replied Dick; "but it don't make much difference."

"Why not?"

"'Cause it begins to look as if they had a dead sure thing of it," said the scout, sententiously.

"I hope not—I hope not," said the trembling lad, who could only pray that Heaven would not desert them in the peril which was encompassing them on every hand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HURRICANE HILL.

While yet at a considerable distance, the full force of the Indians became developed. They were divided almost equally, fifty being on either hand, and their speed still remained such that the main portion kept ahead of the fugitives, with about half a mile intervening between them and their pursuers. It may have been fancy, but Tom Hardyng maintained that he was able to recognize Lone Wolf among the redskins on the right, and when a short time afterward Dick Morris emphatically asserted the same thing, it began to look as if the belief were well founded.

The sun was quite low in the sky, and the gait of the mustangs began to tell upon them. The two were galloping side by side, and going nearly at full speed. Both Tom and Dick were angry at being forced into such a position, which, to them, was a cowardly flight from a lot of wretches whom they despised and hated.

"I must give 'em my compliments," suddenly exclaimed the latter, when they were within rifle shot of each other. As he spoke, he raised his gun, and fired into Lone Wolf's band.

He seemed to take no aim at all, and, indeed, there was little necessity for it, as the Indians were so numerous and compact. A yell followed and then a commotion, showing very plainly that the shot had told.

"I reckon I'll try it again, it works so well," said Dick, repeating the demonstration, except that he aimed to the company on the left. He took a little more pains to guard against throwing his shot away and the result was similar to the first.

"Now we'll catch it," said the terrified Ned, crouching down beside the hunter, who like his friend was engaged in reloading his gun.

But there was no return fire. The Apaches, evidently, had concluded that they could wait. The shots, however, resulted somewhat advantageously for the fugitives, who, during the momentary confusion thus created, managed to crowd a little ahead. The horses were then put to a dead run and the final rush made for Hurricane Hill, the last refuge for which the fugitives could flee, seeing which, the Indians converged toward them, and made every effort to shut them off.

Although the hunters had apparently used their utmost endeavors up to this time, they had husbanded the strength of their animals so cleverly that their pursuers themselves were deceived, and when they expected to interpose themselves directly across the path, they beheld them flying like a whirlwind toward the rocks.

The few hundred yards remaining between the latter and Hurricane Hill were passed in a few seconds by the fleet-footed mustangs. Ned was fairly dazed by the bewildering rush of events, and hardly able to keep track of their order. He saw the hurrying warriors directly behind them, and the rough, cragged mass of rocks in front. The next moment he was off the mustang. The

scouts had checked their beasts at the same instant at the base of Hurricane Hill, and, leaping to the ground, skurried up the steep incline by which its surface was reached. The feet of the lad did not touch the earth. Dick, who was slightly in advance, carried him under his arm as if he were an infant snatched up in haste, and the men bounded toward the top of the hill, the whole howling horde at their heels.

Hurricane Hill, it should be stated, was a pile of rocks about one hundred feet in diameter, with half that height. On one side a narrow path led upward at an angle of forty-five degrees, and, as it permitted only one to pass at a time, the place, with a few defenders, was impregnable against almost any force. This path upward was filled with loose, rattling stones, which sometimes made one's foothold treacherous, and it also made several curious turns, so that, after ascending a rod or so, one was shut out from the view of those upon the ground below.

The very instant this point was reached Dick Morris dropped the lad and exclaimed:

"Now run like thunder, and don't stop till you reach the top."

Then, wheeling about, he leaped back several paces to the assistance of Tom, who was defending the pass like a second Leonidas against the swarming warriors.

A huge, stalwart redskin, who probably believed his strength to be superior to that of the scouts, advanced boldly and seized him, with the evident purpose of drawing him down among the others and making him a prisoner in spite of himself. But he found he had made a slight miscalculation when he was lifted like a child from the ground and hurled over the heads and among the glowering redskins crowding below. The momentum of his body was such that a half dozen were forced backward and almost off their feet. Had the Apaches chosen to do so, it would have been an easy matter to have shot all three of the fugitives, or even two of them, and taken the lad; but they had some old score against Tom and Dick, which could not be wiped out by mere death alone. Now that such a fine opportunity was presented for securing them and indulging in all the luxury of torture, they were not the ones to throw away the chance. Hence, they persistently refused to fire and as persistently forced their way upward.

This check, which might have been simply temporary, was emphasized and made more permanent in its character by Dick, who at the critical moment seized a goodly sized rock, which he drove down among the wretches like the discharge from a fifty pounder. It made terrible work and the discomfited Apaches retreated tumultuously to the bottom, while the hunters hastened away again to the top of the hill. Ned was there awaiting their coming with the most painful misgiving about their coming at all. He knew from the uproar that a desperate fight was raging in the narrow pass, and he feared that the resentful Apaches would overcome the braver hunters, who were defending themselves so desperately. But there they were at last, with the announcement that their enemies had fallen back and a temporary peace was given them.

"Can't expect it to last long, howsomever," added Tom, who breathed scarcely any faster from his terrific exertions. "Them skunks are bound to swallow us whole, and we've got to kick hard to prevent it."

