

THRILLING TALE OF BUFFALO BILL.

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THE NIGHT RIDER.

LONG, COMPLETE
ADVENTURE
STORY.

By
MARK GLOVER.



THE
SCOUT'S
FLIGHT.

(See page 11.)

NO. 3.

VOL. 1.

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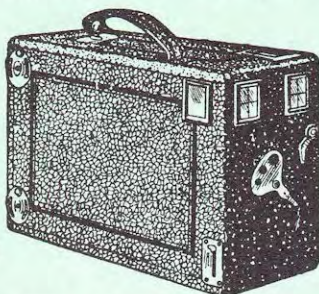
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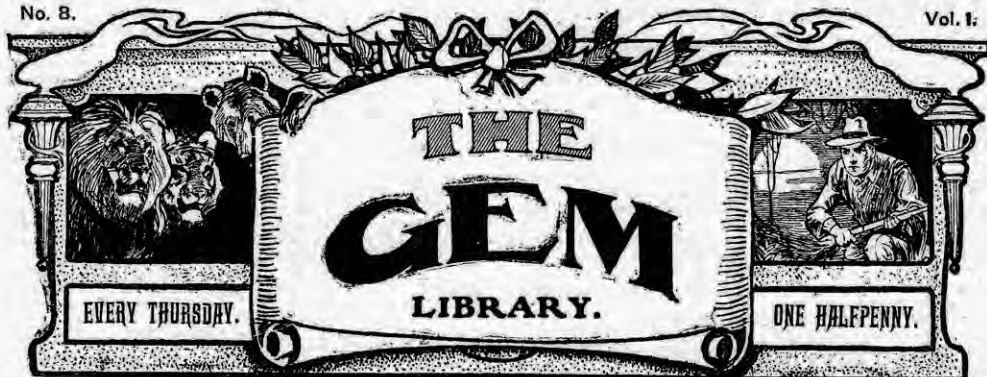
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The NIGHT RIDER



A Splendid
Tale of
Buffalo Bill.

By
MARK
GLOVER.

The Indian chief stooped down and pointed to the imprint of a footmark in the soft earth. (See page 8.)

CHAPTER I.

The Camp-fire—Buffalo Bill—The Night-riders—An Attack on the Camp—Cody to the Rescue.

"IT'S a camp-fire, sure! Yet who can be travelling so far out of the trail?"

Buffalo Bill stared out over the dark plain to where a faint red glow palpitated in the far distance. He had dismounted, leaving his horse to browse on the soft green grass that bordered a water-hole, whilst he climbed the slight eminence at the side so as to command a more extended view of the plain.

He had been riding towards his own camp, where he expected to meet his friend, Wolf's Tooth, a young chief of the Navajo tribe. The red glow of the distant fire had attracted his notice, and he was puzzled to know who it was that lay encamped there.

"It can't be reds, or cowboys, either," he thought. "They'd know better than to light a fire in these parts, at the risk of bringing down a hundred enemies on them. I guess I'll ride forward and see who 'tis. It won't make more'n a few miles difference, anyway."

He descended to the water-hole, mounted his horse—a magnificent animal, noted for its speed and endurance—and went

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off at a lope. He carried his Winchester repeating-rifle across the saddle, and his keen eyes kept watch on every side.

No one knew better than he the dangers of the plains and the need of vigilance at all hours in crossing them.

Bands of the savage Arapahos were constantly on the move, hunting the buffalo which still roamed free over them, and ready to attack all and sundry travellers they might come across.

Further to the west, where the great ranges of the Rocky Mountains rose high above the plains, lawless characters, more to be dreaded than the Red Indians themselves, had their hiding-places, from which they emerged to waylay stage coaches, waggon-trains, or any travellers who chanced to use the trails.

So it was that the scout had been startled to see the distant glow of a fire, knowing well that neither Indian nor outlaw would be foolhardy enough to light one, but that both would be attracted to it on the chance of getting something worth the taking.

It was only an hour after sundown, and he hoped to reach the place in time to warn the rash travellers of their danger. But he had not progressed more than a mile when his horse stopped short at the foot of a gentle rise, its head advanced, its ears pricking backwards and forward.

Buffalo Bill leaned low over the horn of the saddle. The horse had warning of some danger which even the scout had not been quick enough to detect. But as they waited Buffalo Bill heard the soft pad, pad of horse-hoofs some distance ahead.

Were the riders coming towards him? Or had they, too, described the fire, and were on the way to attack the camp?

A few seconds later the scout saw a mounted figure rise above the crest of the slope ahead, horse and man sharply silhouetted against the starlit sky.

Others followed—the first at a rapid rate up the slope and down the further side. The scout counted twenty-two riding Indian file, one behind the other.

"White men!" he ejaculated. "They've spotted the fire as sure as fate, and are on the jump for the camp."

He was in a quandary now. The band of desperadoes, as he guessed them to be, were travelling rapidly, and were between him and the rash travellers.

To give efficient warning to the latter without being discovered he would have had to make a big detour, and, even then, he might not arrive in time to be of use.

"I'll have to follow them," he thought. "If they attack the camp a few shots from their rear may make them imagine help is at hand, and they'll ride off. It's the only chance."

It required a good deal of care to keep near the night-riders without being discovered, but Buffalo Bill succeeded in doing so till they reached a bad piece of chaparral, or broken ground covered with thorn-bush. Here he lost sight of them altogether, but kept on till, on rising a steep slope, he saw the camp scarcely a quarter of a mile distant.

There were four "prairie schooners," or large waggons with canvas tilts, drawn up in a square, in the centre of which blazed the tell-tale fire. Close by, stacked out in two lines, were the horses and mules belonging to the outfit.

The scout made out the figures of two men who seemed to be on guard. The others must have retired to rest in or under the waggons. There was no sign of the party he had followed. Were they already creeping through the long grass to the attack?

Buffalo Bill was about to move forward when he saw a dozen men filing out of the bushes at some distance from his position. They were unmounted, and had soon vanished amongst the grass. A few moments after the remainder of the party rode out and went off rapidly to the right. They were going to surround the camp and attack the waggons from every quarter.

For a moment the scout thought of riding straight through them to rouse the sleeping emigrants. Then he decided to follow out his original idea. The waggons were well arranged. It would take some hard fighting to capture them, and, with the diversion he meant to effect he hoped the attacking force would withdraw.

But first he was anxious to find out who these men were. So considerable a band was a formidable menace to all those who used the Santa Fe route.

Who was their leader? If he could ascertain that it would be the most important step towards breaking up the gang. Any one would be of value, and he determined to obtain one.

He dismounted and left his cayuse in a hollow below the crest of the hill. The well-trained animal would remain there till he whistled for it. Then he crept down the hill and in amongst the grass on the track of the night-riders.

Two hundred yards further on he heard voices. Noiseless as a panther, he crawled on till he was but a few feet from the speakers—two men kneeling with their faces towards the camp.

"They'll be just about gittin' thar now, Jed," said one; "I 'low it's more'n ten minutes."

"Best lie still, anyway, pard, till we's sure. 'Twon't do to raise a racket afore they're ready."

"You stay right hyar, then, an' I'll nossey off a bit nigher to Mark. He's the likeliest man in the crowd to make a break, and we'd oughter had him under command."

He crept off, leaving his companion. The scout's opportunity had come sooner than he had hoped. But he must act before the signal was given.

Panther-like still, he crept nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting night-rider, paused for a moment, to gather himself together, and leaped straight forward.

His weight hurled the night-rider forward with his face to the ground, his two hands encircling the man's neck like steel bands, his knees pressed him to the earth, so that he could neither move nor utter a sound.

Still, the desperado was not beaten. Lying absolutely still for a few seconds, he suddenly exerted all his strength to escape from that deadly grip. The effort was futile. Buffalo Bill only gripped him the harder, and before long the sudden relaxing of the man's muscles proved that he had been choked into insensibility.

Then the scout rolled him over. A mask covered the upper part of his face. Buffalo Bill tore it off and stared at the death-like features.

"Jed Hall, of Sacramento!" he exclaimed to himself. "Then I can pretty well guess who the bulk of his men are, unless—"

He turned at a slight noise behind him, but too late to escape altogether from a murderous blow from a clubbed rifle.

Jed Hall's companion had returned, and it was only his desire not to alarm the camp by a gun-shot that had prevented him from shooting the scout dead. As it was, the blow with which he had intended to dash out his brains missed its mark owing to Buffalo Bill's sudden turn, glancing off the side of the head and nearly smashing the shoulder.

Buffalo Bill, with his left arm nearly paralysed for the time, sprang up and drew his revolver.

At the same instant a gun-shot rang out from the other side of the camp. It was the signal for the attack, and was followed by a general volley from every side.

The scout's opponent dashed in on him as he stood, still half dazed, and aimed another terrible blow with his rifle. The scout fired, but the weapon was struck from his hand, and, yelling to his comrade to come to his assistance, the outlaw closed with him.

Partially disabled as he was, Buffalo Bill fought at a disadvantage, but every second his head was clearing, the numbness was leaving his arm, and he more than held his own.

Too late the night-rider saw his mistake in closing with the redoubtable scout. He let go his grip with his right hand and grabbed for the knife in his belt. It was the scout's opportunity, and he took instant advantage of it.

With the force of a sledge-hammer he struck his opponent a blow under the jaw which lifted him clean off his feet and dropped him like a log, just as Jed Hall, recovering his senses, discovered what was going on, and grabbed for his gun.

Another of the band, hearing the shouts, was leaping through the long grass to help his comrades, and, seeing that the odds were all against him, Buffalo Bill leapt aside, and, flinging himself flat as Jed Hall fired at him, crawled rapidly away.

He had carried out one part of his programme in discovering Jed Hall's identity. He had now to carry out the second—namely, the help of the emigrants, who were now being fiercely assailed on every side.

CHAPTER 2.

The Cry—Chandler's Mad Act—The Night-riders Put to Flight—Kelder and Chandler Missing—Cody's Help Enlisted.

"ROUSE out—rouse out! The Indians are on us!" That awful cry, the prelude to many a dreadful massacre on the vast plains, amongst the rugged mountains, or in the gloomy forests of the American continent, woke every member of the party whom Buffalo Bill had determined to save.

If Thayer Kelder, the leader, had shown his want of caution by allowing a camp-fire to be lighted at night, he showed his coolness and courage now in repelling the attack which he had partially invited.

He was the first to tumble out, rifle in hand, as his son's terrible cry, followed by a rapid discharge of rifles, rang through the night.

The rest of the party, male and female, were not slow to follow, each man looking to his weapons, and even the

women snatching revolvers from the racks hanging at the side of each wagon.

"Steady, lads!" rang out Kelder's deep voice. "Each of you defend your particular wagon. The women get under shelter again and help the men by loading the spare rifles."

A second volley from every point round the camp hurried the men to obey his orders. His son, Jos Kelder, came leaping into the enclosure made by the prairie schooners.

"They're all round us," he cried; "some mounted and others on foot! I'm afraid the horses will stampeede!"

"We must risk that, son. If we can only stand the red fiends off, we may be thankful!"

He had no time for saying more. The enemy was charging straight up to the wagons.

Jos darted to one of them, and his rifle was quickly in use. Thayer Kelder waited to pile a great heap of dry grass and brush on to the fire.

That which had brought the enemy on them should, at any rate, by its kindly light, enable the defenders to see and shoot with more accuracy.

He was turning to help repel the attack, when a man jumped from one of the wagons and ran towards him, catching up a bucket of water, which stood handy for use.

He was dressed in black broadcloth, and his hair hung long under his broad-brimmed hat, giving him the appearance of a parson.

"You're mad, Thayer!" he cried, as he lifted the bucket. And before Kelder could stop him, he had emptied it over the blazing fire, extinguishing it almost entirely. "D'you want to give 'em light to kill you by?"

"No; but we want it to see where to shoot, Chandler!" answered Kelder angrily. "Pile on some dry stuff, you fool, and kindle it up again, for all you're worth. By heavens, hark to that! They're not redskins, but white desperadoes!"

He rushed towards the wagons, when a blow from behind stretched him on the ground, lifeless, to all appearance.

The uproar round the camp was now nearly deafening. The hideous shouts and oaths of the combatants rose above the almost incessant rifle-fire.

The defenders, robbed of their light by Chandler's mad act, fired almost at random.

The attackers, on the contrary, poured a hail of bullets on the wagons, on the chance of hitting those who lay concealed behind the flimsy tilts.

And only too many were hit. Groans and cries of men in agony mingled now with the other sounds.

The fire of the defenders slackened perceptibly.

Jos Kelder groaned as he realised that the rush of the desperadoes must succeed.

He lay beneath one of the wagons, firing steadily at any moving object he could see, though the want of light made his chances of hitting the object very small.

Then he heard a shrill whistle, and a swarm of mounted men swept up to the very wagon he was under, charged round either side of it, pouring in a terrible fire as they passed, dashed right across the enclosed space, and out past the wagons on the further side.

He had given up everything as lost as they charged past him; but now when he saw them disappearing again, instead of making a hand-to-hand attack on the defenders of the camp, he breathed again, sprang out, and shouted to his comrades to watch out on the side the men had gone.

But there was no need for them to worry. To everyone's amazement, the desperadoes appeared to be riding away.

They were firing still, but spasmodically; not, as it seemed, at the camp, but to the right, where the flash of other rifles was seen.

"Hurrah!" shouted Jos Kelder, as he realised what was happening. "There are friends to the rescue! Out and help them, boys!" And, without waiting to see if they followed him, he darted off.

