

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

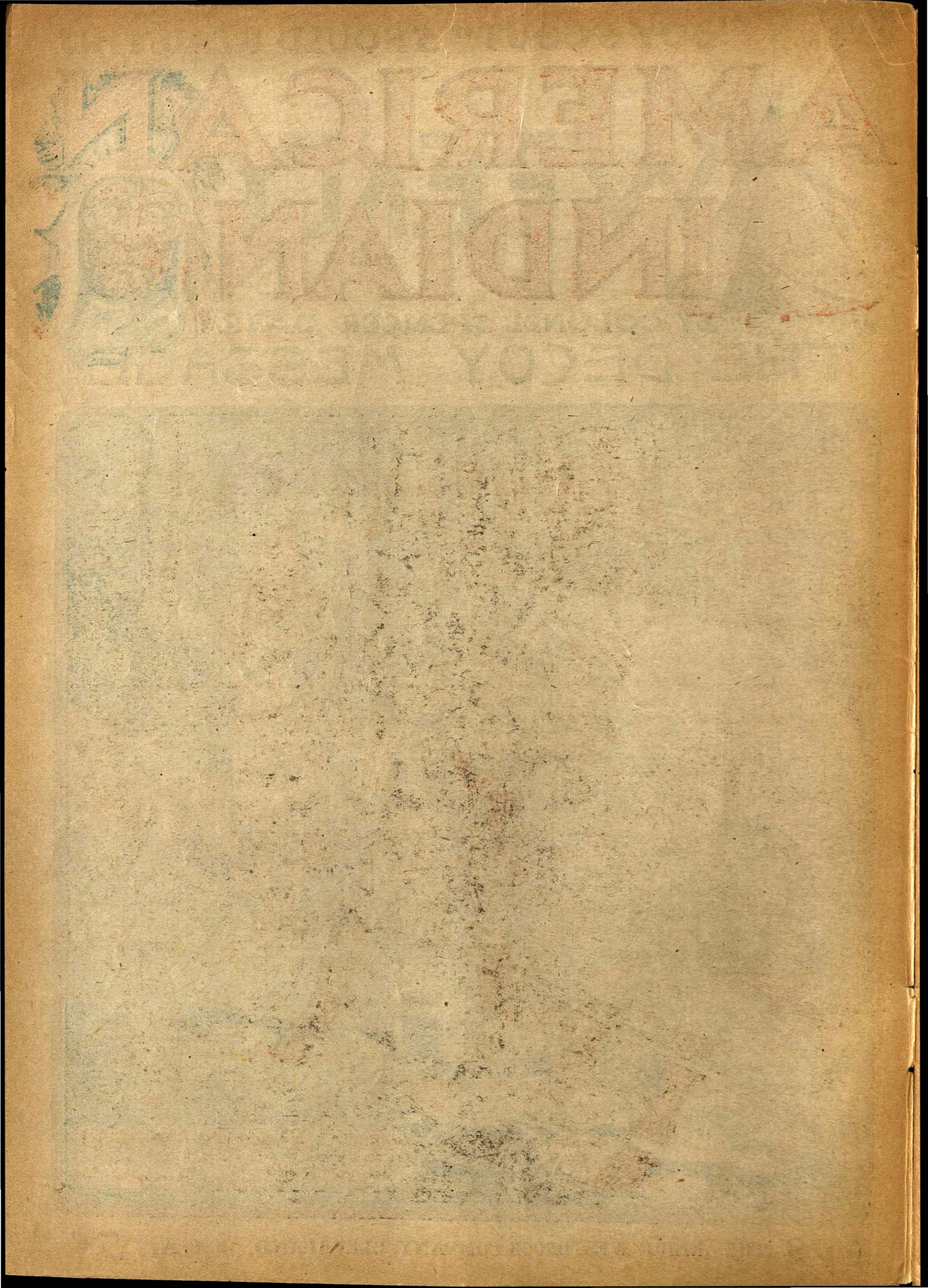
AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE DECOY MESSAGE



"IT'S FROM THAT VILLAIN STEWART, I'LL WAGER," EXCLAIMED THE SERGEANT, HANDING THE NOTE TO JACK.



AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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THE DECOY MESSAGE

OR

THE RUSE OF THE BORDER JUMPERS

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

JACK STEWART, ALIAS JACQUES DIOGO—A splendid type of the great organization, the American Mounted Scouts, whose lives pass in the terrible dangers of the American-Canadian frontier, where outlaws, bandits, smugglers, gun-fighters and bad men generally congregate. Sergeant Jack Stewart is sent from Washington by the Secret Service bureau to track down and arrest the bandit gang of Henri Falloux, who for years have been terrorizing the Canadian-North Dakota border line. How he gained access to the smugglers' camp at Line City, disguised as Jacques Diogo, and how he fulfilled his duty in spite of beautiful Marie Falloux is a picture of heroic, fighting, young American manhood.

MARIE FALLOUX—Hazel-eyed, regular of feature, perfect of form, she is a demon in womanhood. She is the real brains of the renegade gang at Line City, and the story of her trickery, her bravery, her devilishness, with now and then a true feminine charm, is now a part of the history of the up-rooting of the greatest gang of desperadoes, the West has known in many years.

HENRI FALLOUX—A French-Canadian, who has been a lawyer, real estate dealer, millionaire, but who for years led the Falloux band of robber-rovers, and whose death makes a dramatic picture in the crimson flow that ebbed about the desperate men he had gathered together.

PAUL VANCE—An American Mounted Scout Trooper, with a lusty delight in battle, and whose jaw ached after his little altercation with the wild-cat woman of the brigand band.

CHEE LOO—A Chinese pirate, whose terrible death makes him one of the men marked for a fatal ending by fate.

WING TUNG—A Chinese robber, and associate, and supporter of the unfortunate Chee Loo.

QUONG DUCK—A Chinese rover, whose support of Chee Loo, and Wing Tung, although accomplished from his lust for gold, made a happy tinge to the somber cloud that settled over the lives of some of the red-blood characters in this story.

PIG-FACED BUTTS—In a class by himself, unfortunate at birth, but who bore his troubles like a man, and played a man's part all through these interesting pages.

MRS. HENRI FALLOUX—A woman of mystery, whose sad story of man's inhumanity to women makes countless thousands mourn.

STRONG-HAND—A piratical, thieving Dog-Rib renegade of an Indian.

BROKEN-WING—A Dog-Rib Indian, the embodiment of treachery.

CHAPTER I.

FLIRTING WITH DEATH.

"It's a boat sure. I will risk a shot at it anyhow." Sergeant Jack Stewart, of the American Mounted Scouts, muttered these words as he aimed at a huge

black hulk, that could be dimly seen floating in the waters of the Red River, on the border line separating the United States from Canada.

Sergeant Stewart was standing on the American side of the river as he spoke.

Dimly in the distance the Canadian shore showed dark and bleak on the horizon.

The roar of the rifle the Scout carried broke the stillness.

The flame from the weapon made a sudden flare of light in the pitchy darkness.

Then there came a cry of pain which echoed over the wide river.

"I got someone that shot," cried Stewart. "I hope I hit Henri Falloux, that infernal French-Canadian leader of the *Border Jumpers*."

The sound of oars being propelled through the water at quick speed came to the ears of the Scout.

He peered through the darkness.

"They are getting away from me," Stewart said. "Well, better luck next time. But I feel sure that I hit someone that shot. That cry of pain told its own story."

Stewart threw the cartridge out of his rifle with a quick gesture. He turned to his horse who stood near, not at all dismayed by the shot, and gave a low note on a silver whistle that he carried by a string about his neck.

The intelligent animal, a beautiful bay steed of fire and force, turned when he heard the signal and hurried to his rider.

"Good old chap, fine old Don," said Stewart softly as he fondled the splendid animal and gave it a lump of sugar.

The horse champed the sweet morsel and awaited the attempt of his rider to mount.

But Stewart was in no hurry.

He kept straining his eyes toward the river in hope of hearing again the muffled stroke of oars.

"I can not swim after the boat," Stewart muttered. "It's not my night for flying—well, I fancy the best thing to do is to ride onward."

Stewart wore the summer uniform of the American Mounted Scouts, of kahaki, with a wide-brimmed soft felt hat of gray; around his waist was a cartridge belt, stuffed with deadly looking conical bullets in shining copper tubes.

At each hip swung a huge Army revolver, a 45, by the way; a second belt swept from shoulder to shoulder, bearing the cartridges for Stewart's rifle; the rifle itself being usually carried strapped to the shoulder.