As soon as a little breathing time had been gained, the besieged made an examination of their immediate surroundings, to learn the probable form in which this business was likely to end. The hunters removed all superfluous articles from their persons,—in the shape of canteens and a few appurtenances,—like pugilists who are stripping for a fight.

The surface of Hurricane Hill was generally level, and free from the boulders and obstructions which one would naturally expect to find there, which Tom Hardyng explained by saying that they had all been rolled down upon the Indians below by parties who had been driven to this *dernier resorte* years before. The position of the three, therefore, was very much as if they were upon the extensive top of a tower which was reached by a narrow stairway, their province being to defend it against all comers.

For some time after the repulse of the Apaches, all remained quiet. Of course, they took charge of the two mustangs that the fugitives had been compelled to leave behind in their flight and then disposed themselves around the refuge, like those who had made up their minds to wait until the fruit dropped into their hands.

The afternoon was drawing to a close, and Ned naturally viewed the coming night with distrust. Darkness seemed to be the appropriate time for the fiends to work, and more than once he shuddered as he pictured in his imagination the merciless wretches swarming up the narrow path and spreading over the top, like the rush of waters when bursting up from some hidden fountain.

"All we've got to do is to keep our eyes open," said Dick, with a most reassuring manner. "If I could have plenty to eat and drink, with the privilege of sleeping a little now and then, I wouldn't want any better fun than to stay up here for a few months and crack their heads as they come up."

"Shall I do the watching to-night?"

"Not much," grinned Dick. "Tom takes the first half, me the last, and that's as good a way as we can fix it."

"And what shall I do to help?"

"Go to sleep as soon as it is dark, and don't wake up for three or four days—and even then you must not be dry or hungry."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SENTINEL.

Ned then understood why the two scouts had taken pains to fill their canteens at the brook during the day, and why, also, they so religiously preserved the little lunch still remaining in their possession. It was to guard against just such a contingency.

As the sun approached the horizon, the lad seated himself upon a rocky protuberance and looked off over the surrounding country. To the west, the blue, misty outlines of a moderately high range of mountains shut off all further view.

"Just beyond that," he said to himself, as he fixed his eyes upon the elevation, "Tom tells me is Fort Havens, where father is waiting for me. If he only knew we were here, he might come to our relief. Wouldn't he scatter the redskins down there? But I don't know how he will find it out. Oh! if we were only among those mountains, it wouldn't take us long to go the rest of the way. I suppose the fort can be seen from their top."

To the south, a stratum of yellow vapor stretched for forty degrees along the horizon. There were no buffaloes there, but there had been, and it was the evidence of their passage. To the north, the view was broken by ridges, patches of wood, and curious irregularities of surface, but there was no sign of life among all, nor could it be detected except by peering over the edge of Hurricane Hill down upon the assembled besiegers below. He noticed that Tom Hardyng, shading his eyes with his hand, was gazing off with a fixed intensity in the direction of the mountains which intervened between them and Fort Havens. He said nothing, but there was a significance in his persistency which aroused the curiosity of the lad in no small degree. Could it be that his keen vision detected something tangible toward the setting sun, which was hidden from view by the mountain range? Or was it the mere searching for something upon which to hang his hopes?

Dick Morris was very differently occupied, acting, indeed, as if unaware that anyone else was upon the hill-top besides himself. Crawling to the edge, he was stretched out flat upon his face, his hat removed, while he peered stealthily downward upon the crowd below. Probably, he, too, was searching for something or somebody. There was so much meaning in his actions that the interest of the lad centered upon him, and he watched every motion.

The hunter fidgeted around for a few minutes, as if his posture was not exactly comfortable, and then hastily projecting his gun over the margin, he took a quick aim and fired, and then flinging the weapon aside, looked down again to see the result. All at once, he sprang to his feet, and stamped back toward the center of the plateau, in a terrific rage.

"Ain't it awful!" he exclaimed, adding a forcible expletive. "Did I ever make a bigger mistake?"

"What do you mean, Dick?"

"Hit the wrong skunk."

"How is that?" asked Tom, turning toward him.

"I've been figuring around for half an hour so as to draw a bead on Lone Wolf, and just as I pulled the trigger, I found I'd hit the wrong one. It's trying to one's feelings to be disappointed that way."

"I don't b'leve you'll get a chance at him," said Tom, as he seated himself and resumed his patient scrutiny of the western horizon.

However the scout was not quite in despair, and, reloading his piece, he returned to his position and resumed his watch. But the mistake he had made operated against him in every way. It apprised the Apaches of their danger from this sort of sharp-shooting, and the whole force fell back, while Lone Wolf, who was shrewd enough to know that his life was in special demand, made sure that he was out of range of those fatal rifles. Besides this, it was rapidly growing dark, and before Dick could gain any kind of a chance at all, the light was too dim to afford him the indispensable aim.

The hunters showed a business-like manner of doing things. As soon as it was fairly dark, Dick Morris gave up his hunt for Lone Wolf, and, remarking that there would be no fun until the morrow, rolled over and away from the margin, and was sound asleep within ten minutes.

"You'd better do the same," said Tom to the lad, as he left him alone, and moved down the incline to the position he intended to occupy while acting as sentinel during the first portion of the night.