"They're quit, sure 'nough!" cried Lige Hearne, a huge Virginian, whose rifle had played a great part in the defence. "Thar's some fillers out thar that's makin' 'em skip some. Reckon we all shan't be missin' our beauty sleep, after all."

"Don't be too pesky certain 'bout that, neither, you, Lige!" rejoined Bart Olney. "That's Thayer Kelder and some others out thar. They's fools for their pains. The night-riders'll jest natchally chaw 'em up, and then come back and clean us out!"

"Thayer Kelder out thar?" cried Lige and others, in astonishment.

"That's so--leastways, he ain't nowhar around, and more's Lawyer Chandler nor Slick Andrews."

Lige raised his stentorian voice in a shout that must have been heard far out on the plains.

"Oh, Kelder! You, Kelder!" he yelled. "Come back out thar, yer blame fool! They's on'y foolin' yer!"

As if in answer to his call a man came leaping over the long grass towards the camp. The fire, burning fiercely again, showed Lige it was a stranger, and his rifle went to his shoulder.

"Hold on!" cried the new-comer, throwing his hands up to intimate his friendly intentions. "Hold on; I'm a friend!"

"Advance, friend, and give us yer handle!" answered the Virginian grimly, still keeping his rifle levelled at the advancing stranger. "Ef yer try to come any tricks, ye're dead meat!"

"As you would have been if I hadn't played tricks," laughed the stranger, as he advanced into the full light of the fire. "I'm William Cody, better known, perhaps, as Buffalo Bill, scout in Government service."

Instantly Lige dropped his rifle, sprang forward and grasped the other's hand.

"Wal, wal," he roared, "do tell! And it wuz you as made the varmints run--heh?"

All the others crowded round to welcome the scout, who, however, cut their congratulations short.

"You're not through the wood yet!" he cried. "Two of my friends are all the force I have to help you. The night-riders may return yet. What losses have you suffered?"

"Reckon we's all bin chipped a bit," cried Lige, who had been slightly wounded in two places, whilst those round were also bleeding from more or less serious hurts. "We'd best hustle round 'n' see what's the damage."

A rapid examination was made. In the wagons four men and one woman were found dead, and two others so badly wounded they couldn't move. The rest of the party, ten in all, gave mutual assistance in binding up their wounds.

"Who's the leader here?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Thayer Kelder, out f'n Chicago."

"Where is he now?"

"B'gum, that's whar ye have me! Chasin' after them reptiles," I reckoned. Ah, here's his boy, Jos, and two others!"

At that moment Jos Kelder bounded into the camp. Behind him appeared a man, in the dress of a trapper, and a young Indian, at whose belt hung two freshly-severed scalps.

"Where's my father?" cried young Kelder, glancing round.

"We was jest tryin' to answer that kernundrum when you ran up," said Lige. "Didn't yer spot him, way out yonder?"

"No. Has he followed the night-riders?"

"Seems so--leastways, he ain't hyar, and Lawyer Chandler's missin' too."

"Then I fear they've been carried off in that last rush through the camp," said Buffalo Bill slowly.

A dreadful cry from one of the wagons greeted his words.

"That's my mother, sir," groaned Jos Kelder. "If what you say is true and any harm befalls my father, it will kill her! But why should they carry him off?"

"For several reasons," said the scout, in a low voice. "They will probably hold him for ransom. Is he a man of means?"

The question seemed to stagger Jos Kelder. He drew the scout on one side.

"My father is wealthy," he explained; "but he realised all his property before we came West, intending to buy land and stock a ranch near Denver. He holds a draft on the Denver Bank for all his fortune, except what is in these wagons."

"And he carries it on him?"

"Yes, with the other papers. He would never leave it away from him for a moment."

"Then I'm afraid his case is serious. I don't doubt for a moment that these men knew of his movements, and have perhaps been waiting to waylay him for some days."

"They have undoubtedly carried him off with the idea of ransoming him. They will search him, find the draft, and, knowing they have got all he possesses, will probably kill him. They will then hurry to Denver, personate your father, who, I suppose, is known there, cash the draft and disappear."

Jos Kelder shuddered, and clutched the scout's arm.

"They are welcome to the money, if only we can save my father's life," he said earnestly. "Is there no way of doing so?"

"All that can be done, I will do," declared the scout. "But there is a chance of saving his fortune, anyway. I will follow the trail of the night-riders, with Wolf's Tooth to help me. If Thayer Kelder is to be rescued, we'll do it!"

"But you must ride for Denver without delay. Trapper Harn shall guide you. You must, at all hazards, reach the city before Jed Hall or any of his associates do, so, and stop

the payment of the draft. Once that is done, it will only need for you and your mother to prove your identity in coming by your own."

"I thank you; but my business is to rescue my father and Lawyer Chandler!" declared the young man. "I'll go with you."

"And thereby spoil any chance we may have," broke in the scout. "No, sir; it needs men trained to the utmost in all the perils and mysteries of the mountains and plains to carry out such a task! To have one with us who was not a past master in woodcraft would be fatal to all concerned. Your part in the business is to save your father's fortune; mine to save him and enable him to enjoy it! Will you do it?"

"You leave me no choice!" said Jos Kelder bitterly. Then, as if realising his ingratitude, he again seized Buffalo Bill's hand. "Don't think me ungrateful for all you have done, and are about to do, for the sake of my father and our people!" he cried. "I am only anxious to save him, and I am more than willing to be guided by you. I will do all you wish."

"And we'll beat them yet, lad!" cried the scout cheerfully. "We'll start as soon as ever the horses are ready. Yours stampeded, but I don't fancy they'll run far. They passed me to the south there. Wolf's Tooth and I will round them up whilst you attend to your people."

And so it came that scarcely two hours after the camp had been attacked, two parties rode away amid the encouraging cheers of their comrades.

Jos Kelder and Trapper Harn struck out nearly due north, whilst Buffalo Bill and Wolf's Tooth galloped west, towards the hills, on the trail of the dreaded night-riders.

CHAPTER 3.

Trapper Harn Stands Treat—Two of the Gang—Chandler Arrives with a Strange Story.

"CRIPPLE CREEK that is. Not much of a place to look at, maybe, but big enough to give us a meal and a feed for the broncos, and a few hours' rest."

"They want a rest, too, Harn. We must have ridden sixty miles."

"Add ten to that, and you'd be a bit nearer the mark, lad! Don't open yer mouth too much in the village, though. They'll be drillin' ye through with questions. We're just out on a huntin' trip, remember, and ain't talkin' much, anyway."

Jos Kelder nodded acquiescence, and they rode on down the slope to the "city," which lay nestling at the foot of the hill.

It was nothing more than a collection of frame and log houses at present, but the streets and blocks of the prospective city had been pegged out. Cripple Creek's prospects were largely in the future.

A dozen or so men were lounging about the main street as the two rode in. A few more were "holding up the walls" of the only store in the place, each man placidly chewing his plug like so many ruminants.

Harn passed on to the saloon and hotel a bit further up the street, outside which, tethered to the hitching-rail, were a number of rough, hardy-looking bronchos, carrying the cumbersome saddles and stirrups used by the plainsmen.

Their owners were inside the saloon, and the trapper gave Jos another warning look as they dismounted and tied their horses up with the others.

"How do, boys!" he cried, as they entered, to see a number of rough-and-tough fellows standing round the bar.

Each man might have passed for a first-class specimen of desperado, to judge by face, dress, and armament, yet they were mostly cowboys or miners, harmless and pleasant enough, unless given cause to be otherwise.

"How do, boys! Will you liquidade? Name yer antidotes! Set 'em up, Bill, an' don't mind me!"

Including the whole room in this general invitation to refresh at his expense, Trapper Harn took a greasy five-dollar bill from his pocket, and threw it on the bar.

The bar-tender knew him, apparently.

"Line up, boys!" he shouted, slinging the glasses and bottles along to each man. "Harn ain't often this way, and when he is we ache to make him welcome!"

There wasn't much hanging back on the part of the crowd, except in the case of two men, who sat on a bench at the further side of the saloon.

One of them had his head bound up, and his left arm appeared to have been hurt as well. The other had a scarf tied tight round his thigh, and seemed almost unable to move.

He of the bound up head advanced to get his drink, swallowed it down, and turned to carry his comrade's share to him.

Harn was watching them out of the tail of his eye.

"Set 'em up again, Bill," he laughed. "It's so plaguery dusty my throat's like a lime-kiln, and I reckon you fliers is the same way."

Again the delighted crowd availed themselves of this unlooked-for generosity, and Harn seized the opportunity to whisper to Jos:

"Back me up, lad; but don't shoot unless I call ye."

Then he turned and faced the two at the table, his right hand carelessly dropped on the butt of his revolver.

"Bin runnin' up agin trouble—eh, pards?" he asked pleasantly enough.

The man with the wounded head turned and faced him. There was a nasty look in his eye.

"Reckon you can't help us ef we have!" he retorted. "I guess you ain't a doc, anyway. That's who we're waitin' for."

"Not the best place to wait in, either," returned Harn, still speaking pleasantly. "Apt ter be too heatin' fer the blood, I'm thinkin'; an' hot blood ain't good for bullet wounds."

"Who said they was bullet wounds?" growled the man. "You'd best look to your own business, and not come shovin' yer nose where you ain't wanted."

"Just what I mean ter do, somie," laughed the trapper. Suddenly his guns leapt out, covering each man.

"Hands up, both of you!" he ordered. "That's so! Now, don't dare to so much as wink while my pard attends to you. Jest walk up, Jos, an' secure them irons, will ye? Sick men didn't oughter have 'em aroun'. They're dangerous."

The other occupants of the saloon, electrified by the sudden turn of affairs, stood dubiously as Jos Kelder quickly secured each of the wounded men's belt of arms.

If Harn hadn't been known to the bar-tender there might have been instant trouble.

"What's your game, Harn?" cried the latter, stopping in the act of mixing a gin-sling for one of the customers. "Friends of yours?"

"Not kerzackly friends, Bill; but acquaintances jest the same. We sorter ran up agin each other last night. Yit I ain't so sure they ain't friends neither. Leas'ways, I'd hate so ter lose sight of 'em fer a time that I'd like ter see 'em put in a close, comfortable sorter place, whar they isn't likely ter get hurt by takin' too much exercise."

"If that's all you want," laughed the bar-tender, "I guess Abe Bolman's shack'll about suit you. We ain't spotted a gaol yet in the city, though the plans is out for a dandy."

"That's all very well, Bill," growled one of the other men, a big bearded cowboy; "but these hyar men's our guests, I reckon, and we all, as citizens of this everlastin' enlightened town, has got to have a little say as to what's happenin'. Do you get me, boys?"

A deep murmur of assent went up from the others. They closed in round the trapper, some of them handling their guns in an ominous way.

"You're talkin' plum sense, pard," said Harn, not giving way an inch. "I'd have axed your permission to talk to these two afore now ef it could 've bin done without trouble. But they's both on 'em mighty quick on the shoot, and I 'lowed it was best to act first an' talk after."

"That's all right 's far as it goes," admitted the cowboy. "But you kin talk now, and we'll hear the rights of the case. Fire ahead!"

"These fliers, then," said the trapper slowly, "b'long to a gang of night-riders. You's some of you heard of Jed Hall, I guess?"

A low whistle of astonishment told him he'd hit the mark.

"Wal, he and a score or more, includin' our friends thar, broke up a wagon-train last night jest below Willow Springs. They was driven off, and I, Bill Cody, and a friend of his helped to do it. I reckenized that one and his pard warn't far off, I reckon. That's whar they got them wounds, and I'll stake my life on it!"

"Your word's good enough every time, Harn!" cried the bar-tender. "What'd you want us to do?"

"Keep these brutes in a safe place till you hear fr'm me."

"He's talkin' through his hat!" cried one of the desperados. "We wasn't within a hundred miles o' Willow Creek!"

"Yes, you were!" cried a voice behind them all, and Jos Kelder uttered a cry of joy to see the lank form of Lawyer Chandler standing in the doorway.

"It's me, right enough, Jos!" cried Chandler, as he stepped forward. "Just ridden up in time, I see. What have you done with Thayer Kelder?" he added, turning savagely on the two prisoners.

They seemed paralysed by his appearance, but the one who had done all the talking again swore he knew nothing of what they were saying.

"It's a lie!" shouted Chandler. "The rascals grabbed me and Thayer Kelder in that rush and carried us off. Then they split up into different parties. I was put in the

charge of four men, and only escaped by a bit of extraordinary luck. They chased me for twenty miles or more. These men were amongst the gang. That I'll swear to! You'll have to put 'em in gaol to wait trial."

"Best string 'em up right away," suggested the cowboy. But the lawyer and Harn were both against it.

"Maybe we shall want them later on, and they must be tried properly. Besides, Thayer Kelder has been carried off, and we may learn from them where to look for him. Lock them up safely and guard them well."

This, after long arguments, was decided on. The two prisoners were marched off to Abe Bolman's shack, a strong log building from which it would be more than difficult for them to escape, and a guard was placed at the door.

The three friends then returned to the saloon, Jos Kelder asking a hundred questions regarding his father, few of which the lawyer could answer.

"It's some consolation to know he's alive," he said. "Perhaps Buffalo Bill will hit on the right trail and rescue him yet."

"If anyone kin do it, he will, and you kin freeze ter that!" ejaculated the trapper. "Ef I was a runaway I'd rather have a hull passle o' redskins on my trail than Buffalo Bill. He's dead hot!"

"Let us only hope he'll succeed, then," said the lawyer fervently. "I'd give ten years of my life to rescue Thayer Kelder. And now what's your programme?"