High boots, with a Spanish spur attached to each heel; a great roll of blankets on the haunches of the horse; a lasso, a tiny pair of saddle-bags bearing a trifle of flour, some odds and ends, and Stewart, who was expected to subsist in the wilds he traversed upon his own expert marksmanship, was ready for his daily toil.

The watch-word of the American Scouts told what his duty each day would be.

This is the watch-word: "Waste No Words and Very Little Ammunition."

And Jack Stewart followed the watch-word to the limit.

After listening a moment Stewart blew a soft note again, upon his silver whistle.

Soft as was the sound it was quickly followed by a second note from another whistle.

"Where did that sound come from?" said Stewart to his horse. "Confound these nights up here on the Canadian and North Dakota border line. They are so clear that sound seems to come from every point of the compass at once."

Stewart again listened long.

"Who! Who!"

Again came to his anxious ear the long note of the whistle his note had called into activity.

Then there came the soft tramp of a walking horse, coming forward from over the prairie-like bottom land that skirted the noble Red River.

Stewart hitched his revolver from his right hip forward, but merely in a precautionary way. He felt sure that the approaching horse bore a friend.

But he cried sharply in an undertone—

"Halt!"

The advancing horse stopped immediately, but his impatient hoofs could be heard pawing the earth.

"Having halted me, is it your intention to shoot me?" came a soft, but rather angry voice out of the darkness.

"That isn't you, is it, Paul?"

"Not to any absolute extent."

There was a mocking ring in the voice.

"Hey, Vance is that you?" insisted Stewart.

"Again must I tell you that my name isn't Paul, nor is it Vance, and I am willing to add that either name wouldn't fit me because you see—"

"Thunder," cried Stewart as he interrupted the speaker, "if it isn't a girl!"

"I admit it. With sack-cloth and in ashes I admit it. I didn't want to be born a girl, but I was—and there you are; I mean here I am."

Stewart was sure that he was not sorry to see the girl. She was an absolutely pleasing personage of twenty years of age; with ash brown hair, and a very expressive pair of hazel eyes, which were twinkling with mirth as she spoke. The rapidly rising moon revealed these facts to Stewart.

Stewart noticed further that the girl carried two fine revolvers in her saddle-holsters with two others around her slender waist, and that she was dressed in a brown, short-skirted riding suit, rode astride in true border fashion, and was laughing at him quite perceptibly as she sat on her horse watching him with frank amazement.

"Do you usually run around in the night with four able guns attached to your pleasing self, or to the able horse you are riding?" queried Jack.

"I ride when and where I choose," replied the girl

as she drew the finely arched eye-brows down over her changeful eyes, in a fit of anger, "and I use the guns whenever I think it necessary."

"Do not think it necessary," replied Stewart with the same note of mockery in his voice as the girl so recently had accorded him. "Why should we quarrel?"

"Goodness knows I don't wish to quarrel. It is not pleasant anyway, quarrelling. Let's be friends."

"With pleasure, but at the same time would you mind telling me, how you managed to get here, far from anywhere in particular, alone, at this hour of the night?"

"Simple as can be. I am here not because I wish to be but because I have lost my way."

"What was your way?"

"The trail to Line City."

"To Line City; where is Line City?"

"I don't know. If I did I would not be here talking to you."

"I never heard of Line City."

"Nor did anyone else but me, the seven other white people that live there, the seventy or eighty Chinamen, a few Indians, about forty dogs, and a fair sprinkling of cats."

"Then there is such a place as Line City?"

"Surely. It started two years ago to be the great metropolis of this part of the world. It got its name because it's on the border between Uncle Sam and King George, of England. It was to be the Great Line City."

"But what has happened to it?"

"It kind of petered out. Didn't assay up to standard. Was mostly tailings and the ore wasn't what she ought to was."

"It kinder slumped, eh?"

"Yes. There's nothing there now but one so-called-hotel, one so-called-grocery-store-butcher-shop, a saloon, and one shack, or so, devoted to our red and yellow friends."

"Meaning Chinamen and Indians."

"Chinks and Redders, we call 'em out here."

"Good name for them, at that. But how do the Chinks and Redders get a living?"

"The good Lord alone knows; I don't. They seem to get one; that is all I know. I'm not so much interested in Indians and Chinamen, as to try and pry into their private lives."

Stewart grinned.

"How do you live?"

"By eating, drinking—water, and sleeping, the same as you do. Honest I'm no angel."