Ned remained up a considerable time, when, as there seemed to be nothing going on of an alarming nature, he concluded to step out and do the same, if he could control his nerves enough to do so. He was both hungry and thirsty, but not to a very great degree, and as his companions said nothing about eating or drinking, he made up his mind to wait until the morrow. It was about

an hour before he became entirely unconscious, but when he shut his eyes they were not opened until morning.

Before that time, however, Tom Hardyng became involved in a little difficulty. The point where he located was about half way between the base and top of Hurricane Hill. Here the path made such an abrupt bend that it was easy to conceal himself, and still keep a sharp watch upon any one coming from below. It was the hunter's belief that an attempt would be made by the Apaches to steal upon them before morning; for, while their enemies were ready to wait three or four days, or as long as was necessary, yet it was to be expected that they would prefer to force matters to a conclusion as speedily as possible. If they could crowd up to the top of the hill and overwhelm the fugitives, they were willing to incur the risk of losing several lives that they might do so. Accordingly, when he assumed his position it was with the expectation that there would be something on the carpet before long.

Nor was he disappointed. For two hours not the slightest sound reached his ears, and then a pebble softly rattled down the incline below him. There might have been no human agency in this slight occurrence, as the loose *débris* was likely to do the same thing at any moment, but Tom believed that it was caused by the moccasin of an Apache stealing upward. He stealthily peeped around the edge of the rock, but nothing was to be seen. There was a moon in the sky, but its position was such that the path was thrown in shadow, and he could not have detected a man a dozen feet distant.

Fifteen minutes more passed and then the scout became certain that an Indian was stealing up the path toward him. It was a wonder how the thing could be done, without sending streams of gravel and pebbles rattling to the bottom. Hardyng straightened up, still peering around in the gloom.

The moments wore away and still he was able to detect that soft, faint gliding, as if a rattlesnake were getting into a position to strike its prey. By and by—yes, he could now make out the crouching figure approaching through the darkness and he drew back lest he should be seen. Nearer and nearer it drew, while he remained as motionless as the solid rock beside him. Finally, after great delay it stood opposite.

At the very instant it was passing the hand of Tom Hardyng shot straight out with lightning-like quickness and force, and the knife clutched in his iron-like grasp did its duty well. No outcry proclaimed the deed. There was only a gasp and all was over. The moment it was done the hunter straightened up and listened.

"Mebbe there's another behind him."

But the most patient, careful listening failed to detect anything, and, leaving the body lying where it had fallen, he went noiselessly to the top where Dick was sleeping. A gentle touch aroused the latter and he instantly rose to his feet. A few words told him all that had happened and then the two hurriedly discussed the scheme which had occurred to Hardyng a short time before. Two minutes only were needed for them to reach a conclusion.

"I'll do it," muttered Tom, as they arose and began picking their way down the path.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A DESPERATE SCHEME.

The two scouts carefully descended until they reached the spot where the dead Apache lay. They moved as noiselessly as shadows until they stood directly by the inanimate form. Then, while Tom Hardyng began adjusting his outer garments, Dick Morris stooped over and drew forth the blanket which was crumpled beneath the dead warrior.

The Apaches and Comanches and different tribes of the southwest nearly always carry their blankets with them when traveling, and when this particular Indian essayed his perilous reconnaissance on a sultry summer night that garment was flung over his shoulders. These savages as a rule, do not wear their hair done up in the defiant scalp-lock form seen among their more northern kindred. It hangs loosely about their heads and shoulders, being ornamented with stained feathers, the hair itself frequently daubed with brilliant paint.

Tom gathered the blanket about him precisely as did the warrior, and then, his own cap being thrown aside, the feathers were stuck in among the tresses with all the skill of the veteran warrior. As he wore leggings the same as the redskin, his *tout ensemble* was complete. Beneath his blanket he carried his rifle, pistol and knife, and even took the tomahawk from the girdle of the fallen brave, and managed to stow that about his clothing. Even now the two comrades spoke not a word. They merely shook hands in a silent, cordial grasp, and almost immediately became invisible to each other. Dick remained where he was for several minutes, listening and looking, and then, hearing nothing, moved back toward his former position, muttering as he went:

"If anybody can get through 'em, Tom's the boy—but it's a powerful desprit scheme—a powerful desprit one!"

Reaching the top, he crawled again to the margin, and stretched out with his head partly over. Eye-sight was of no avail now, and he depended upon hearing alone, believing that by that means he would be able to learn the success or failure of the maneuver. But not until nearly an hour had passed did he begin to feel anything like a real hope that his comrade had succeeded.

In the meantime, Tom was doing his best. It was no easy task for him to pass safely through the Apache lines in the guise of an Indian. The redskins would be on the lookout for the return of their scout, and the ordeal through which he would have to pass would be a much more severe one than usual. But he was accustomed to desperate schemes, and ready for any sort of encounter. If discovered immediately, he meant to dash back again up the rocks; but if he could get any distance away, he would make a determined effort to elude his enemies altogether.

Following out his plan with the deliberation of a veteran, he stole slowly downward, consuming fully half an hour before he reached the base of Hurricane Hill. When, at length, he stood upon hard ground below, he was taken somewhat back by seeing no one near him.