"To get to Denver with as little delay as possible. Will you ride with us, or wait for the wagon-train? They'll have to pass this way, and should be here in a couple of days."

"Then I'll just wait," said the lawyer. "I'm not used to this hard riding, and my bones ache as if I had been beaten with clubs. I'll stay and look after those two birds. They mustn't escape."

"Good! And we'll turn in for a couple of hours," agreed the trapper. "The broncs will be freshened up by then, and we kin travel by night purty nigh as fast as by day."

He and Jos accordingly, after a substantial meal, turned in to sleep just as the sun was sinking behind the western mountains.

CHAPTER 4.

The Escape—The Enemy Again—Harn is Wounded—Cody Arrives In Time—On the Trail.

It seemed to Jos as if he'd only just closed his eyes when he was roused by someone dashing into the room.

"Hey, you fliers!" shouted the bar-tender. "Wake up! Your birds is flown!"

"What?" roared the trapper, coming off his bunk with a jump, wide awake in a moment. What's that you're telling us?"

"Them two has broke out, Harn! How, goodness on'y knows! But they's clean gone, and two of the best horses in the place with them."

Harn and Jos were speechless with rage and disgust for a moment. Then the trapper dashed through the door.

"That's somebody got ter pay fer this!" he cried. "They didn't git out by their own alone! What's the feller we left on guard?"

He raced down the street, Jos and the bar-tender beside him. A small crowd of "citizens," some of them carrying lanterns, stood in front of the extemporised "prison."

The door was wide open, Abe Bolman himself standing just inside.

"Tain't no use kickin', pard!" he cried, as the trapper, snorting with rage, burst through the crowd and faced him. "They's gone, sure pop, and knocked Andy Tate on the head, too."

Andy Tate was the guard who had been left to watch them.

"How long 've they bin gone?"

"Dunno. Mout be haf an hour, and mout be two. One of the boys found Andy lyin' like he was dead and the door open not twenty minutes since."

"And then what?"

"He come runnin' up to the s'loon whar we all was, and we nipped out. That lawyer chap was hoppin' mad. He and a dozen others has gone chasin' off after them, but I guess they'll have to shake dust to ketch 'em."

"Was they mounted, then?"

"Yes, sircs. Waltzed off with Mark Abbott and Duf Hill's broncs. The best animiles this side o' the Rockies. Shoo, they're a pair of knowin' ones! You'd better b'lieve!"

"Best have lot us strung 'em up when we had 'em!" cried one of the bystanders. "Nothin' like doin' a thing on time."

The trapper stared hopelessly at Jos.

"Wal, it can't be helped," he said at last. "They've gone, and it ain't no manner o' good us standin' yaupin' over it. We'd best nosey off, pard. We're late, as it is!"

"And what about Chandler?"

"Oh, him! He'll be all right. He's with friends. He'll

have another bone-shaking, and git back hyar agin ter rest a bit till the wagon-train comes through. Let's git!"

Not another word would he say whilst they were saddling-up. They had slept more than the two hours, and Harn knew that every minute was of value now. They had a good sixty miles to cover, and he knew that Jed Hall, or whoever was the leader of the night-riders, would let little grass grow under his feet till that draft was cashed. So, amidst the good wishes of the Cripple Creek citizens, the two galloped off, their broncs fresh as paint after their feed and rest.

Jos Kelder found the trapper a poor companion so far as talking went during that ride. Not that there was too much opportunity for speech. The going was rough, and Harn urged on his bronc at a pace that seemed to spell disaster.

"Better ease up a bit!" cried Jos, after they had covered a good fifteen miles. "The broncs won't last if we push 'em too hard!"

"They'll have a restin'-spell soon," answered the trapper. "We're not above a mile from the river. We'll cross the ford, and give 'em a breather t'other side."

"You're not expecting to catch up with those two, are you, Harn?"

"Not me! They'd know better than to keep to the trail. They're 'way off up in the hills by now, rot 'em! It'll be a cold day when we set eyes on 'em again."

A few minutes later they descended towards the river, which flowed, broad and deep, across their path.

The trail led to its widest part, where it shallowed considerably, enabling the stage-coaches and waggon to ford in safety, except in flood times. Harn scanned the soft ground by the water's edge carefully.

"Jest ez I thought," he exclaimed. "Thar ain't no hoof-prints showin' thar—lastways, not fresh ones! The blamed cusses never rid this way, or—"

A sharp report from the left, and a bullet sung past his head. Two more shots, almost together, as he slipped from the saddle, and Jos Kelder's bronco, leaping up, fell forward, hurling its rider into the water.

In a second the trapper had slipped under some bushes growing near, his rifle ready, waiting for a chance to spot the enemy.

Jos Kelder got back to the bank, but was wise enough to let little but his head show above water. That was mark enough, however, for those who had laid the ambush. A couple of bullets struck dangerously near.

The trapper, seeing the flash of the gun, fired where he judged the marksmen to be.

"Keep along under cover of the bank, pard," he called, in a low voice. "They's off thar amongst the willows."

Jos took the hint, and soon joined the trapper, without again attracting notice.

"We must change our ground," whispered Harn. "Keep yer eyes peeled, sonnie, and don't hang too long on the trigger ef ye see a chance to shoot. Follow me jest as quick as a mole!"

He crawled along on his stomach under the bushes, making for a high elevation fifty yards back from the river, where he hoped to get a commanding position.

All was silent as death round them now. The enemy were not going to help them by revealing their whereabouts.

To Jos it seemed an interminable time before the trapper stopped. They were at the foot of the slope, but had reached the edge of the bushes.

To gain the top of the rise they would be exposed to the watchful eyes of those concealed amongst the willows.

"Stay here, sonnie," whispered the trapper; "I'll make a break. Once I'm up thar I kin keep their fire down. Come when I whistle, and come right smart!"

He rose and ran, stooping, but with extraordinary speed, up the exposed slope.

He was half-way up before the enemy spotted him. Then their rifles spoke, and it was only the darkness that spoilt their aim and saved Harry from instant death.

As it was, he was hit, stumbled, and fell, but was up again in a second, and gained the top of the rise, to sink down out of sight both of Jos and the enemy.

Once again silence reigned supreme, a silence which became almost insupportable to the youngster lying under the bushes.

What had happened to Harn? he wondered. Perhaps that effort he had made to reach the top of the rise was his last. He might be lying dead now, up there, or, at any rate, too badly wounded to move.

Minute after minute passed, and no sign was made. At last Jos Kelder could stand it no longer. He had not been schooled in the life of the plains, and could not stand this test of quiet waiting.

Had he been brought up to the frontiersman's life, he would have known that "sitting tight" is half the battle in Indian warfare, when the combatants often lie for hours behind some tuft of grass, a jutting stone, or mossy tree-

trunk, waiting for the slightest move, and so get the first chance to shoot.

As it was, his patience became mastered by his anxiety to know what had happened to Harn, and, forgetful of the trapper's injunction, he rose and ran swiftly up the slope.

He had reached about the same place where Harn had fallen, when the silence was broken by the almost simultaneous reports of three rifles.

Jos Kelder, shot in two places, dropped and lay still.

Following almost instantly on these reports came the flash of Harn's rifle, once, twice, and, after a slight pause, a third time.

The enemy replied from the willows, but their bullets sang high above the trapper's head.

"Keep that up, ye varmints!" he muttered as he returned the fire. "The more ye shoot, the better I like it! I'll pay some of ye for droppin' the fool tenderfoot!"

But the enemy now changed their tactics: They had put one man hors de combat and located the other. They meant to attack Harn from different points. One remained amongst the willows. The other two crept away.

The trapper, guessing what they would do, watched keenly all round.

A dark object, which he had not noticed before, on a bare piece of ground, attracted his attention. He thought it moved, but the motion was so gradual he could only test it by lining the object up with a tree just beyond. At the end of five minutes it had moved a foot.

Harn drew a bead on it, and fired, and the man, leaping up, fell forward with extended arms.

"That levels it up a bit," he thought grimly, when from behind him a shot rang out, and the bullet grazed his head, the shock nearly rendering him senseless.

He tried to turn round, but his head swam, and he sank down again, half-rose, to see a man bounding towards him, tried to lift his rifle, when he heard a distant shout, saw the figure stop, turn and double back to the bushes.

After that he lay still, hearing as in a dream the reports of firearms, which appeared to get further and further away, until they died off in the distance or ceased altogether.

He was roused by the sound of voices near, and, turning, saw Buffalo Bill and Jos Kelder bending over him.

"Ah, that's better!" exclaimed the scout. "I thought you'd pegged out this time, Harn."

"Nary a bit of it, pard!" he cried, putting his hand up to his head where the bullet had grazed him. "It was nip an' tuck, though. An eighth of an inch lower down an' it would have bin Kingdom come! And you ain't killed, neither, young un?"

"No," laughed Jos; "I got a bullet in the ribs that knocked all the wind out of me, but it glanced off, and made nothing but a flesh-wound, after all."

"Sure! An' me lying up hyar like a two-year-old that can't stand a bit of a knock!" exclaimed the trapper, with infinite disgust. "But tell me," he added, turning to Buffalo Bill, "how come you up hyar?"

"By following the trail of some of the rascals who played it up on the camp. I followed it as long as there was light to see, and was camping a couple of miles up the river when I heard the pop of rifles, and came along to see what it was all about."

"And I guess you come jest in time—eh?"

"It seems so. You dropped one man just as I was wondering where the fuss had come from. Another fellow, in that bush of willows, spotted me, and got away, after yelling to the others. I hunted round, but couldn't find anyone, so came on here to see who they were gunning after, and found you."

"And you don't know who it was we was up agin?"

"No; but it's easy to guess. Probably some of the party I have been trailing all these hours. But the man you killed still lies there. We should find out something by seeing who he is."

Harn rose, but nearly fell again.

"Blame my cats!" he muttered, as his hand dropped to his thigh. "I'd forgotten that. They dropped me on the slope. Tote me down to the river, Bill! I'll have to doctor this place, anyway!"

With the scout's assistance he got down to the water, and, ripping open the leg of his deerskin breeches, discovered a bullet-wound, which was bleeding freely.

The ball had passed clean through, but, fortunately, had missed the bone.

The scout soon bound the place up with a wet scarf, and after the trapper had bathed his head and stopped the bleeding, he declared he was fit to go anywhere.

"That won't be far," said Buffalo Bill. "Jos Kelder's horse lies there dead, and yours has gone off on its own. You can't get to Denver now, except on your own marrow bones."

"And then we'd be too late! What's ter be did?"

"And then we'd be too late! What's ter be did?"

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"Simple enough, Harn," laughed the scout. "I'll keep right on to Denver and stop the draft. You and Kelder can just get quietly back to Cripple Creek and wait for the rest of the party."

"And how 'bout the hold-ups? Ain't you goin' ter foller 'em up?"

"Later on. Wolf's Tooth is after another party of them. It's my belief they are running for Denver now, and if we want to stop the money I must get on. Most likely I shall tumble up against them in the city, and so kill two birds with one stone."

"Kill the hull bilin' of 'em, Bill!" cried the trapper. "They're too good ter live. Let's go and see who 'twas I dropped afore you git it!"

They made their way to the dead man's side. Harn rolled him over to see his face.

"B'gum, if it ain't one of the two we coralled at Cripple Creek!" he exclaimed. "The other must've been amongst the willows. But there was a third. Whar could they have picked him up?"

"Most likely, as I said, he was one of those I have been trailing. This man is Tod Hubbard, a crony of Jed Hall's and that 'cute rascal Plug Howe. If Howe's in this game, there's going to be lots more trouble."

"Geewhiz! That's so. But I thought he was run into Mexico after that business at La Junta?"

"So he was. But it doesn't follow that he stayed there. He's got his agents scattered about, and it's more than probable that he's started afresh in these parts, where he isn't much known."

"Jed Hall's had enough, Bill; but Jed Hall and Plug Howe's a combination that will take some beatin'!"

"I believe you, and, that being so, I'll get away to my horse and ride for Denver without further delay. Look out for trouble on your way back to the Creek, and don't go by the trail, in case it is watched."

"Trust me for that, pard! I hate to go back, but a man without a hoss in these parts is on'y half a human. S'long!"

The scout waved his hand, and, slinging his rifle into the hollow of his arm, bounded away, and was lost to sight amongst the bushes.

CHAPTER 5.

Cody Loses His Pony and Uses the Navajo's—At the Bank—Too Late!—"The Bonanza."

BUFFALO BILL had nearly reached the place where he had left his horse, when he heard a well-known signal, the bushes parted, and the tall form of Wolf's Tooth appeared.

"What does the young chief here?" cried the scout, in the Indian language. "Has he followed the trail of the pale-faces?"

"My father has said it," answered the Navajo quietly; "yet the trail did but lead to where the great white chief had rested."

"Then we have followed the same trail. Has Wolf's Tooth discovered which way it leads?"

The young chief turned and pointed to the east.

"The palefaces crossed the rushing water below the falls," he said. "They ride towards the great village."

"To Denyer—eh?" said the scout, as if to himself. "Then those we followed were not the party that ambushed Harn. Did my brother?" he asked, "know of other palefaces lying near the ford?"

The chief did not answer, but, beckoning to the scout to follow, led him to the bank of the river, stooped down, and pointed to a footmark impressed in the soft earth.

The footprints pointed away from the ford towards the place where Buffalo Bill had camped.

Still, without speaking, the young chief led the scout quickly on, occasionally pointing out other impressions made by the same feet, till they stopped at the tree to which Buffalo Bill had tethered his horse.

The cayuse was gone!