"If you are one you're a substantial one."

"But I will be one if I don't get some food. I haven't eaten since sun up."

Stewart dove down into his saddle-bag. He fished out some smoked antelope, some bread, a flask of red-

wine, and handed them all to the girl, who sat only a few feet away on her horse, in easy reach.

"Don't be an angel," cried Stewart. "I do not know how to talk to angels."

The girl grasped the food eagerly.

"I never heard a male angel described, but they surely must look like you."

The girl ate her portion with the appetite of a perfectly healthy young woman in a starving state.

"You see," she finally said, "this straightens up the situation remarkably. I don't feel that life in Line City is worth leaving as much as I did fifteen minutes ago."

"But suppose we find the trail to Line City—then what?"

"I will follow it to my home."

"Always live in Line City?"

"Yep."

"Born there?"

"Yep."

"Father alive?"

"Yep."

"Mother alive?"

"No."

The girl was laughing inwardly Stewart saw.

"Come around some day," she added. "I will let you look at all the family portraits in our album—say we have a lovely album."

The girl then began cross questioning Stewart.

"Where are you from?"

"Grand Forks, North Dakota."

"You wear the uniform of an American Mounted Scout."

The girl's face was filled with suspicion.

"You men are the guardians of the border-mounted custom house officers among other things," she added.

"Yes."

"You make a lot of trouble out here."

"Only for those who are criminals."

"Ah."

The girl passed into a brown-study. Her face seemed to be trying to keep from expressing a puzzling thought.

"I do not like the Mounted Scouts," she finally remarked.

"Why not?"

"Some day I will tell you."

Her fearless hazel eyes looked deep into Stewart's brown ones. There was in the girl's eyes a subtle challenge.

"Any day," rejoined Stewart. "I am ready, any day."

The girl laughed with a little catch behind the laughter that was almost a sob.

"See," she cried, "the moon is rising, yes, there it is, 'the inconstant moon.' And here comes your part-

ner, the Paul Vance, you insisted I was, before you knew that I was, just plain I."

There was a quick plunge from the girl's mettled broncho; she was gone like a dream, in a great whirl of dust, just as Vance trotted into sight over a near-by knoll in the river bottom.

Vance turned in his saddle as the female whirlwind flashed by him.

He gazed earnestly after the hurrying figure.

Then he trotted his horse onward to Stewart.

"Hello," Vance said cordially.

"Hello," replied Stewart.

"Charming girl, eh, for a rendezvous?"

"Eh?"

"That's what."

"What is what?"

"That she is a charming girl."

"Yes, she seemed to be. She had lost her way."

"Who had lost her way?"

"That girl."

"Excuse me now. I begin to understand. You mean the girl told you she had lost her way."

"Yes. That is what she said; had lost her way from Line City, and was trying to get back to the trail leading there."

"Well, if she was trying to get back to the trail, and had lost her way, why did she bolt so quickly when her sharp eyes came across me, eh?"

"How do I know?"

"Of course you don't know. But she did."

"Eh?"

"She knew that Jack Stewart was a new Mounted Scout on this patrol or she wouldn't have given you that story. It was easy meat, in you, she saw quickly."

"I don't understand."

"Of course not. Oh, Lordy, why do Washington Secret Service people take on such chaps as raw as you and make 'em Scouts, and send 'em out here on the border line, where we need experienced men—now don't get mad, Jack, I know you are as good a man, as brave a man as there is in the service, but you see, old chap, you are raw to this country, and that is why you got it handed to you by that girl."

"Got it handed to me—explain?"

"Do you know who is the man we are after?"

"Of course I do."

"Who is he?"

"Henri Falloux, the Border Jumper."

"The worst scoundrel on the border, you will admit."

"No question of it. He is an outlaw from choice, a bandit by profession, a smuggler, a *border jumper*, for years, a gun-man known all over the frontier, and it is to apprehend him and bring him to justice that you and I are in these parts."

"Our orders are to get a case on him, and then arrest him and hustle him off for trial."

"Yes."

"Well, what next?"

"Do you think we stand a swell chance of winning after your being taken in by that girl?"

"What has that pretty, refined girl, got to do with Henri Falloux?"