"That's queer," he said; "what's become of the skunks?"

He had scarcely uttered the words when a tall form suddenly appeared at his side, coming up as if he had risen from the very ground.

"Do the hunters sleep?"

This question was asked in pure Apache, and Tom, somewhat distrustful of his own ability in that line, managed to muffle his blanket up in front of his mouth as he replied in the same tongue:

"They sleep not."

"Where is their scalps, Mau-tau-ke?"

"On their heads."

The warrior was no more than ten feet distant, and from the moment the scout detected him he began edging away, the Indian naturally following along while these words were being uttered, so as to keep within easy ear-shot. Upon hearing the second reply to his question, he paused, and Tom, dreading a betrayal, grasped the handle of his knife under his cloak, and was ready to use it on the instant. But the Indian remained standing, while Tom, still moving away in his indifferent manner, soon passed beyond his view.

"I guess he's stopped to think," was the conclusion of the scout, as he looked back in the gloom, "and it'll be some time before he's through."

But the trouble now remained as to how he should pass through the Apache lines beyond. If the redskins had any suspicion of any such movement, or if the warrior whom he had just left were suspicious, serious trouble was at hand.

The hunter sauntered aimlessly along, using his eyes and ears, and a walk of something over a hundred yards brought him up against a number of figures that were stretched out and sitting upon the ground, with several standing near at hand.

They showed no surprise at their "brother's" approach, and he was confident that, if they didn't undertake to cross-question him too closely, he stood a good chance of getting through. As they were gathered too closely at this point he made a turn to the right, and, to his amazement, not a word was said or the least notice taken of him, as he walked directly by. That was succeeding, indeed; but Tom was not yet ready to leave the neighborhood. He wanted his horse, Thundergust, and, once astride of him, his heart would be light as a bird; but in looking around he could not discern a single horse.

It would be useless to attempt to reach Fort Havens on foot. The Apaches would detect his flight by daylight, which was only a few hours away, and they could overhaul him before he could go any distance at all. No, he must have his horse, and he began his search for him. This was a delicate task; but he prosecuted it with the same skill and *nonchalance* that he had displayed heretofore.

He had stolen along for a short distance, when he descried some twenty horses corraled and cropping the grass, while a still larger number were lying on the ground. Was his own among them? he asked himself, as he stood looking in that direction, while he dimly discerned the figures of the warriors upon his left. Very cautiously he gave utterance to a slight whistle. There was no response, although he suspected it was heard by the redskins themselves. Then he repeated it several times, walking a little nearer the group of equines.

All at once one of their number rose from the ground with a faint whinney, and came trotting toward him. At the same time several Indians came forward from the main group, their suspicions fairly awakened by these maneuvers.

One of these suddenly broke into a run, as he descried the mustang trotting toward the warrior-like figure shrouded in his blanket. There was no doubt in his mind that something was wrong. The scout stood like a statue, as though he saw not the approach of the man or horse. The latter as if distrustful of the shape of things moved so reluctantly that the redskin beat him in reaching the goal.

"What means Mau-tau-ke?" he demanded, in a gruff voice, as he clutched his shoulder. "Is he a

dog that—"

The poor Apache scarcely knew what disposed of him. It was with the suddenness of the lightning stroke, and, flinging back the dirty blanket that had enshrouded his form, the scout pointed his revolvers at the others, fired three shots, accompanied by a screech loud enough to wake the dead. Then, springing toward his mustang, he vaulted upon his back, wheeled about, and thundered away, like the whirlwind across the prairie.

This demonstration was so unexpected and so appalling that the Apaches were effectually checked for a time. Before they could recover, mount their horses, and start in pursuit, the fugitive was beyond their sight. It was useless to pursue, at any rate, for there was no steed among them all that could overtake the flying mustang, whose hoofs were plainly heard upon the prairie, rapidly growing fainter as the distance increased. In a few minutes it had died out altogether, and, ferocious as was the hatred of the redskins toward the hunter who had outwitted and injured them so often, no one made any effort to overhaul him.

Tom Hardyng, every few seconds, let out a regular Apache war-yell, intended as exultation, taunt and defiance. He could afford it, for he had triumphed as completely as heart could covet. The magnificent Thundergust instinctively knew their destination, and the reins lay loosely upon his neck as he sped away. He was aiming for Fort Havens. It was a long distance away, and many hours must pass before its flagstaff could be detected against the far-off horizon.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TWO DEFENDERS.

Dick Morris, stretched out full length upon the top of Hurricane Hill, peering down in the impenetrable gloom, understood all that had passed. There was no mistaking that yell of Tom Hardyng; he had heard it many a time before in the heat of conflict, and it generally meant something.

"Go it, old chap!" he shouted, swinging his hat over his head, as he saw the whole thing in his imagination. "Them 'ere pistol-barks show there's been some bitin' done. Business is business."

He noted, too, the sounds of the mustang's hoofs growing fainter and fainter, until the strained ears could detect them no longer. Tom Hardyng had safely passed through the Apache lines. It was a daring and desperate feat indeed, but it had succeeded to perfection. Nothing now remained to hinder his flight direct to Fort Havens.