"The paleface has stolen the great chief's horse," said the young chief rapidly. "Wolf's Tooth heard the sound as they swam the river, as they followed the trail to the camp. He read the signs which told him his father was yonder"—pointing in the direction of the ford. "He would have followed the paleface thief, but he feared his father, the great white chief, was in trouble, and remained to search for him."

"And my brother did not see this horse-thief?"

"My father has said. Yet will he follow the trail—"

"Too late for that!" cried the scout, who realised that this man who had stolen the horse was one of those who had attacked Harn.

No doubt he had imagined more than one of Harn's

"And then we'd be too late! What's ter be did?"

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friends were near, and had bolted by way of the river-bank, and, as luck would have it, had stumbled across the scout's camp, spotted the cayuse, and made instant use of so opportune a means of escape.

"Too late to hope to catch!" repeated Buffalo Bill. "He's too far ahead, and mounted on the best horse in the country. My brother must lead me his pony. I will ride for Denver. Wolf's Tooth must keep on the trail of those we followed thus far."

The young chief nodded, and slipped away, returning shortly leading his pony, one of the small but hardy Indian breed.

The animal carried only a strip of blanket for saddle, whilst a single rope, twisted round its lower jaw, served for bridle.

The scout shook his head as he saw that the pony limped slightly. It had been travelling incessantly for many hours, and looked a sorry specimen compared to his own cayuse.

"It'll have to serve," he muttered. "I may come across another later on."

Then, after giving Wolf's Tooth some further directions, he mounted, rode back to the ford, and crossed the river.

Considering the state of his mount, the scout dared not hurry, but had to content himself with going at a lope, the natural gait of the half-wild ponies of the redskins, which they can keep up for hours.

Unfortunately the lameness increased, and he was forced to give the animal a rest, bathing its feet and legs in a cool spring.

Then on again, with occasional halts, till the sky lightened and the sun rose.

By then he had covered twenty-five to thirty miles, but the worst part of the journey was to come; and the pony, stout-hearted as it was, could go no further.

There was nothing for it but to leave it and go on on foot. There were still nearly fifteen miles of hilly country lying between him and Denver.

Would he be able to cover them in time to reach the bank before business commenced?

He could but try, and started off, running easily and lightly, yet not at such a pace as would soon exhaust him. It was, indeed, necessary for him to husband his strength, for he had been in saddle and afoot for over thirty-six hours, and even his iron frame was feeling the effects.

Higher rose the sun in the skies, the heat adding to the difficulties of the journey till at last Denver, even then a city of importance, lay before him. There was still time to reach the bank before it opened. Two miles from the town he was overtaken by the Medalia coach, and glad enough he was to climb aboard and take a seat by the driver, old Sam Halter. The latter was full of questions as to Buffalo Bill's business, the scout telling him just as much as was necessary to the occasion.

"I see a feller way back along the road," said Sam, "who looked mighty sick. He was hangin' on to a flea-bitten bronc, which looked as ef it had travelled from the back of beyond. I lay it wuz one of the crowd."

"What sort of man? What was he like?"

"A little, mean-lookin' skunk, tied up in half a dozen places! He turned off up the trail to Porkipine."

"He's not the man I'm after, then," declared the scout.

"It's more than likely he's one of the lot that attacked Harn at the crossing, but he's not my meat."

Sam Halter laid the lash across the backs of the team.

"Then we'd best hurry," he said. "I thought mebbe he mout be the one you wanted, and it'd've saved you a bit ef you c'd've coralled him. So Jed Hall an' Plug Howe's out agin—eh? Then there's likely to be lively times for the Medalia coach. It's bin mortal quiet on the trail lately. I guess I'll hev ter look over my guns and take out the best-runnin' teams, in case o' trouble. But hyar we is, Bill! I'll be runnin' out at six sharp to-night, an' ef you's comin' my way we will be glad of yer comp'ny. S'long!"

The scout swung down from his seat, and made his way rapidly to the bank, greeting several acquaintances that he saw amongst the crowd that thronged the side walks. The clock over the Renick building struck nine as he reached the bank. The doors were open, and he entered.

"Is Manager Behr in?" he asked one of the cashiers.

"He's engaged just now."

"Who's with him?"

"Can't say. He was round early, and the man had been waitin' some time. Reckon he won't be long."

"Take in my name," said the scout, rapidly writing a short message on a slip of paper. "The business is urgent." The cashier glanced at the name, and called up one of the clerks.

"Look alive with this!" he said, when at that moment a glass door at the other side of the room opened, and Manager Behr, with the chief cashier, entered.

"You want to see me, Cody?" he asked, after glancing at the paper the clerk handed him.

"Yes—badly! It's about a draft on your bank made out to Thayer Kelder."

"What about it?" asked the manager sharply.

"You must stop payment on it."

"Too late. It's been put through."

"You've paid out on it? When?"

"Just now. The draft was presented, and, though it was not in strict business hours, Kelder had urgent need of the money, and I obliged him."

"Kelder? Thayer Kelder here?"

"Why, certainly! He's only just quit by my private door."

"What was he like?"

"A tall, clean-shaven man, brown hair, and grey eyes, with a scar on the left temple."

"Plug Howe, for a million!" cried the scout. "You paid the draft in full?"

"Certainly! A thousand dollars in gold, the rest in bills. But what are you saying? Plug Howe! What's he got to do with it?"

"Everything! He raised a gang and attacked Kelder's camp night before last, captured Kelder and another man, killed or wounded the others, and got clear away!"

"And you've followed to stop the draft?"

"That's so. He stopped me forty miles or more from Denver, stole my horse, and so got ahead of me."

"And of us all!" cried Manager Behr savagely. "I don't often break my rule as to doing business out of hours; but he pitched such a yarn, and showed me a whole parcel of papers proving identity, that I was clean roped in."

"And by now he's well away!" cried the scout bitterly.

"There are a hundred friends in the city who'd hide him."

"If he stays in the city. He's more likely to run."

"Not in daylight. He'll lie up somewhere till dark."

"What makes you think so?"

"He knows he is being followed, and won't risk being spotted more than he can help. He ran the risk of coming to you, but he had to do that. He won't do it a second time if it can be avoided."

"Then there will be a chance of catching him?"

"We'll do all we can. I'll go to the City Marshal now, and get his assistance. Plug Howe is a prize worth catching without counting the money."

He left the bank, and hurried to the marshal's office, stated the facts of the case, and had the satisfaction of knowing that a number of special men were told off to search the city and keep a strict watch on all the roads leading out of it. Then, having done all he could for the time, he turned into the Palmer Hotel, to refresh himself for a few hours with needful rest. He was roused by the hotel clerk some hours later.

"There's someone inquiren' for you, Cody."

"Who is it?"

"A blame redskin! He's bin squattin' in the piazza fer two hours waitin' fer yer, but I clean forgot about it!"

He ran down to find, as he expected, the young Navajo chief, sitting motionless in the shade.

"My brother is welcome!" cried the scout. "What news does he bring?"

"He has followed the trail of the palefaces," replied Wolf's Tooth, rising.

"And where have they run?"

"The Indian waved his hand towards the east side of the city."

"My father will find them yonder," he said.

"Let Wolf's Tooth show the way."

With light step the Navajo swung along the busy street, Buffalo Bill following at some little distance. He had no wish to attract too much notice, such as would have been roused by his walking with the young chief. At a corner of a low street in the roughest part of the town the Indian paused.

"My father will find the paleface he seeks in the lodge with the painted sign."

He pointed to one of the several saloons near by, which was distinguished by a gaudily-painted board bearing the name the Bonanza in flaming gold-and-scarlet letters.

Buffalo Bill knew it to be the haunt of the worst gamblers in the place.

"Let my brother wait here," he said. "If the paleface he has trailed should come out, follow him closely."

"My father has spoken!" Wolf's Tooth replied; and the scout, loosening the guns in his belt, walked slowly towards the place.

Even at that early hour the place was crowded. It so happened that a violent dispute was in progress between two of the most noted frequenters of the place, and the scout's entrance was unnoticed. He took a quick survey of the crowd. At first he could see no one answering to Plug Howe's description, when he caught sight of the one other

man he wanted most—Jed Hall. This, then, was the one whom he and Wolf's Tooth had followed so far. The scout made a mental oath that he should not escape him this time.

But how to take him? The room was full of men, any of whom would side with Jed Hall, and the chances were enormously against the scout. Besides, he was anxious, if possible, to effect the night-rider's capture quietly, so as not to scare Plug Howe away from the place. He didn't doubt that the latter would turn up here to meet his lieutenant. Perhaps, even now, he was in the house. A rash move might mean losing the chance of taking him, and recovering the lost money, too.

Jed Hall was standing, with half a dozen others, near a low partition which divided the bar from the playing-tables. His attention was taken up by the dispute close to him. The scout quietly moved across the room, and gained the other side of the low partition. No one appeared to notice him. He was so close to Jed Hall that he could hear all the latter said, unless he spoke in whispers.

The dispute—which threatened to end in serious trouble—was at last settled by the proprietor, Jim Bulman, who was noted for his methods in managing the worst fire-eaters in the town.

"Look ye hyar, fliers!" he shouted, snatching a gun up in each hand from the shelf under the bar. "If you's got anything to talk about, take it outside. Thar's plenty of shootin' room in the street; but thar's on'y one man, I allow, kin use his gun in this place, an' that's Jim Bulman! You hear me?"

"That's the way to talk, Jim!" shouted several others. "Slap it into 'em! We'll stand by an' see fair play."

"I ain't wantin' no one ter hep me pull trigger!" retorted the saloon-keeper grimly. "Sling yer dust about as much as ye like, but don't stand yawpin' thar all day like a couple o' wimmen folk! Quit now, or git outside!"

The disputants concluded to quit and drown their differences in large potations of "forty rod," and in ten minutes were swearing eternal friendship between themselves and everybody in the saloon. Meanwhile, the interest having died out, Jed Hall turned to his companions.

"It's just as I'm tellin' ye, Dan," he said, in a low voice, but loud enough for Buffalo Bill to catch. "He rid off with the hoodle jest after nine o'clock. He was right smart over it, I'll allow; but he's playin' it low down on us all, and thar's goin' ter be trouble."

"An' you're sartain sure it was him?"

"Sure's I live! Dinky Daniels saw him quit the bank."

"Mebbe he's in the town?"

"An' mebbe he ain't. Didn't I tell yer Dinky follered him way out till he couldn't run no furdur?"

"He was ridin', then?"

"Yes; on a big cayuse, Dinky says, which I'll swear never b'longed to him?"

"And he's gone west?"

"That's so. But I know whar he's makin' for. Is you or isn't you game to foller him?"

"He's a mighty cute hand. We'd on'y have our trouble for nothin', or get a two-ounce ball in our head!"

"Wal, I allow said you was a white man, Dan," retorted Jed, in infinite disgust; "but now I take it all back. I never thought you'd crowd down like that."

"Call it crowdin' down of you like," growled Dan; "but I call it just plain sense! The man ain't born yit as kin ketch Plug Howe when he concludes to mizzle. He's cuter than a pison Indian, and slicker than a fox! It'd be plum waste o' time goin' after him."

"There's one man as don't think so, then," chimed in a third. "Didn't Marty tell you who he saw at the Palmer House?"

"I ain't seen Marty," said Jed. "Who was it, anyway?"

"Buffalo Bill."

Jed Hall rapped out an oath.

"What him? I lowed I'd blinded the trail too well fer any scout or red to foller me."

"He may've bin trailin' Plug Howe."

"Gee! That's so. Then that makes it all the more ne'ssary to git away. A thousand to one the scout's after him now! Shoo! It was bad enough before, but if that blame scout gits a hold of the rhino, it's all u p."

"Then whar're you goin' to do?"

"Ride ter the Blue Canyon. That's whar he'll make for, sure's you live!"

"And s'pose he ain't thar?"

"Then I'll just play off old man Kelder on my own. I've got him, anyway. His folks'll raise a few more thou. ter git him free. I'll make sump'n outter the biz, ef I have ter carve the old man up to do it! Yo' hear me?"

There was a sound as if he and his friends were making a move, and, fearful of losing him if he once got outside, Buffalo Bill drew his guns, and, stepping round the barrier, confronted the astounded night-rider.

CHAPTER 6.

Hands Up—The Marshal's Posse—Jed Hall Escape^s—The Navajo On His Trail.

"YOU'RE euhred, Jed! Hands up!" The scout's words, low and distinct, seemed to be heard by every man in the room. In an instant the place was as silent as a church, except for the shuffling of feet as the crowd turned to stare at the leading actors in the drama before them.

Jed Hall and his companions stood motionless till the last syllable left the scout's lips, but their eyes told what was passing in their minds.

Such a look was in Jed Hall's eyes as a hunter will see in that of some savage beast he has cornered, which waits only for the least sign of fear to make its last spring. But Jed Hall saw that in the scout's look which would not be denied. He threw up his hands as the trigger rose.

"Now, boys," continued Buffalo Bill quietly, as one gun moved in a half circle, threatening every man in the room. "I'm sorry to disturb the meeting in this way, but Jed Hall and I have important business. We'll just talk outside, and as it's private business, there won't be any call for any of you to follow. D'you take me?"

The crowd realised quickly that the scout had the drop on them. Although he was apparently watching Jed Hall all the time, there wasn't a man present that couldn't swear the scout wasn't looking at him personally.

Still no sound broke the silence after Buffalo Bill had spoken. He motioned to Jed Hall to move for the door. The night-rider hesitated, moved a few paces, and paused.