"Oh, only she is his daughter, Marie Falloux, and she has put up this game on you, my boy. She is wise as a serpent, and not by any means as harmless as the dove. She is a dead shot, a woman of brains, a daring rider, devoted to her father, and you could not lose her blindfolded in these parts. She sold you a gold brick, got near enough to know that you were an American Mounted Scout, got your alley quick, found out that I was with you, for she knows me well, and then, off she skips to tell her father, who will hustle any incriminating evidence about him, out of sight. Oh, Jack, you sold out to a pretty face and a pair of hazel eyes."

Stewart was the picture of mortification.

"By thunder," he cried. "I guess you are right. I ought not to be in the force."

Then he gave an awful cry of astonishment and rage.

"What is the matter?" rejoined Vance.

"The girl has got my wallet!"

"What?"

"She has my wallet with the warrant for her father's arrest in it. I had it in my saddle-bag. When I handed her the food, I must have accidentally handed her the wallet."

Stewart put spurs to his horse and dashed in the direction the girl had disappeared.

"Hold, on you, idiot," yelled Vance, "where are you going?"

"To get back my papers from that girl," yelled back Stewart.

"Stop, you fool, don't you know if you get near that girl she will shoot you as she would a wildcat?"

Stewart, who had caught sight of the girl tearing along in wonderful speed, ahead of him, on her broncho, gave a yell of triumph.

He put spurs to his horse.

The girl looked back.

She saw that she was pursued.

She reined in her handsome horse.

Again Stewart gave his triumphant yell.

The girl turned her horse sideways.

In her hand glittered her revolver.

There was a flash; a sharp report.

Jack Stewart, Sergeant in the American Mounted Scouts, with the quick crack that came from the girl's weapon, plunged heavily face forward, and measured his length on the ground.

His horse ran back helplessly toward Vance, who

had dismounted from his animal, and was sighting over its back, with his long rifle, at the girl.

"She got Jack," hissed Vance. "I'll get her."

Vance took deadly aim.

CHAPTER II.

JACK STEWART'S RESOLVE.

The silken rustle of a woman's gown seemed to Jack Stewart, to be about the only thing he had heard in many years.

He felt weak; but he did not know why.

He was sore all over his six feet of sinewy frame. But there still burned into his brain the face of the woman, who had shot him, and her beautiful hazel eyes.

He heard the silken rustle of the woman's gown, he was sure, and he managed to raise himself on one arm and look around.

He was in a tent, he saw, and there opposite him was Paul Vance, busily polishing his top-boots. It was this that had sounded like the rustle of a woman's skirt.

Stewart groaned.

Paul Vance looked up quickly. His eyes caught those of the sick man.

"Fellow bunkie, feeling better?" asked Vance, with a smile.

"Yes," whispered Stewart, wondering why his voice came so softly in spite of his effort.

"Good."

"Have I been here long?"

"Matter of six weeks."

"What?"

"Sure. A man doesn't get a hole through his lungs and ask for a dinner immediately after."

Stewart turned the answer over in his mind for some time. He tried to trace the connection between his illness in view of the words of Vance, but he could not.

"How did I get a hole in my lungs?" at length he questioned.

"Revolver; bullet; there you are, with the hole well placed."

"I was shot then?"

"Neatly and with dispatch. Never saw a man get a bullet put into him any quicker than you did in my life."

"Who shot me?"

"A woman."

"Ah!"

"Better say, Oh; I would."

"Who was the woman?"

"Marie Falloux."

"The French-Canadian bandit's daughter?"

"The same."

Then it all came back to Stewart. The scene in which he played such a pitifully foolish part. The girl who had duped him; it was all clear.

And the missing packet of valuable papers?

Stewart fell back in bed with a faint cry.

Vance rushed over and gave the patient a good stiff "bracer" of pure American whiskey.

"When is whiskey, not whiskey, and where is it not whiskey, may be vexing authorities at Washington, but right here is where whiskey does the most good to one Jack Stewart," remarked Vance calmly as he saw the color returning to Stewart's face.

Stewart gasped once or twice, but the liquor had braced him up wonderfully and he insisted in learning more from Vance.

"I remember chasing after the girl when I found she had stolen my papers," Stewart said, "but I don't remember her shooting me."

"You didn't have time to remember anything. She just pulled up when she found you were chasing her, and let you have it."

"Did you chase her?"