"I rather think somebody's mad," exulted Dick, who was fully as proud over the exploit of his comrade as was Tom himself. "There ain't much doubt but what there'll be lively times here before long. They know there's only two of us, counting in the little chap, and they'll make a rush. Let 'em do it. If they can get up by that corner where the other fellow dropped they're welcome, that's all."

And with this conclusion he left the top of the hill and picked his way down the path, until he reached the spot where he had parted from his comrade. Here he stooped down with the purpose of picking up the body of the warrior and flinging it down upon the heads of those below. To his astonishment, it was gone!

He searched around for several minutes, venturing to descend some distance, but it was missing.

"I don't think he could have got up and walked away," said the hunter, as he scratched his head over the occurrence. "No, it couldn't have been that, for Tom don't strike any such blows any more than I do."

It followed, then, as a matter of course, that after the discovery of the trick, some brother Apache had stolen his way up the path and removed the body, a proceeding which Dick Morris hardly suspected until he was really compelled to believe it.

"If I'd only knowed he was coming," he growled, "how I would have lammed him; but he's come and gone, and there ain't any use in cryin' over it."

He waited and listened carefully, and once or twice a slight rattling of the gravel caused him to suspect that some of the redskins were attempting to steal upon him; but if such were the case, they must have contented themselves by not approaching within striking distance.

Finally the night wore away, and the dull light of morning began stealing over the prairie. As soon as objects could be distinguished, he returned to his position upon the top of the rock and made his observations.

Little, if any, change was discernible in the disposition of the besieging Indians. Their horses were gathered at some distance, where the grass was quite rank. The warriors had assumed all the indolent attitudes which are seen in a body of men that have more time at their disposal than they know what to do with. They had shifted their position so far back that they were beyond good rifle range; for although a hunter like Dick Morris could have picked off a redskin nine

times out of ten, yet he could not "pick his man." Lone Wolf had attired himself precisely as were the rest of his warriors, and at the distance it was impossible to distinguish him from them, so the scout wisely concluded to hold his fire until he could be certain of his target.

As soon as it was fairly light, Dick naturally turned his eyes off toward the southwest, in the direction of the hills, whither his comrade had fled during the night.

"He is gone," he muttered, when he had made certain that no object was to be seen. "I might have knowed that before I looked, 'cause the hoss knows how to travel, and Tom's made him do his purtiest."

"Hello! what's the news?"

The query came from Ned Chadmund, who had aroused himself from slumber, and was standing at his side.

"Where is Tom?"

"About fifty miles off yonder, goin' like a streak of greased lightnin' for Fort Havens."

"What?"

Whereupon Dick Morris explained. Of course the lad was astounded to think that all this had taken place while he was dreaming of home and friends, and he hardly knew whether to rejoice or to be alarmed at the shape matters had just then taken. True, Tom Hardyng was speeding away on his fleet-footed mustang for Fort Havens, but it would take a long time to reach there and return. There was something startling in the thought that a man and a boy were all that were left to oppose the advance of the force of the Apaches from below. What was to prevent their swarming upward and overwhelming them? Nothing, it may be said, but the strong arm of Dick Morris. He might have been a Hercules, and still unable to stem the tide, but for the vast advantage given him by nature in constructing Hurricane Hill. He could be approached by the enemy only in single file. Dick, however, was of the opinion that something of the kind would be attempted, for the Apaches could not but know the errand of him who had so nicely outwitted them.

"Ain't there some way of blocking up the way?" asked Ned, as they discussed the plan.

"I've been thinkin' it over, and there is," returned Morris, crossing his legs, and scratching his head in his thoughtful way. "Three years ago, me and Kit Carson had to scoot up here to get out of the reach of something like two hundred Comanches, under that prime devil Valo-Velasquiz. They shot Kit's horse, and mine dropped dead just as we reached the bottom of the hill, so we couldn't do anythin' more in the way of hoss-flesh.

"Them Comanches hated Kit and me like pison; they knowed us both, and they went for us in a way that made us dance around lively; but it was no go, and we tumbled 'em back like tenpins, but they kept things so hot that me and Kit tipped over a big rock in the path. Of course they could climb that easy enough, but it gave us so much more chance that they didn't try it often, and they fell back and tried the Apache dodge—waiting until hunger and thirst made us come down."

"How was it you got out of the trouble?"

"It was in a mighty queer way—a mighty queer way. On the next day arter the brush we had with 'em, a bigger party than ever came up, and we calc'lated things were goin' to be redhot. But as soon as the two parties jined, some kind of a rumpus took place. We could see 'em talkin' in the most excited way, and a high old quarrel was under way. Kit Carson knowed all about Injins, but he couldn't make out what all this meant. We was in hope they'd git into a wrangle themselves, and swaller each other, and I can tell you they came mighty nigh it.

"Just as it begun to look as if it was goin' that way, one of their chiefs walked forward, swingin' a dirty rag on the end of his ramrod as a flag of truce. Kit looked at him very closely, and then exclaimed that it was Quizto, a great rival of Valo-Velasquiz. They were always at swords points, and whichever happened to have the strongest party at his back when they met, outranked the other. The beauty of it all was that Quizto was a friend all his life to Kit Carson—a regular redskin friend, who was ready to scalp all his brothers and sisters if they tried to harm him—and when he came to learn that Kit was treed, he swore that he'd burn at the stake any Injun that laid a straw in his way.