The scout's eyes glittered dangerously. He knew his own life hung on a thread, that there was scarcely a man present that wouldn't be glad to put a bullet through him.

"Go slow, Jed!" he said sharply.

Again the night-rider moved on, overawed as much by the invincible coolness and audacity of the scout as by the levelled barrel of his deadly weapon.

Still no one besides themselves moved. The onlookers were held as by a spell, such as a lion-tamer exercises over the savage animals in his charge—the spell of an indomitable will.

Had Jed Hall known that there was no one outside to help the scout he might have reached the door more quickly, on the chance of making a break for liberty. He imagined that others must surely be waiting there, and that once he was outside his hopes of escape must be abandoned.

He knew, as well as the scout himself, that nearly every man in the room would assist him, if he could only get a chance. But he also knew, as they did, that the first shot fired would mean the signal for his own death.

Still, it was death for him anyway, as he thought—certain death if he went out and was carried to prison, and death if he refused to leave the place.

At such moments any chance will be seized by a desperate man, and none could be more desperate than Jed Hall, the night-rider.

There was a small table standing between him and the door, at which sat two men, motionless as everybody else. Just as he reached them Jed Hall seemed to stumble forward, gripped one of the men, and, swinging him round the table, the scout's eyes, dropped like a flash behind the table.

The scout's revolver rang out, the bullet grazing Jed's shoulder, but otherwise not harming him.

In an instant the room was in an uproar. One of Jed's pards pulled his gun and fired. The scout dropped him in his tracks. Two other men opened fire as Buffalo Bill leaped to the door. One of them fell dead, the other had his arm struck up by Bulman, the proprietor.

Jed Hall, the instant he dropped, drew his guns, but preferred to let his friends do the shooting to showing himself and risking a second bullet.

"Quit it, you all!" roared Bulman, the proprietor of the Bonanza. "D'you want the marshal's officers in hyar? Ef Cody has business with anyone let 'em git outside."

"He sha'n't take him, Dan!" roared a huge, red-bearded miner from Montana, known as Ruddy Hart. "No man ain't gwine ter monkey round with the Bonanza boys s'long as Ruddy Hart lives!"

"That won't be long!" cried Buffalo Bill, as the big man's hand dropped to his belt. "Hands up, or you're dead meat!"

For answer, Ruddy Hart's hand flew up, and the scout dodged just in time to escape a bowie-knife, which struck the woodwork behind him, splitting the panel as if an axe had struck it. Hart dropped the same instant, but was only wounded in the shoulder, and, yanking out his gun, endeavoured to get the drop on the scout.

But now bullets were flying, and those who were not anxious to join in the fray dodged about to any cover which happened to be handy.



Buffalo Bill rolled the desperado over. A mask covered the upper part of his face. The scout tore it off and stared at the man's features. (See page 2.)

A dozen or more of the most desperate rushed on Buffalo Bill, despite Bulman's yells to them, and a regular hand-to-hand fight was in progress, when the doors burst open and the deputy-marshal, with a dozen of his men, rushed in. The sight of them only increased the tumult.

Everyone in the room wanted to clear out now, and a rush was made for the door. The marshal's posse charged in amongst them, striking, threatening, and forcing them back.

The scout, fighting desperately with three or four of the worst characters, his clothing torn, and the blood streaming down his face, was almost unrecognisable.

Some of the posse, seeing only a group of infuriated men, charged in, striking right and left with the butts of their revolvers, and before Buffalo Bill knew what was happening he received a blow on the head which sent him staggering back against the wall, with his senses nearly knocked out of him. By the time he had recovered order had been restored.

Five men lay dead, and the posse were guarding a dozen others, mostly badly wounded.

The marshal's man who had struck the scout down had just succeeded in disarming three of those who had been attacking him. He turned as Buffalo Bill straightened up.

"Now, you!" he shouted. "No foolin'! Throw them irons down, or there'll be trouble!"

"There's trouble enough anyway, Whitely!" latched the

scout savagely. "You've spoilt my game, I'm afraid! Did you catch Jed Hall?"

"Thunder! If it ain't Bill Cody!" ejaculated the astonished officer. "An' I nearly flummuxed you for good!"

"You did that. But what about Jed Hall?"

Others of the marshal's men ran up, a search was instituted, but Jed Hall was gone.

"That's let him out," said Buffalo Bill to Moreright, the deputy-marshal. "It'll be a month of Sundays before I set eyes on him again!"

"It's too bad, Bill! We heard there was fighting going on here, but never guessed you'd be mixed up in it. But Jed Hall can't leave the city. Every road's bein' watched."

"That won't worry him," said Buffalo Bill. "Jed Hall's as clever as most, and it will take a mighty smart man to stop him. But, by thunder, I forgot! You're little tap on the head makes me think crooked. There's someone on his trail!"

"Who's that? One of your men?"

"Yes. Wolf's Tooth, the Navajo. I left him outside to keep watch, and if Jed Hall gets past him he's a cleverer oon than I take him for."

Bulman, anxious to keep the peace with the authorities, had washed and bound up Buffalo Bill's wounds—none of them severe ones—and the scout ran from the place to search

for Wolf's Tooth. As he expected, the young chief was not to be found.

"That's as it should be," thought the scout. "He's following Jed Hall, and will send me news where to find him later on."

Satisfied on this point, he made his way back to the Palmer Hotel, confident that Wolf's Tooth would come, or send for him, before long.

He had not been there more than half an hour when Deputy Moreright arrived in hot haste to say that Jed Hall and four others had got away by the Laramie trail after a fight with the man who had been sent to guard that point. They were well mounted, and by this time would have so good a start that pursuit seemed hopeless.

"They can't run for ever," laughed the scout. "Give me the best mount you can procure, and I'll camp on their trail."

Moreright offered to accompany him, but Buffalo Bill refused all offers of help.

"They're making for the hills," he declared. "Once free of the city, they'll hear round to the west somewhere. A party of men following them would be noticed where one would get along on the quiet. There's Plug Howe to be thought of, too. He's the bird I'm after, and it needs a cunning hand to time him."

"And how about Wolf's Tooth?"

"He's following Jed Hall, and we shall probably meet up. If not, and he returns here, tell him to come to me at the Cascades this side of the Blue Canyon."

Moreright hurried away to procure a horse for the scout, who, fifteen minutes later, rode away to pick up the trail of the night-riders.

CHAPTER 7.

Fine Tracks—Silver Creek Camp—The Chase.

JUST what I expected! They've split the trail."

The scout dropped from the saddle and examined the ground. Five separate tracks branched off in as many directions. The case looked hopeless.

The sun was already getting low in the sky. In another hour it would be dark. Standing on the slope of the hill, Buffalo Bill's eyes searched the surrounding country in every direction. There was not a moving thing to be seen, save for a hawk circling slowly round over a clump of oak-trees.

To the west the hills rose in gradual steps till the distant peaks of the great Rockies seemed to pierce the skies.

A promising country for man-hunting! To the uninitiated it seemed impossible for anyone to succeed in discovering the whereabouts of a fugitive amongst those rugged hills, broken ravines, and mountain forests.

But it was not that thought that troubled the scout. His difficulty lay in determining which of the five trails to follow. For all he knew, four of them, after winding about in all directions, might just lead back to the city, for there was only one man of the party who would be afraid to venture there again.

But as he gazed round, some wood pigeons rose from a clump of trees, circled round for a second or two, and flew out of sight.

He sank down behind a bush, and waited. That sign was enough to show him that someone was about. For ten minutes he saw nothing, then gave an exclamation of pleasure as the lithe form of the Indian chief appeared on the slope below.

"My brother is welcome!" he cried, as Wolf's Tooth joined him. "Has he followed the trail?"

The Navajo nodded gravely, and, going back to the place where the five men had separated, pointed to four of the trails.

The palefaces are cunning," he said, with a near approach to a laugh. "They have scattered like the hunted wolves. They knew not that the hunter was so close."

"But Wolf's Tooth saw them go?"

"The eye of the chief sees everything. The enemy of the Great White Chief rides yonder."

He pointed in the direction from which he had come.

"That is good!" said Buffalo Bill. "Let my brother lead the way, and I will follow."

He leaped into the saddle, and followed the Indian as he bounded lightly down the slope, along the side of a deep valley, which was crossed higher up, and so round the base of a low hill.

At the entrance to a narrow gorge Wolf's Tooth stopped and pointed to a dark object which the scout had just noticed.

"The rascal's horse, by all that's lucky!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, as they went towards it.

So it proved. The poor brute's leg had been broken by a fall, or by stepping into a hole, and Jed Hall had left it lying there to become the prey of coyotes and buzzards.

At a sign from the scout the young chief put it out of its misery.

"Did the chief follow the trail further?" Buffalo Bill asked.

The Indian nodded, pointing up the gorge, through which the scout immediately rode as rapidly as the rough ground permitted. A quarter of a mile beyond the end of the gorge, Wolf's Tooth stopped at an old Indian trail.

"The paleface will keep to the trail," he said. "He will need a horse."

"And where will he get it?" asked the scout. Then suddenly remembered where the trail led. "Wolf's Tooth believes he has gone to Silver Creek Camp?"

Again the young chief nodded, and, convinced by examination of the ground that he was right, Buffalo Bill struck into the trail without further delay. Darkness overtook them before they had gone very far, but that was now to their advantage.

Either of them could have kept to the well-trodden trail with ease on the darkest night, and their movements were now hidden from any chance discovery on Jed Hall's part.

The one fear was that the horses' hoofs striking against the hard ground would be heard, for sounds travel a great distance in the clear atmosphere of the Colorado Mountains. This Buffalo Bill obviated by muffling the hoofs with strips of blanket, and in this way they ascended the trail in almost complete silence.

The scout, when first Wolf's Tooth showed him Jed Hall's trail, had been puzzled to guess where the night-rider was making for. Was it possible that Thayer Kelder had been brought up into this part of the hills? Or was Jed Hall after Plug Howe, and running for some known haunt of his on the chance of finding him there?

The Blue Canyon, which Jed had mentioned, lay far to the south, almost in a line with Cripple Creek, and ten miles west of it. But this Indian trail, if followed in the opposite direction to which they were now travelling, led over the divide, and would have been as good a way as any for Jed Hall to take to reach either the Blue Canyon or the place where the camp had been attacked.

Buffalo Bill felt sure he had intended to go that way had he not lost his horse, and that he was now making for Silver Creek Camp on the chance of procuring another there. The camp bore none too good a reputation. Started some years before on the discovery of silver ore, a big rush of miners had filled it with the usual crowd of undesirables who always make for such places on the chance of picking up a fortune easily.

The glowing reports proved anything but correct; most of the legitimate miners left to prospect other more promising localities, whilst the riff-raff stayed on to make a precarious livelihood by plundering such travellers and other folk who might still be attracted to the place.

The scout knew that he was more likely to run up against enemies than friends in the camp. Even if he were to find Jed Hall, it would be a dangerous job to attempt his capture there. It would be better to waylay him on the trail than to run any unnecessary risks in that way.

At the outskirts of the camp he dismounted, and, leaving his horse with Wolf's Tooth, went forward alone. The shacks he passed seemed deserted. Most of them were in a tumble-down condition, and spoke ill of the prosperity of the place. But further on lights gleamed, and hoarse voices, singing, shouting, and laughing, showed that some few, at least, found it was not altogether impossible to make a living at Silver Creek.

He advanced to a long, low building, outside which a flaring oil-lamp was hanging illuminating a board, which stated that inside could be procured a bed and grub, soft goods and soft drinks, and every necessary for man and beast.

It was from this place that all the noise proceeded, for here was collected the bulk of Silver Creek's inhabitants, though some few were willing away the weary hours at a rival establishment twenty yards further on.

The scout reached a window, and took a survey of the room. So far as he could see, Jed Hall was not there. A second window overlooked another part of the room, and he was just looking in when someone touched him on the shoulder. He turned to find a revolver within an inch of his face, held in the hand of a tough-looking miner.

"Don't trouble ter move, stranger," said the latter threateningly. "This is a hair trigger, and liable ter go off sudden. What's your game?"

"Minding my own business, pard!" answered the scout coolly. "What's yours?"

The answer seemed to tickle the man, for he grinned.

"Same ez yours, stranger; and, as I happen ter have an interest in this establishment, I wanter know what you's up to, equintin' in at the winders 'stead of goin' in ter join in the fun?"

"Well, if you must know," answered Buffalo Bill, "I was looking for a friend. As he doesn't appear to be there, I'll get on to the next shebang and take a squint in there."

"Mighty fine; but it don't wash, stranger. I guess you'll have ter go in hyar. Thor boys'll like to see yer!"

Just then two others came round the corner of the building and instantly joined their friend, who began to explain the situation, when Buffalo Bill cut him short:

"Now, look here, you," he said. "You're not looking for trouble, but you're running right up against it when you break into my game. I'm here on—"

At that moment he heard the sound of a horse's feet, and voices. Jed Hall, mounted on a rough-looking broncho, came from the stables at the rear of the building, accompanied by two other men, also mounted. They swung out into the road, and, without noticing the group under the window, galloped away towards the trail by which the scout had reached the camp.

Buffalo Bill's eyes must have shown something of what was passing in his mind, for the man with the revolver glanced away from him for a second to see who it was that was riding off.

That was the one chance the scout had hoped for, and he took instant advantage of it. With a lightninglike movement, he struck the gun up with one hand, the weapon exploding harmlessly above his head, and felled the man with a terrible blow on the point of the jaw.

The other two, taken by surprise, were covered by his own revolver before they had time to draw. The scout never spoke to them, but, moving swiftly backwards, still keeping them covered, gained the end of the building, turned the corner, and dashed away into the darkness. He was only just in time. The noise of the gunshot had brought every man in the place running to the door.