"Not much. No chasing Marie Falloux for me. She is too much of a wildcat for yours truly to chase. I fired at her but missed. I just picked up your corpse, as I expected to find it, but you being an impossible sort of gent, anyway, wouldn't become a corpse. Instead of the easy task of burying you, I had to pitch our tent here and nurse you back to life."

Stewart shot a grateful look at Vance.

"You have saved my life."

"No. You saved yourself. I could not extract the bullet. I guess you will carry it some moons. But I did all I could. You did the rest yourself."

"When will I get out of here?"

"Oh, you will be up and out again in ten days, I think. The bullet is in your body some where but it isn't going to do much harm now, it seems to me. Why, are you anxious to get up?"

"I am going after that girl, that Marie Falloux, who has my packet of papers."

Vance burst into a great laugh.

"That's the talk, my bantam," he cried. "Give it to the young recruit to get into the death game quick. You go to find Marie Falloux? Say, why not make your will at once, and blow your brains out. It's easier."

Stewart shook his head.

"I may be a raw recruit in this patrol of the Scouts, but I am not a raw Scout, at that. Mind you I got my grade of Sergeant only after two years of hard service in other fields."

"I know that."

"If you think I am going to let a girl of twenty years of age, if she has ten bandit relations, take my papers, shoot me, and make a general idiot of me, I am mistaken. I came out here from Washington to root out this robber gang. There isn't a desperado in it that I won't arrest before I quit."

There was the ring of quiet purpose in Stewart's voice. Vance looked at him with added respect.

"Well, my lad, in the American Scouts, we think a seasoned old trooper like I am, quite the equal of a young Sergeant like you, but old chap, let me add that I applaud your determination, and I for one am with you heart and soul. It's about time that Falloux's gang, and Falloux's daughter are suppressed together."

"I make no war on a woman, but in this case, she lies in the same legal tangle as her father. As we can not separate them, you see, we must make both suffer together."

"That's the ticket. The border can well spare the Falloux renegades."

Stewart lay still revolving a plan of campaign in his mind.

"How do you suppose Marie Falloux got hold of one of our Scout whistles?" he said after some thought.

"Goodness only knows. But she got one it's evident, for as I understand it you whistled for me, and she replied, and you thought it was me, then you met her and——"

A warning hand held up by Stewart aided him in stopping the swift flow of Vance's words.

"Go slow, my boy," remarked Stewart. "I am not well yet. I can stand a bullet but your words, as they say in the big cities, 'cut me heart like a knife.' Come over easy."

Vance repressed an inclination to continue.

"As to where Marie got that whistle," he continued, "I don't know. Not knowing I can't say, but my boy, she is the swiftest thing you ever saw in planning matters. They call it 'Falloux's Robber-Band' about here, but I suspect it should read 'Marie Falloux's Robber Band.' She's the brains of the outfit."

Stewart stroked his long beard as he spoke. Since his illness it had grown of wonderful size; before he was shot he had worn it cut English fashion.

"Help me up," he said.

Vance assisted him to rise.

"Loan me your razors."

"Suicide route?" asked Vance.

"No, just want you to cut off my beard."

"Why?"

"It's the beginning of our plot."

"Are you out of your head?"

"No."

"Then why this barber-shop-like episode."

"Shave me. Then I will tell you."

"It's a pop."

Vance worked with great haste. He gave a cry when he had cut off the superb beard of Stewart's.

"Why, how changed you are?" he cried. "Your face is funny. Your mouth turns up at the corners when your beard is off, and when it is on it looks as if your mouth turned down. This absolutely changes your looks. No one would know you now."

Stewart nodded.

"That is why I asked you to shave me. This peculiar facial mannerism has long been a perfect disguise for me. When I cut off my beard no one knows me who knew me when I wore it, and when I do not wear it no one knows me who knew me when I didn't."

"I begin to see your plan."

"Yes."

"You are going to Line City, where the Falloux gang live."

"Yes."

"I suppose you know that not a single building in the little hamlet dignified by the title of city, is owned by the Falloux's; they are the entire city owners; the others who live there are their gang entirely. It's a hot bunch to get into, and means sure death if you are found out."

"Don't you worry, I shall not be found out."

"If you do you're a dead man the next minute."

"A man dies but once really; twenty times a day one dies who fears death."

"I hope you will not get found out."

"Drop that, and tell me all you know about this gang of robbers."

"There isn't much to tell. Henri Falloux is a French-Canadian. He has lived in Line City for many years. Just now when he isn't cattle stealing or opium smuggling, or holding up any one he can and robbing them straight, he is engaged in border jumping."