"This made a time, and, as I's tellin' you, the biggest kind of a fight. At one time it only lacked a word to set it a-goin'; but Quizto's braves stood by him, every one, and the others had to knock under.

"When Quizto come forward with his flag of truce, he called out to Kit and told him that he was at liberty to go wherever he chose without harm; but as Valo-Velasquiz would be so disappointed, he thought Carson would turn over his friend, who wasn't of much account, that they might have the pleasure of torturing him to death. That was lovely for me, and you ought to have heard Kit laugh. He told Quizto that he couldn't do that—both would go or stay together. That made another wrangle, but the friendship of the chief to Carson saved the lives of us both. He wouldn't consent that the guide should run the least risk, and they told us to come down and clear out. We expected a big fight, for Valo-Velasquiz had some ugly men with him, and he was a regular devil

himself; but when we got to the bottom, there was two mustangs awaitin', and we straddled 'em, and warn't long in leavin' those parts. Old Valo-Velasquiz and a dozen of his warriors tried to sneak along after us, but we was as well mounted as they, and we rode into Santa Fe without tradin' rifle shots with any of 'em. That was a strange thing, but," added the scout, significantly, "I don't think you've got any Quizto among them skunks down there."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HAND TO HAND.

The Apaches surrounding Hurricane Hill were more closely watched through the forenoon, for Dick more than once gave it as his opinion that they would make a rush before the day was over. To protect themselves as much as possible, the rock of which the hunter had spoken was forced into the passage-way, and an unremitting guard maintained, to prevent any sudden surprise.

It was near noon, when three Apaches were seen to leap upon their mustangs, one going north, another south and the third due west.

"Spies," explained Dick. "Lone Wolf is a little anxious about what Tom may do, and he sends them out to watch. If they find out anythin' they'll manage to telegraph him in time to get ready for anythin' comin'."

"Can you see Lone Wolf among them?"

"Can't make sartin of it," returned the hunter. "He knows that if I can get a crack at him he'll go, and so he takes care not to let me have the chance. Can you see anythin' off toward the mountains in the west?"

"Nothing but that Apache horseman going away like an arrow."

"There's the p'int from which our friends will come, if they ever come at all. Keep your eye on it while I take a look below."

The scout moved down the declivity, until he reached the place where it had been barricaded, when he stationed himself behind the obstruction, quite certain that something stirring would soon take place. It was his belief that when the time came, the Apaches, at a preconcerted signal, would rush tumultuously up the steep in a determined effort to overwhelm them all. Such a movement, of course, from the very nature of things, would give timely notice of its coming. His astonishment, therefore, may be imagined when, after he had stood in his position for a few minutes, rather listlessly and looking for no immediate demonstration, he perceived a dark body suddenly pass over his head. Turning about, he saw an Indian warrior speeding like a deer up the path toward the top of Hurricane Hill, where Ned Chadmund stood, all unconscious of his coming.

The hunter, astonished as he was at the daring feat, was not thrown off his guard. He knew that the Apache was not seeking the life of the lad, but only to open the way for the rest of the warriors to follow over the barricade. They believed that in the excitement Dick would turn and dash after the redskin, leaving the way open for the whole horde to swarm to the top of the Hill. But the clear-headed Dick maintained his position, only uttering a shout of warning to Ned Chadmund, in the hope that he might be prepared and "wing" the redskin the instant he should appear in view. Then, having done this, he stood back behind the jutting rock and held his rifle ready.

Within ten seconds a second Apache scrambled over the barricade, and started at full speed up the pathway, but he had no more than fairly started, than he fell headlong to the ground, pierced through and through by the rifle fired almost in his face. Almost the same instant a second appeared, when he tumbled backward, driven thence by the revolver of the hunter, who was as cool as an iceberg. This stemmed the tide, the crowding warriors hurrying back before the lion that lay in their path. All this was the work of a very few seconds, but it was scarcely effected, when a cry from the lad on top of the rock showed that he had discovered his danger. The next instant, white-faced and scared, he came dashing down the path, shouting to the hunter:

"Oh, Dick, save me! save me! there's an Indian after me!"

The savage, however, did not follow, and Dick, as the lad rushed into his arms, shook him rather roughly, and said:

"Keep still! Why do you make such a thunderin' noise?" The lad speedily controlled himself, and then the scout placed his revolver in his hand, and said: "Stand right here, and the minute a redskin shows himself, crack him over. Can you do it?"

"Haven't I proved it?"

"Yes; but you made such a racket here that I've lost faith in you."

"Try me and see."

Adding a few hasty words, the scout left him, and hurried to the top of the hill, without pausing to approach with his usual precaution.

His expectation was to encounter the redskin at once upon reaching it, but, to his surprise, he was nowhere to be seen, and he paused somewhat bewildered.