It was only a second before the two he had covered were guiding the whole pack after him. He had run to the back of the building on purpose to avoid all this, guessing what would happen. He knew nothing of what lay behind the house, except that the stables were there.

Before his eyes, dazzled by the flaring oil-lamp, had grown accustomed to the darkness, he had plunged against a high-boarded fence, which seemed to cut off his retreat in that direction.

He jumped, caught the top of the fence, and straddled it as the crowd burst round the side of the building. Fortunately, they, too, were dazzled, or a dozen bullets must have ended the scout's career. As it was, he dropped to the other side of the fence before they realised his position. He fell amongst a lot of loose boards, old packing-cases, and barrels, the noise showing his pursuers only too well which way he had gone.

To make matters worse, a couple of dogs, kept to guard the yard in which he now stood, sprang forward and attacked him without hesitation. He stunned one by a well-directed kick under the jaw; the other fastened on his sleeve and tried to get a hold on his arm.

He was compelled to shoot the savage brute, and ran swiftly across the yard. By this time half a dozen men had scrambled to the top of the fence and opened fire, whilst others ran round so as to cut off his retreat. The darkness saved the scout from the good intentions of the gunners; but though they could not hit him, they could direct the others.

"He's way down by Howells'! He's turned back, boys! New he's makin' for Ham's shack! Git roun' by the road. He's over the fence!" and a hundred other directions, punctuated by an occasional pistol-shot, rang out for two breathless minutes, as the scout ran on, stumbling over heaps of rubbish, dodging behind piles of firewood or old packing-cases, seeking a safe outlet from the trap he seemed to have run into.

Fortunately, it was as difficult for the pursuers to get to him as for him to escape, for the only proper entrance to the yard was by the stable, a fact which the mob forgot for the moment.

They had to make a fairly long way round, therefore, and Buffalo Bill, doubling back under cover of the wood-piles, took the fence on the side nearest the road again, and was over before those who were still seated on it twenty yards further on were aware of his intentions.

With a clear run before him, he had little fear, except for a stray bullet, for several men, dotted about the street watching for his appearance, had a shot at him. Unhit, he dashed across to the opposite side, and, running with great swiftness under the dark shadows of the houses, soon gained the open hills, and could laugh at further pursuit.

CHAPTER 8.

When Thieves Fall Out—Howe's Hiding-place—The Ruse that Failed.

FELLED with fears that Jed Hall would escape him, the scout made with all speed for the place where he had left Wolf's Tooth. The Navajo was standing by the horse. He looked pleased to see the scout.

"Wolf's Tooth say his father's enemy. He and two others have passed along the trail."

"My brother did well not to attack him," said the scout. "We will follow. He may lead us to where his chief is hidden."

Anxious to know whether Jed Hall kept to the trail or turned off it again towards Denver, Buffalo Bill pushed on at a good pace, Wolf's Tooth running like a shadow before him, so as to give timely warning in case they caught up with the night-rider.

It was an hour or more before he came on the Navajo, standing motionless in the track. He was holding up his hand as a warning.

"The palefaces are on trail below," he whispered. "They ride slowly."

This was good news, and Buffalo Bill contented himself with sending the young chief on as before to keep watch, whilst he rode after him at a sufficient distance to prevent any alarm being given.

In this way the hunt was kept up for many hours, till just before sunrise the neighbourhood of the Blue Canyon was reached, and Buffalo Bill knew that the crisis of the whole business was at hand. His whole scheme was nearly ruined, however, a little further on.

They were passing through thick pine woods, which shut out all view of the surrounding country, when a shout was raised just ahead of the scout, and half a dozen men appeared on the trail. They were calling and running after Jed Hall, and had their backs to Buffalo Bill.

He guessed that they were part of the force which had attacked the camp.

He slipped from the saddle, led the horse in amongst the timber and tethered it, and crept down to meet Wolf's Tooth. He saw the Navajo gliding amongst the trees, intercepted him, and learnt that Jed Hall had stopped, and was in conference with the new-comers.

Then the two stole on again until the group of men were in view, and, screened by the trees and undergrowth, got near enough to hear most of what was said.

"I'll smoke him out, boys," Jed Hall was saying. "He's made us his cat's-paws, and we've gotter level things up!"

"You'll have ter wait till dark, then," growled one of the others.

"So you say, Benton. Ef you think I'm fool enough to try that dodge, you'd best save trouble and salivate me now. I tell you we'll smoke him out, and I mean it. He's got all Kelder's money, and won't part with a cent; and now you tell me you've let him walk off with the old man, too! What d'you propose doin'? Goin' home to maminie, and lettin' Plug Howe enjoy himself! Get all the kicks, and let him freeze to the dollars! I tell you, I ain't built that way. You all kin go of you're skeert. I'm goin' to call on Plug Howe, and see who's goin' to be top dog. D'you take me?"

A grunt of approval went up. The men may not have liked the job, but they couldn't resist the idea of getting hold of the money they had all fought for, which they had only just discovered was in Plug Howe's keeping.

"We's with you, Jed," cried one of them, "though I'm jiggered if I know how it's to be done!"

"You leave that to me, Hank. So long as you boys'll stick by me we're all right. But are you sure he's gone to the cave?"

"Dead sure! Didn't you hear us say we trailed him purty nigh to the place, an' only come away when he opened fire?"

"And a hundred to one he's gone off whilst we all's yawping hyar!" said Jed angrily.

"I ain't so sure," retorted Hank. "Old man Thayer can't walk far, and Plug's hoss was about played out. Reckon he'll stay there a spell to freshen 'em up."

"It's all right if he does," said Jed. "If he can stop us getting in, we can stop him getting out. The money won't be much good to him in thar. Come, let's git, and don't fergit to travel!"

Sending Wolf's Tooth back for the horse, the scout followed the party as they went single-file down the trail. They had another "lay up" near by, for which, it seems, Jed Hall had been making. There Thayer Kelder had been carried by Plug Howe's orders, and Jed had hoped to get hold of him as a set-off to the loss of the money.

Now Plug Howe had stolen a second march on him, and not only had the money, but the hostage, too. It was easy to see his reason for wishing to get hold of Kelder. He

DAILY MAIL.

NEXT THURSDAY:

A Tale of School Life and Adventure.

"TOM MERRY ON THE WARPATH."

knew that Buffalo Bill and every marshal's posse would be out hunting for him. All the trails would be watched, and there was a chance that he might be captured. He would hold Kelder as a hostage for his own liberty, and so be able to get away across the border and enjoy his ill-gotten gains.

Buffalo Bill congratulated himself now on the fact that he had not captured Jed Hall. Had he done so, he might never have discovered Plug Howe's hiding-place. The Blue Canyon is full of caves and vast fissures where any number of men might hide, and for that reason it was then, as it still is, a favourite haunt of desperate characters.

On reaching the entrance to the canyon, Jed Hall divided the party—he and four others stealing in amongst the trees and bushes which covered the lower part of the slopes, the remaining four keeping to the main trail. For a mile or more they kept on level with each other, till those on the trail below signalled to Jed to stop. A minute or two later the canyon echoed to the report of a rifle. Plug Howe was at home, but wanted no callers.

"That's the best sound I've heard for many a long day!" laughed Jed Hall. "Now, if them fellows plays the game, we'll just about fix Plug Howe to rights. Keep close, boys, and don't shake a leaf!"

They crept in and out amongst the bushes, climbing rather higher up the slope to where the precipice rose sheer up, a mighty wall of eight hundred feet. From below came the incessant reports of the rifles, the business of the other party being to keep the night-rider's attention engaged on them, whilst Jed Hall got to a position from which he could surprise him. In this he and those with him very nearly succeeded. They clambered on and up till they were right over the cave, some eighty feet above it. Then, at the risk of breaking his neck by a fall, Jed Hall began to climb down. The others hung back.

"Come on, blame ye!" said Jed Hall, in a hoarse whisper. "That's more than one kin do. You ain't backin' down—eh?"

"Faith, an' it's fallin' down we'll be!" said Mike Lanty. "It's meself that'll go furdur on to where the shlopes a bit aiser."

"And be seen by Howe, ye everlastin' fool!" retorted Jed Hall. "It's easy-going here, if ye look careful. We'll drop right on to him."

"Bedad, it's that same I'm not cravin' after doin'!" grinned Lanty. "But if it's goin' y'are, Mike Lanty isn't the wan to hould back, so he isn't! Git on wid yez. I'll be behind yez, so's if we drop it's something soft I'll have to fall on!"

Lanty having decided to follow, the other three started down as well, with sundry cautions from Jed Hall to be careful not to dislodge stones, which might betray their presence.

The rifle fire from below still continued, showing that Plug Howe had no idea of this second party being so near. The light puffs of smoke as he fired drifted out in view of Jed Hall, but the night-rider himself could not yet be seen.

Then, just when things appeared rosy for Jed Hall, Mike Lanty rested his foot on a large jutting stone. It gave way under his weight, the Irishman only just saving himself from following as it crashed down the hill. The stone narrowly missed Jed Hall's head, which he ducked instinctively as he heard it breaking away.

"You fool!" he growled, as he looked up at the startled Irishman. "That's spoilt our little game. I've a good mind ter send you after it!"

Lanty's hand dropped carelessly to his gun. "It wouldn't be healthy to thry it, I'm thinking!" he said. "If you'd throd where I did, sure an' wudn't the stone 'av' dropped as illegantly fer yez?"

Jed didn't answer, but leaned out as far as he could, so as to see below. He could just see part of the ledge which ran outside the cave and along the face of the cliff, the path used by any who visited it. But there was no sign of Plug Howe.

"We'll just have to wait here, or get down a bit lower," he said savagely. "He's gone back out of sight. We sha'n't have the ghost of a chance to pepper him now until he shows up again."

So they waited there until Jed Hall conceived the idea of letting those below make a feint of ascending the path. Plug Howe would scarcely let them do it without a fight, and that would give him the opportunity he needed. He signalled this to the four below, and they grasped his meaning. He watched them going back down the canyon to a point where they could ascend the path, but Plug Howe made no effort to stop them.

They came on gingerly enough. Once they came within range of his rifle they knew he could pick them off one by one, for there was no chance of cover. But suddenly Jed Hall was startled by a shout from Spot Mudge, who was

posted considerably higher on the slope than any of the others.

"He's beat us, Jed!" Mudge shouted. "He and Kelder's goin' up the path yonder like two-year-olds!"

"What?" yelled Jed Hall furiously. "Plug Howe's quit? Are ye foolin'?"

"Come and see fer yourself; or, if it can be did, you'd best git on down to the cave, and start after 'em along the path."

"A lot o' good that'll be!" cried Jed Hall, who was nearly crazy with rage and disappointment. "He c'n hold the lot of us at bay on the path, and there's no one below to shoot at him. That comes of havin' a set of fools about 'stead of men with a decent share of brain! Yes, it's him, fair enough!" he added, having climbed up sufficiently high to spot the rapidly-retreating forms of the night-rider and his prisoner. "What's the others? If they was to hurry they might run him close. Come on down. It's the onliest chance we've got."

Now that there was no necessity for concealing their movements, the party descended more rapidly, and gained the wide platform in front of the cave some minutes before the other four could get there. Jed Hall shouted to them to hurry up, and started off at full speed in pursuit of Plug Howe, Mike Lanty and the other three following him.

A bend in the path prevented them from seeing far, but they knew it would be almost impossible for the night-rider to get to the lower part of the canyon until he had gone a considerable distance.

So they raced on round the first bend, but still without seeing anyone; along a wider portion of the path to where a jutting crag again shot out to view; gained the crag and rounded it, and saw standing within thirty yards of them, not Plug Howe, but Thayer Kelder, leaning against the cliff, and Buffalo Bill facing them with levelled guns.

CHAPTER 9.

Kelder again.

"BACK, Jed Hall," cried the scout, "unless you want to be food for the vultures!"

So utterly astonished was the villain by the sight of the scout—about the last person he expected or wished to see there—that he halted in his stride and stood staring, without attempting to go forward or back. The others pulled up short behind him, and so they stood, not daring to lift a hand, knowing that the least show of fighting would be the signal for the scout to open fire. He had them completely at his mercy, and they were quick to realise it.

"You're eueched, Jed Hall, on this hand!" called the scout. "By rights I should end the game for you right here, but I never yet killed a man unless compelled to do so. I'll leave you to those behind you, and if you take my advice you'll make yourself pretty scarce this side the border. Get back now, and remember that the first man who tries to follow gets it where he lives!"

Slowly Jed Hall retreated on those behind, who in turn backed along the path till they were round the crag and out of sight.

"Now, Kelder, we've got to move, and quickly, too!" said the scout, as he leaned over the edge of the path and looked below. "Plug Howe's gone," he said, turning again to watch the corner round which Jed and his companions had vanished. "Where he got down we can follow—that is, if you can hold out."

"That's the question, Cody," said Kelder. "That blow he struck me as you came round the bend was meant to kill me. If I hadn't stumbled forward at the very moment it would have done so. As it is, it has made me feel sick and giddy, but it will pass off."

"I'll give you three minutes, Kelder, to get over it. Those rascals back there will be getting to a place where they can command us. We'll get on to the next bend there, and then you've got to get down."

Kelder slowly moved along the path, Buffalo Bill keeping behind him, watching out for any sign of Jed Hall's gang till they reached the end of the curve and passed round the cliff. Again the scout took a careful survey of the steep slopes below, and up and down the canyon. There was no sign of Plug Howe.