"There are many varieties of border jumping; what particular one does Falloux deal in?"

"He gets a colony of Chinamen from Winnipeg, over in Canada. Then he rushes them over the border to Line City. He stakes them out there till some of the big labor using companies in mines, in timber, in road building, in the thousand and one activities of North Dakota, send to him for men. Then Falloux agrees to send, say, twenty Chinamen for fifty dollars each, at the prevailing wages."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. So far Falloux is merely a labor agent. But after the men get on this job at fifty per man, one day the agent one Falloux turns up missing; then one by one the Chinamen he has delivered turn up missing. They have quietly 'jumped the border' to get out of arrest under our Chinese exclusion act,

and also to get back into Canada where by this time, some of the Canadian labor using concerns, have contracted with Falloux to get them labor."

"So by jumping from border to border, Falloux manages to sell his labor both sides of the line, and reaps a great total, eh?"

"And also his title of the Border Jumper."

Stewart mused apart for some time. He had now thoroughly planned his method of attack upon Line City, but he needed some facts about Marie Falloux, so he asked Vance to state briefly all he knew about the girl.

"Don't know much. She has been there since she was a girl. Don't know anything about her mother except she is dead."

It was the turn of Vance to puzzle over the next new move to make. His face was wreathed in smiles finally and he turned to Stewart and asked him if he was strong enough to withstand a shock.

"Depends upon the kind of a shock," laughed Stewart. "What kind do you propose to give me?"

"Take it quick for here it goes—do you remember the night you shot at a boat going up the Red River, suspecting it was a boat of Henri Falloux's with contraband Chinamen aboard?"

"Yes. I shot at a huge bulk in the darkness. There was a cry of pain and I felt sure I got my bullet into some Chink."

"You did."

"How do you know?"

"Because I found the Chinaman's body."

"Where?"

"Floating on the Red River about a mile from this camp."

"What did you do?"

"Searched the body and turned it loose to float down-stream. I had no time to bury dead members of Falloux's robber gang."

"What did you find on the body?"

Vance impressively produced a soiled water-stained letter from the pocket of his coat. With a flourish he handed it to Stewart.

"It's a dirty looking letter," Stewart replied as he turned it over and over. "It doesn't seem addressed to any one."

"No. So I saw."

"Shall I read it?"

"I think you had better."

Stewart broke the seal to the letter; it was sealed with a red wafer in old fashioned style.

Then he laughed.

"What makes you laugh?"

"Read the letter."

With a bewildered look Vance read. Then he also burst into laughter.

This is what the letter said:

"Bill—The Sandwiches Will be reddy, by the first or second, at Pops. Get wise and bizy.

"MARIE."

"look out fer them d—d American Scouts; two are heer; I git 1."

Stewart and Vance looked into each other's eyes. Then both roared in unison.

"Hazel eyed Marie talks all right, but she needs a course in night school on her writing, for her fair hand is better on the trigger than on the pen."

"That's right. But what does it mean?" rejoined Vance.

"It means 'the sandwiches will be ready' doesn't it," replied Stewart "'about the first or second of the month'?"

"What sandwiches?"

"I don't know, I do know however, that in two weeks the first of the month will be here, and I am going to Line City."

"What for?"

"To eat one of those sandwiches that pretty Marie Falloux so poorly writes about, and to recover my stolen papers."

Vance began whistling as he returned to the polishing of his boots.

But he cast many admiring glances at Stewart who lay asleep now, after his fatiguing talk.

"Gosh! He's got sand," whispered Vance to himself.

CHAPTER III.

HENRI FALLOUX PUTS ONE OVER.

"Row you yellow son of a thief."

Henri Falloux stood in the center of his great boat, as it swung hard against the swift current of the Red River, in the early dawn of a wonderful day.

The weather was splendid; the soft haze of summer was everywhere; the air clear and bracing and Falloux was in good humor.

It had been a record-breaking trip for him.

He had three thousand pounds of opium on board his craft, which was a flat-boat, wide, and with two banks of oars on each side, manned by able bodied Chinamen.