"I wonder whether he's got scart 'cause none of the rest followed him, and jumped overboard—"

At that instant something descended like a ponderous rock, and he realized that he was in the grip of the very redskin about whom he had been meditating. The miscreant had managed to crouch behind a rocky protuberance, and then made a sudden leap upon the shoulders of the hunter. As the Apache's scheme had miscarried thus far, and instead of being backed up by the other warriors, he was left alone to fight it out, he did not pause to attempt to make him prisoner, but went into the scrimmage with the purpose of ending it as briefly as possible. As he landed upon the shoulders of Dick the latter caught the gleam of his knife, and grasped his wrist just in time. Fearful that it would be wrenched from him, the Apache managed to give his confined hand a flirt, which threw it beyond the reach of both. By a tremendous effort Dick then succeeded in flinging him over his shoulder, although the agile redskin dropped upon his feet, and instantly flew at his antagonist like a tiger.

For several minutes the struggle raged with the greatest fury; but the Apache, in a contest of this kind, was overmatched. The hunter was much the superior, and he began crowding his foe toward the margin of the rock. Divining his purpose, he resisted with the fury of desperation; but it was useless, and the two moved along toward the brink like the slow, resistless tread of fate. Neither of them spoke a word, nor was a muscle relaxed. The scout knew that the instant the struggle was detected by those below, there would be a rush up the incline such as Ned Chadmund with his loaded and cocked revolver could not withstand. The fighting, therefore, was of the hurricane order from the beginning to the close.

There was one terrific burst of strength, and then, gathering the writhing savage in his arms, Dick Morris ran to the very edge of the plateau and hurled him over.

Down, down from dizzy heights he spun, until he struck the ground far below, a shapeless, insensible mass, falling almost at the feet of the horror-bound Apaches, who thus saw the dreadful death of one of their most intrepid and powerful warriors.

Without waiting to see the last of the redskin, the scout turned and hurried down to the relief of his young charge, and to be prepared for the rush which he was confident would be made the next minute. But it was not. The redskins had learned, from dear experience, the mettle of this formidable white man, and they had no wish to encounter it again.

The time wore away until the sun was at the meridian, and the heat became almost intolerable. Even the toughened old scout was compelled to shelter himself as best he could from its intolerable rays, by seeking the scant shadow of jutting points of the rock. Ned Chadmund suffered much, and the roiled and warm water in the old canteen was quaffed again, even though they were compelled to tip it more and more, until, toward the close of the day, Dick held it mouth downward, and showed that not a drop was left.

"No use of keeping it when we are thirsty," was the philosophic remark of the hunter. "It's made to drink, and we needn't stop so long as any is left; and bein' there ain't any left, I guess we'll stop. I've a mouthful or two of meat left, and we may as well surround that."

So they did; and when the sun sank down in the west, not a particle of food nor a drop of water remained to them.

"Now, Ned, my boy," said Dick, who always maintained a certain cheerfulness, no matter what the circumstances might be, "go to the lookout and tell me what you see."

The lad was absent some ten minutes, during which he carefully scanned every part of the horizon and took a peep down upon their besiegers.

"I find no sign of a living soul," he said, when he returned, "except the Apaches, and they're waiting until they can get us without fighting."

"Stay here while I take a peep."

Long and carefully Dick Morris gazed off to the west, in the direction of the mountains, and then something like a sigh escaped him, as he shook his head and muttered:

"It looks bad, it looks bad. If Tom succeeded, he ought to be in sight by this time. I see nothing of 'em, and from the way the redskins act down there, they seem to be sartin he's gone under. I don't mind for myself, for I'm ready to go any time; but I feel powerful sorry for the little fellow down there."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Long and hard rode Tom Hardyng after his escape from the beleaguering Apaches, for he was determined to save Ned and Dick if the thing were within the range of human possibility. His mustang seemed to understand what was expected of him, and he required no urging from his master to maintain his arrowy flight. It was a literal race between life and death. If he could reach Fort Havens in time to procure succor, the man and the boy were saved. If not, then they were doomed.

At daylight he was among the mountains, and the steed paused a few seconds to swallow a little water from a tiny stream. An hour later he ascended an elevation, and from his back the rider took a survey of the plain stretched out before him.

Far away in the distance a dark, stationary object was discerned. A keen eye could detect something fluttering above it in the wind. That was the star-spangled banner, waving above Fort Havens. Yonder was the destination toward which the little party had been laboring for days and which there was no assurance of still reaching. The scout had not yet passed half the distance intervening between the fort and Hurricane Hill. Mercy to his beast compelled him to give him a brief rest and an opportunity to eat a little food. Then, away again.

It was the middle of the afternoon, and Tom was nearing the fort, which was in distinct view a few miles ahead, when his attention was arrested by the sight of a number of men moving along to the north, and in a contrary direction to that which he himself was following. They suddenly emerged from some hills, and rode at a sweeping gallop. What surprised the hunter was the discovery that they were United States cavalry, that had evidently come from Fort Havens itself! How their appearance could be explained was more than he could understand; but he saw at once that if their co-operation could be secured, several hours' valuable time might be saved. He turned the head of his mustang in that direction and rode at the same tearing speed as before.

The cavalry detected his coming, reined up and awaited his approach. The afternoon was well advanced when the hunter drew rein in front of the company, and saluted the chief officer, who was Colonel Chadmund himself, the commandant of Fort Havens, at the head of seventy-five veteran cavalry. He recognized the scout, and rode forward to meet him.