To effect the rescue of Kelder, he had got ahead of Jed Hall's party as soon as he had located the cave, and had got down to the path a good bit further on. His plan was, if possible, to surprise Plug Howe himself whilst the night-rider's attention was taken up in stalling off his late comrades.

The latter had unintentionally played into his hands. He had thought to give Jed Hall the slip by escaping from the cave, calculating that by the time they had discovered it

was empty he would be far out of the canyon, and concealed in some other place.

He had forced Kelder along the path, when Buffalo Bill suddenly appeared; and, acting on a desperate resolve not to be taken, the night-rider had struck Kelder to the earth, and swung down over the almost precipitous side of the canyon. Whether he managed to climb down, or fell to almost certain death, the scout could not see. The jutting pines and bushes far below might well conceal him, alive or dead.

But now the scout had to effect Kelder's rescue by the same means; or, rather, he considered it better than risking taking him along the path, which at that moment might be commanded by Jed Hall and his gang. He knew, too, that Wolf's Tooth was below somewhere with the horse. With Kelder mounted, there was every chance of his getting safely off, leaving the scout and the Navajo chief to finish their work so well begun.

The scout's survey showed that, with the help of his lariat, which he generally carried wound round his body, it would be possible to get Kelder down to a ridge below, from which it would not be difficult to reach the bottom of the canyon. He would have to trust to his own skill to reach the ridge himself.

Without further delay he passed the lariat under Kelder's arms, and by its support the rescued man was able to reach the ridge in safety. He, too, then started to climb down, and the two eventually reached the trail running up the centre of the canyon. A few yards away Wolf's Tooth stepped out from amongst the trees.

"Where is the horse?" asked the scout.

"By the White Rock," answered the chief.

"Then we must hurry. Hall will yet have a chance if he gets down, and can block the exit for us."

Taking Kelder's arm, he assisted him forward, the Indian going on as advanced guard, in case of surprises.

"You'll ride for Cripple Creek, Kelder. Wolf's Tooth will guide you there. It is more than likely you'll find your people and wagons there, but if they've passed through you'd better get on after them."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Get back into the canyon again."

"What for? Jed Hall hasn't the money. Howe boasted to me that he had every penny."

"Exactly. That's what I'm after. Jed Hall and his gang can go hang, for all I care at present! They'll not see me even if I see them. I'm going to find out what became of Plug Howe, Jed Hall's real leader."

"He must have been killed where he fell."

"If he fell. I'm not at all sure that he did. If he did the money is in his pockets. If he didn't, it is still in his pockets, and I've got to find where he is before they can be picked. Hurry on now! Wolf's Tooth will lead you safely."

CHAPTER 10.

Lawyer Chandler gets ill-used—The Night-riders are Captured—Howe alias Chandler.

CRIPPLE CREEK had been in a state of considerable excitement for a long time.

To begin with, there was the account the "citizens" had had of the attack on the caravan, and the knowledge that Plug Howe, the most noted hold-up in the country, was again at work.

Then there was the capture and subsequent escape of two members of his gang, after which Trapper Harn returned bearing the signs of a tough fight, and in charge of young Kelder, who was wounded, too.

Parties rode out in all directions the next day in hopes of getting in touch with Buffalo Bill, or discovering some more members of the night-rider's force.

But nothing was discovered. Jos Kelder lay up at the "hotel," and nursed his wounds, which were more severe than he had thought, whilst Trapper Harn rode off to meet the wagon-train, and let the rest of the folk know the latest news.

And now, some hours after the fight in Blue Canyon, the wagons arrived at Cripple Creek, and the local store was ransacked for various needs of the wounded folk.

The big Virginian, Lige Hearne, and Bart Olney had acted as leaders after Thayer Kelder's disappearance, but now that they were once more in touch with young Jos, were prepared to relinquish the charge to him.

He, however, had enough to do to look after his mother, who was in a state of partial collapse. The sight of her son helped to restore her a little, but the fact that no news had yet been obtained as to her husband's fate filled her with renewed grief.

Harn, the trapper, had appeared at the camp only to go off again, and he had not yet returned. He was, personally, on the hunt after Kelder and the equally unfortunate Lawyer Chandler, who had never been seen again after he went chasing the two escaped prisoners.

All the Cripple Creekites vied with each other in tending the wounded emigrants, and administering rough consolation to "the widow," as they already called Mrs. Kelder; and most of them were so engaged when a commotion was heard in the street.

A small crowd of men were seen approaching the place where the wagons were drawn up, and in the middle of them Jos recognised Trapper Harn and Lawyer Chandler.

At least, all that was left of him. He looked a wreck. His face was bruised and cut, and his clothing torn to rags.

He was mounted on a horse which looked as if had been ridden hard and could scarcely go another yard.

A thousand questions poured in on the lawyer and trapper, who was leading the horse; but it was not till they reached the spot where Jos and Mrs. Kelder were standing, that Chandler would speak.

Then he told them how he had followed the fugitives, had got lost in the darkness, had run across another lot of the night-riders, who had cruelly ill-treated him, that he had escaped only that morning, and had been overcome by his wounds, and discovered by Harn some ten miles from the creek.

This Harn confirmed, saying that Chandler was lying unconscious in the foothills, where he would probably have died had it not been for the trapper's assistance.

The lawyer looked sick enough now. His head hung low down on his chest, his long black hair falling on either side so as to further conceal his face, which was covered with dried blood.

For all that, he refused all offers of help, and begged only for a quiet room, where he could wash and rest his aching bones.

This was soon found for him, and he was left to get some much-needed rest.

Half an hour had scarcely elapsed before a rider dashed into the city, reporting that he had seen two men, one mounted, the other on foot, coming up the valley, and apparently, pursued by four or five others.

Such a statement at such a time sent nearly every man in the place hunting for his horse, and careering down the valley directly he was mounted.

It was soon evident that the report that the two men were being chased was correct. The angry little spurts of white smoke which came from the pursuers' rifles proved that.

But as the rescuers got nearer they were astonished to see that one of the two was an Indian, who held on to the stirrup-leather, which enabled him to keep up without apparent difficulty.

"Hold up, boys!" shouted Lige Hearne, who was riding in the lead, checking the others by a wave of his hand. "We've got to do more'n help them two yonder. If I ain't mistook, that's Thayer Kelder ridin' there with the redskin. We kin get to him right enough afore them others come up. But that ain't all we've got to do; we've got to git hold of them fellers that's runnin' Kelder."

A growl of approval broke out from the crowd.

"We've got to ride off right and left," continued Lige. "We're hidden from 'em now, and, mayhap, it won't be too late. A dozen of you make for that timber over there. I and some more will ride on slowly amongst the scrub this side. Kelder'll pass between the two forces, and ef those others ain't tumbled to it they'll follow. Then we ride out on 'em, and corral the lot."

He spoke rapidly, and his plan was rapidly carried out. They had reached the level of the valley, well out of sight of pursuers and pursued, who were still a good mile to the south.

Lige Hearne's assertion that it was Thayer Kelder raised the excitement to fever-pitch, for, if that were true, then it almost followed that the pursuers were some of Plug Howe's gang, and perhaps the famous outlaw himself was amongst them.

Lige and his party, well screened by clumps of spruce and other trees, eagerly awaited the appearance of the fugitives. They could hardly repress a shout as they came into view again, and Lige Hearne declared it was indeed Thayer Kelder.

But, fearful of scaring the pursuers, they allowed him to pass without calling to him, and neither he nor the Indian, whom several of the Cripple Creekites recognised as Wolf's Tooth, seemed to have any idea of their proximity.

The pursuers also came on unsuspectingly, making every effort now to catch the fugitives before they should reach Cripple Creek.

Lige held his men well in hand as the five came galloping up the valley. Jed Hall was in the lead, flogging his horse

NEXT THURSDAY:

A Tale of School Life and Adventure.

"TOM MERRY ON THE WARPETH,"

unmercifully. Then, as they were well within the two lines, Lige gave a mighty shout, and, driving in his spurs at the same moment, crashed through the undergrowth, and with his whole force swept down on the astonished night-riders.

Jed Hall, realising that he was trapped, levelled his rifle to fire, but a dozen bullets struck his horse, which dropped, hurling him violently to the ground.

Before he could rise, Lige Hearne and half a dozen more had reached him, and he was secured, after a short but desperate struggle.

The other four attempted to charge through the cordon. Two were killed and the others secured as their leader had been.

Thayer Kelder and the Navajo had stopped on the slope when they heard the shouts and the gunshots, and now came slowly to meet their victorious friends.

The return to Cripple Creek was in the nature of a triumph, and the reception Thayer Kelder got almost made up to him for all he had gone through.

Jos Kelder ran off to tell Chandler the joyful news, but the latter, though pleased enough to hear of Kelder's escape,

was suffering too much to go and welcome him. Jos left him, promising that his father should come and see him before long, and give him an account of all that had happened.

The young fellow had hardly rejoined the others, when a fresh shout was raised, and Buffalo Bill, torn and covered with dust, came striding up.

"Thank heavens, you have escaped, Kelder!" he cried. "I saw those rascals going on your trail, and feared they had caught you."

"So they would if Wolf's Tooth hadn't been with me," said Thayer. "He led me off across the hills by another and longer route. Jed Hall must have guessed where we should have to pass, though, and nearly succeeded in trapping us. We have been running from them for many hours, and nothing but the young chief's skill and cunning saved me. But what of Plug Howe? Did you discover him?"

Buffalo Bill became suddenly grave. Trapper Harn was standing close by, and he turned to him:

"Where's the man you brought in, Harn?"

"How on 'arth did you know I brought anyone in?" demanded the trapper.

"How, unless by your trail?" replied the scout. "I've hunted with you too often not to know your footmark when I see it. Where is he?"

"H'm! What, Chandler? Lyin' sick up thar. He was 'most gone when I come across him, and he's lyin' up—"

But the scout didn't wait to hear more, running rapidly back to the hotel, followed by Harn, Wolf's Tooth, Jos Kelder, and a gradually-increasing number of others.

He ran into the house and up the stairs, Jos Kelder showing him Chandler's room. The door was locked! In a second the scout had burst the lock from the hasp, and rushed in.

The room was empty, but the open window suggested the way Chandler had taken. Buffalo Bill went the same way, dropping lightly to the ground.

Just at that moment the stable door, twenty feet away,

opened, and Chandler appeared, leading a horse already saddled and bridled. He saw the scout, and attempted to back into the stable, but the horse slewed round, being a bit fresh, and prevented the movement.

"It's all up, Howe!" shouted the scout, levelling his revolver. "Put 'em up, sharp!"

The sham lawyer's answer was to pull a gun from his breast, so quickly that he got in one shot, striking the scout's left arm.

Almost simultaneously Buffalo Bill fired, and Lawyer Chandler, better known as Plug Howe, the night-rider, sank back against the wall, and collapsed slowly to the ground.

Those in the room above stared open-eyed at the scene, only half-comprehending it. But the scout soon unravelled the mystery by running to the dead man and searching his clothes, from which he produced various fat rolls of bills, which represented nearly the whole of the money paid out by the bank.

Only a portion of the gold was found, Howe having probably secreted it on account of its weight, or for use at some future date, when he might have need for it.

One of the men taken with Jed Hall made full confession. Plug Howe's agent in Chicago had apprised him, some time before of Kelder's intention to sell out and move West. Every detail of the business was known to the night-rider, who, disguised as a lawyer, joined the wagon-train at Dodge City, and, soon becoming on the best of terms with the whole party, travelled with them as their guest.

He it was who struck Kelder down at the camp and carried him off. Finding that the raft was on him, he had determined to ride for Denver, get the money, and cheat the others of their promised share.

After the fight in the canyon, he must have resumed his wig and other disguises, fearful of being spotted by others besides his own tricked followers.

But, in escaping over the precipice, he had really fallen, and nearly

got killed, as Buffalo Bill discovered, but managed to get away, till the pain of his injuries caused him to drop where Harn had found him.

The scout had followed his trail step by step to that place and then the horse's trail to Cripple Creek, only to find that Plug Howe was masquerading there as Lawyer Chandler.

Jed Hall was rash enough to try to escape a day or two after, and got shot for his pains, thus cheating the hangman, whilst the rest of the gang, not caring to remain in the neighbourhood of that sworn enemy to all their kind—Buffalo Bill—cleared out to more healthy districts, and were heard of no more.

THE END.

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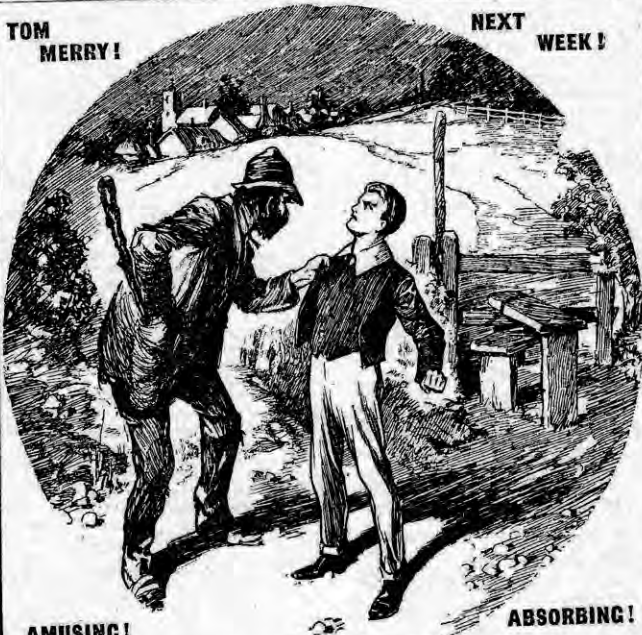
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"TOM MERRY ON THE WARPATH."



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Rex Allingham kicks the winning goal for Stormpoint College in an important match, and so gets in favour of Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school. But Jardon, a Fifth Former, bullies Rex. Rex, with his two chums, Jim and Bob, are punished by Mr. Salmon, who locks them in a room while the other boys go skating. Porker, the school porter, is told to guard them. However, the boys break away, and go skating on a small pond. Porker finds them, and goes on the ice and falls in. The three chums go into the school stove-hole and cook some sausages, etc. Porker again finds them. (Now go on with the story.)

Porker Gets Help.

"You come out of that!" cried Porker. "I shall report you for what you have done to-day, and if the doctor don't give you a sound thrashing, all I can say is, that he won't be doing his dooty by you."

"Why not give the doc. a few lessons as to what really is his duty, Porker?" suggested Rex. "I'm sure he would take it kindly from such a clever fellow as you are. I often wonder why he doesn't use you to take the Sixth Form fellows in Greek."

"Are you coming out of that?"

"No, Porker. We have not quite finished our tea; but we are getting on very nicely, thank you. These sausages are excellent, and the baked potatoes spiffin. I would let you taste some, only I dare not encourage cannibalism. It wouldn't do for a poor old porker to eat pork sausages. The potatoes are really too good for you."

"Yes," said Jim, "it would be a pity to give him any of those, because they might burn his mouth."

"Go home to your sty, Porker!" growled Bob. "I do wish the doc. would keep your door shut. You are always running all over the place. I'll bet you root up a lot of carrots and turnips in his garden, too. It is a great pity he does not put a ring through your nose, the same as they do to the other pigs."

Porker, who had been hooting out all sorts of things, tried to think of something to say that would hurt the chums' feelings, but because nothing occurred to him, he slammed down the trapdoor.

"I'll be even with the varminths!" he muttered, making his way to Jardon's study. "I know as Jardon and Symes have come in, and if they can't give them socks, I dunno who can. Haw, haw, haw! I'll get my own back without any risk of getting into a bother."

Now, as Porker neared the bullies' study, he heard the sound of very angry voices within, so he listened a little, in case one of the masters might be there.

"I'll bet it's those young demons," roared Jardon. "I know that little brute Bouncer wants to have vengeance for the thrashing I gave him!"

"I should hardly think the little ruffian would have cheek to collar your crockery."

"He has got cheek enough for anything; and that calm-faced Rex Allingham is just as bad. Why, they've taken my kettle as well! Fury! Only wait till I catch— What do you want, Porker?" For that individual considered that he had heard enough, and he entered the study at that moment.

"I thought I heard you calling, young gent's."

"No; but do you know where those three young brutes are?"

"Suttinly! They are a-having a prime tea in the stove-hole. A real, slap-up tea, I can tell you. I did hear 'em saying suthing about having collared your pervisions, and I know for a fact that they have collared all your crocks, knives and forks, and suchlike. I tell you, young gent's, it's time you took 'em down. They have romped me into the duck-pond this afternoon; then they wedged me in the winder, and lashed me with their skate-straps. They ain't safe; that's what's the matter with them."

"You are right, Porker," cried Jardon, clenching his teeth, and looking more vicious than he generally did, which was saying a good deal, "they are not safe by a long way! Come along, Symes! We will give them a lesson that they will never forget. If I can't put a stop to their monkey-tricks, I shall be surprised. I'll teach them to collar my

things! Where's my stick? That will teach the young villains! They struck you, Porker?"

"They did so. I can feel the sting of it now."

"Very well. That sort of thing must be stopped, and I'm going to stop it once for all. You had better come and watch the operation, and then you will be able to say that we did not punish them too severely, in case anything comes of it—only it won't. There's one thing about them, they would never sneak, even if they were half killed. There's no one can possibly hear them. You can come into the stove-hole, Porker, and see exactly what happens."

And Porker, not being a man gifted with much intellect, did so. Had he thought a little, he would have remained outside, and heard what was happening, because he might have known, from the bullies' natures, that there would be hard blows, and that they would not all be on one side.

As Jardon, followed by the other two, entered the place, the bully's face was white with passion, but he controlled his voice sufficiently to speak calmly.

"I see you have been stealing my property," he said. "Of course, this does not surprise me, because I always knew that you were thieves."

"You can't expect us to be as honest as you are," said Jim. "Of course, there was one little slip on your part when you were a dear little boy, and you robbed another of half-a-sovereign; but the doc. forgave you, so we won't bring that up again."

"Perhaps he has redeemed his character," observed Rex.

"He may have done so," said Jim. "But if I had a character anything like his, instead of redeeming the beastly thing, I would burn the ticket. The sooner such a character is blotted out the better for the owner of it and the world at large."

"You shocking little thieves! Do you think to make your crime better by impertinence?"

"They say he blubbered when the doc. dressed him down about his theft," observed Rex.

"But he did not blubber so much as when the doc. undressed him preparatory to the flogging," said Jim.

"It is useless to speak to such depraved little cads," said Jardon, who could not possibly defend himself, because both Porker and Symes knew of the theft. "I merely want to know who stole my property."

"I borrowed your crockery, Jardon," said Bob.

"And we used them," observed Rex. "Still, they are all right. You have only got to wash them."

"You have also stolen my provisions!"

"Guess again, Bully Jardon," said Rex. "Because you are a thief, you must not think that everyone else is."

"Now, Symes and I are going to make an example of you three," observed Jardon. "We consider it our duty."

"Not you," laughed Jim. "If you considered if your duty, you would never do it. There's one thing you will also have to consider. If you lay a hand on us, we shall go for you. You may hurt us, but we shall also hurt you."

"You have also knocked the porter into the duck-pond, and you have wedged him into a window, and mercilessly lashed him when he was in a helpless state."

"Poor dear Porker!" growled Bob. "He's an oily brute, is Porker, and he got some strap-on that time."

"Come on, Symes!" cried Jardon, making a rush at Bob. He remembered that pin.

Now, the chums could use their fists, but the two bullies were young men, and both were strongly built. In an open space the chums would not have had the slightest chance

NEXT THURSDAY: A Tale of School Life and Adventure.

"TOM MERRY ON THE WARPATH."

STORMPOINT (Continued).

against them; but in that stoke-hole the bullies did not have matters all their own way. Fortunately the furnace-door had been shut by Bob, because they found it uncomfortably warm; but that door was not far off red-hot, and when Jardon stumbled against it, he uttered a wild yell, while there was a smell of scorching cloth.

He dropped his stick; but that was a most unlucky thing for the chums; because when Symes rushed at Rex, that worthy, who always kept calm under the most exciting circumstances, caught the bully one on the nose, delivered straight from the shoulder, and with power behind it, Symes seized that stick, and brought its knob end down on Rex's head with a strength that laid him low.

Rex was not a perfect hero, because, to his disgrace, it must be confessed he loved a fight, and he was out of that one. He knew nothing for a couple of minutes or more, and in those two minutes matters were settled, so far as the combatants were concerned. Symes went for Jim, and hurt him considerably. That smash on the nose enraged Symes, and he did not consider consequential damages; so he hit out, and Jim did the same, though he got by far the worst of it.

One was a mere lad, the other a young man, so Jim was bound to suffer. So did Bob. Porker howled with laughter as he both heard and saw him suffering. He knew how to arrange matters so that he would not suffer consequential damages, and he just looked on and howled with laughter.

As for Jardon, he behaved in an utterly brutal manner. In the struggle every piece of borrowed china was smashed to atoms, and this enraged him the more; besides, Bob gave him a black eye.

But now Jardon got to close quarters, and, gripping the lad round the body, he rammed him against the furnace door. It was then that Bob howled, and then that Porker laughed.

We boil lobsters alive—at least, we eat them after they have been boiled for us—and we argue that it does not hurt them. Well, lobsters cooked that way are nice; they would be just as nice if they were mercifully killed first. But custom is custom. The lobsters have noticed that. At any rate, you can boil a lobster alive, and hope that you don't hurt it; but you cannot hold a schoolboy against a nearly red-hot door without being perfectly sure you are hurting him. Jardon knew that he was hurting Bob, but as that was exactly what he wanted to do, the bully was perfectly satisfied, but Bob was not. He yelled, and in making a desperate struggle to get away from that painfully hot door his fist struck the water-gauge-glass of the boiler.

The result was peculiar. Scalding water squirted at the bully's legs, and equally scalding steam hissed at his face. Porker got a shower of both, so did Symes; the chums, who were the farther side from the steam-gauge, came off better. Bob and Jim dragged Rex out of the way, and, having got him in that comfortable position, they kept out of the way. Porker was the first up the steps, but the other two were not far behind him, and Jim shut off the two cocks with the coal-hammer.

"Is anyone hurt?" murmured Rex, who was just regaining consciousness.

"I should smile?" growled Bob.

"Is anyone hurt?" repeated Jim. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear, no! How could anyone get hurt in a gentle little fray like that? Ha, ha, ha! If those fellows are not hurt, I shall be more surprised than I was when Bob smashed the gauge-glass. I'm worse steamed than a well-cooked potato."

"I believe I should come off in pieces if you were to scrape me with a knife," observed Bob. "But—ha, ha, ha!—we didn't get anything of it like they did. It seemed to be squirting deliberately at them. Look at his crocks!"

"They appear to be considerably damaged," observed Rex, gazing through the cloud of steam which was now condensing.

"Well, it's lucky we haven't done any damage to speak of!" said Bob.

"We don't need to speak of it," said Jim. "The doc. will speak of it all we require, and if he doesn't, Seaslug will—"

"Boys!"

It was Mr. Salmon—otherwise, Seaslug.

"Boys!"

It was Dr. Andale—otherwise, the doc. Had those two voices been two electric shocks they could scarcely have startled the chums more, especially as Mr. Salmon must have heard himself called Seaslug.

Dr. Andale had great experience with boys, so, instead of asking questions, he used his eyes and brain

in an attempt to grasp the scene. He saw the smashed china and the broken gauge-glass, and as he had already seen the bullies and Porker leave the place, he began to put two and two together, as was his custom. He also saw that the chums were considerably the worse for wear.

"Why did you boys come here?" demanded the doctor.

"Gated, sir!" murmured Rex. "Mr. Salmon gated us. Impots done. Well, we had a little skatin gon your duck-pond, and then came here for tea. Porker fell into the pond. The ice wouldn't bear him, and he lost his key. In getting through his window, I lowered the sash—er—slightly, and then we used our skate-straps."

"Whose broken china is that?"

"Jardon's, sir; I borrowed it," answered Bob.

The doctor easily guessed the rest.

"Go into the hall!" he ordered, leaving the place.

"He's wrathy!" exclaimed Jim. "However, he's got the worst of it, and you were wise, Rex. It's better to let him know the whole lot straight away, because he's bound to get it sooner or later, unless a chap lies; even then I would back the doc. You see, we are fairly right. He wouldn't mind our skating, seeing that we did not break bounds; then again, having tea in the stoke-hole—well, that's nothing. Strapping Porker is the worst of it; but, after all, he thoroughly well deserved it. Come on!"

The bell was tolling now, and all the boys were trooping in. The chums slunk off to their correct places, and the boys shouted with laughter at their appearance; then there was a moment's silence, and Dr. Andale entered the great hall, accompanied by Jardon and Symes.

The masters were all there, but that did not stop the howl of laughter, for the bullies' appearance was most extraordinary, nor was Porker, who followed them, in any better state.

Some moments elapsed even before the doctor could gain silence, and even then there was some whispering, followed by spluttering laughter.

"Allingham, Fisher, and Bouncer, step this way!" commanded the doctor; and the three chums stepped. "Tell me what has happened, Parker?" ordered the doctor.

"Porker added considerably to Rex's version of the affair. He said that they had stolen provisions from Jardon, and that they nearly murdered him."

"I believe my spine is injured, sir," he added. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I'm crippled for life."

"What did they strike you with?"

"Their skate straps, and they laid it on suthing crool; then they squirted boiling steam and water at me—"

Here another roar of laughter drowned Porker's words; while the doctor had got his eyes fixed on Rex, whose face was deathly white, for he still felt the effects of that brutal blow.

"You say these lads stole your provisions, Jardon?" demanded Dr. Andale.

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story next week. Order your GEM in advance.)



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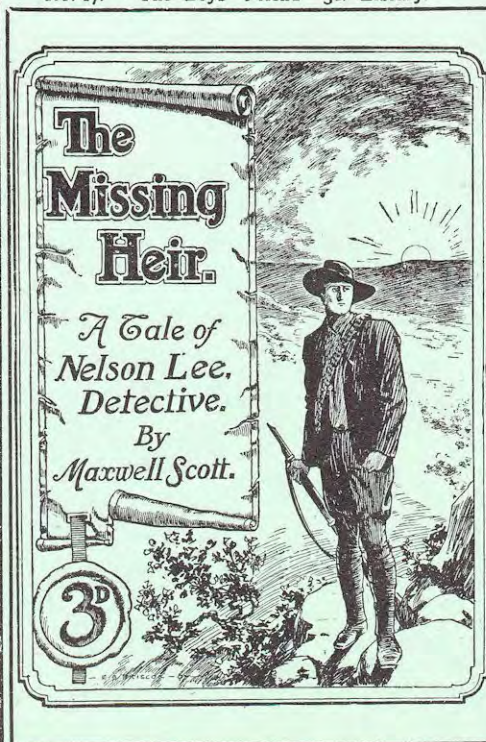
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