"Any news of my little boy, Tom?" he asked, before their palms crossed.

"Alive and well."

"Thank God! thank God!" exclaimed the white-faced officer, trembling with joy. "Have the Indians caught him?"

"No; but he is in danger. What are you doing with these men here?"

"An Indian came into the fort several hours ago, with the word that Lone Wolf and a party of Apaches had driven two or three persons to the top of Hurricane Hill, where they would soon be caught unless assistance was sent them. The Indian is one of our regular scouts, in whom we have much confidence, and thinking it might be you, with possibly my little Ned, I put myself at the head of the company and started out to see. I had very little hope, however, of seeing him alive, for news had reached us of the massacre of the escort party in Devil's Pass."

Hardyng, in a few minutes, explained the situation, and the colonel was all excitement to be off again. Every hour—every minute, indeed—was precious to him, and, as the two rode back, the advance was resumed without a moment's delay. Instead of proceeding back in a direct line, however, over the path traveled by the scout, they made a detour to the northward, the configuration of the country being such that a much nearer approach, undiscovered, could be made from this direction than from any other.

There were several extra horses in the company, one of which was appropriated by Tom, while he left his own to roam over the plain and reach the fort whenever his disposition should take him in that direction. Colonel Chadmund had taken the precaution to mount all his men upon the best steeds at command, and they were driven into a rapid, telling pace. They made good progress, but when the sun set they had not yet reached a point from which the most distant view of Hurricane Hill could be obtained. A more moderate speed was kept up until midnight, when they went into camp, picketed their animals, and resumed the march at daybreak. The horses were forced to the greatest possible endurance, but never did miles seem so long. It was high noon before a point among the hills on the north was reached from which a fair view of the pile of rocks could be obtained. Colonel Chadmund produced his glass, and scrutinized the towering-like mass, in quest of some sign of the defenders. Not the least could be obtained; but he saw at the base the band of Apaches, spread out like a miniature besieging army, and this, to the minds of all, was proof that the garrison of Hurricane Hill were still at the post of duty.

It was necessary to approach as close to the spot as possible without discovery, and then to charge down upon the Indians with such fiery impetuosity that they would have no time to inflict any damage upon the brave defenders. The appearance of the cavalry would apprise them that the siege was at an end, and in the gnawing rage thereat, they might charge up the incline and open a fire, which would riddle Dick and Ned and from which there would be no escape.

Colonel Chadmund understood Indian warfare so well as to know that Lone Wolf had his scouts out, and it would be a difficult matter to avoid them. Still the attempt was made, and by the middle of the afternoon, the cavalry had reached a point barely two miles away without his presence being suspected.

"I've been watching the place for half an hour," said the colonel, as he lowered his glass, and handed it to Tom Hardyng, standing at his elbow, "and it seems to me that the top of Hurricane Hill is deserted, although the Apaches at the base seem to point the other way."

"Of course, of course," replied the hunter, impatiently. "You don't 'spose they'd stand up in sight all the time, like a couple of spoonies gettin' their pictures took? They're watchin' the path that leads up to where they be."

It required but a few minutes to conclude their preparations, when the seventy odd cavalymen, armed to the teeth, burst forth from the hills like a mountain torrent, and charged straight for Lone Wolf and his band. The latter, of course, were quick to detect it, and drew up with the purpose of making a fight; but when they took in the strength of the company approaching, they changed their minds, and broke and scattered like chaff before the whirlwind.

This was a severe disappointment, for the colonel and a dozen of his best Indian fighters had arranged to make a determined effort to rid the country of this pest. These were the best mounted in the company, and in their eagerness they sped straight ahead after the redskins, still hoping that some turn of fortune's wheel would give them the coveted chance. But the mustangs of the Apaches were fresh and fleet, and they had no purpose of meeting the United States cavalry where there was anything like an equal advantage; so they continued their flight with such persistent celerity that they soon vanished from view.

The heart of Colonel Chadmund misgave him as he galloped toward Hurricane Hill and saw no sign of life there. But while he was alternating between hope and despair, the figure of a man appeared around the corner of the rock, and then the form of a little boy was discerned, as he came running across the prairie with out-stretched arms.

"Oh, father! father!"

Colonel Chadmund leaped from the back of his horse and ran to meet him.

"My darling boy! God be thanked!"

The stern old soldier wept like a child as he caught him in his arms and hugged him to his breast, while more than one rough soldier, looking on, dashed the tears from his eyes and tried to look as if he were thinking of something else.

The danger was passed. Little Ned, carried in triumph to the fort, remained the appointed time with his father at this advanced frontier post, and when he returned to Santa Fe to his beloved mother it was with an escort which guaranteed his safety.

Thus ended his adventures with what were then the scourges of the great Southwest, but the memory of them is indelible and not to be subdued by the lapse of years. In his manhood days he looks back upon those troublous times when the wild riders left the bones of venturesome white men to whiten upon the banks of the Gila; and, although remembrance brings its thrill of excitement, it is coupled with a shudder whenever Ned Chadmund thinks of his passage "Through Apache Land."

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