There was a fine cargo of rich silks aboard, tea smuggled over the border from China, via Vancouver, cigars that were now in America without the stamp of the United States Revenue office on a single box; loot from all over the Far East, and what was better than all the rest, there was the usual cargo of China-

men who had legal right to enter America, and who made up the *Border Jumpers* of the Falloux gang; but in addition there was a little colony of ten new Chinamen, who had never set foot in America before, but who paid Falloux five hundred dollars each, for the privilege of becoming sudden-Americans.

So Falloux felt fine as he swore at his lusty crew.

"Fifty t'ousan' dollar made dis tr-ee-p, pouf," cried Falloux. "*Elle est excellente.*"

The stalwart young steersman who was deftly curving the unwieldy boat hither and thither, taking care not to retard the work of the rowers by making the boat lose way, nodded and smiled.

Falloux looked at him with an answering smile.

"Ah, yo' one g-r-r-ande young man. Ah, you one grande, eh, st-e-r, look over dere,—le vent nous est contraire. (The wind is against us.)"

Jacques Diogo, the steersman, smiled again.

He was now used to the many sided character of his employer, who one moment spoke the French-Canadian dialect sort of speech; the next roared in pure Parisian French, and in the third breath, spoke in excellent English. And some times, when excited, Falloux spoke all three ways at once.

He drew a pad from his pocket and quickly wrote in a plain hand a few words which he passed to Falloux.

"Hurry up the oarsmen; the time to hurry is in the morning."

"Wise boy, Jacques," approved Falloux, this time speaking quite good English. "Hurry up, you yellow devils. I'll take the hide off you if you are not quicker."

The oarsmen bent to their work.

Soon the boat hurried around a bend.

At a signal from Falloux, Jacques whirled the boat to a long pier that jutted out into the river.

In a few moments the boat was lashed to the pier; and, while Jacques Diogo idly watched the Chinese crew begin to unload the valuable cargo, Marie Falloux came tripping down the dock, to be gruffly greeted by her sire.

"Hello, Marie."

"Hello, dad."

The girl's shrewd eyes glanced over the cargo.

"That looks good to me," she said. "Fine cash this trip, eh, pop?"

Falloux nodded in smiling assent.

Then Marie's glance fell upon Jacques Diogo.

He made a direct and striking note in her mind. A tall, muscular young man, with sunny-brown hair, close clipped; a strong chin, throwing his stronger nose into the back-ground of his clean shaven face, he made a goodly picture.

"Who is the new man, pop?" asked Marie as she gave a covering glance at Jacques, that took him in from toe to the crown of his head.

"Deef and dumb chap. I got him up the River. Best steersman I ever had. Was stone broke and works cheap."

"Do you think it wise to hire a stranger to come here?" asked Marie.

"Nonsense. What can he do?"

Marie did not answer. Instead she walked over to where Diogo stood idly looking down into the water with his back turned to her.

Marie spoke when she was quite within a few inches of Jacques.

"Father," she cried.

Old Falloux turned quickly when he heard his daughter's voice. But she was not attending to him, but narrowly watching the back of his new steersman.

"Father!" cried Marie again. "If this man here is crooked I will blow out his infernal brains myself."

Marie shot out the words with all the force of her healthy young lungs. Her voice even caused the Chinese and half-breed laborers at work landing the cargo to look up in astonishment.

When she spoke Marie kept her eyes fixed on the new man's back.

It was a clever ruse if her suspicions that Diogo was not deaf, had been founded on fact, but the subject of her espionage never even moved at all the hurly-burly.

In perfect unconsciousness he continued idly to dream away as he gazed into the swiftly moving waters that gurgled under the moored raft-boat.

"He's deaf, all right," said Marie to her mystified father, as she took a long breath. "I guess he is safe enough."

But Marie did not wish to let the tests drop with her efforts.

As Diogo still stood dormant Marie took up a water cask which stood empty on the deck of the craft.

She rolled it over toward the young suspect. It made no end of a racket as it whirled over the deck.

It was not until it fairly hit him, that Diogo started. Then with a good round oath, he picked up the barrel, twirled it with one hand over to one side, looked up, saw Falloux with a woman, and clicking his heels together in true soldier fashion saluted and stood at attention.

Marie drew near.

"You have served in the Army," said Marie in her clear voice.

Diogo brilliantly smiled.

He pulled a tiny wad of writing paper, and a lead-pencil from his pocket.

"I am deaf and dumb," he wrote.

Then he extended the pad to Marie.

The girl read the words. She was now thoroughly convinced that Diogo was not dangerous.

In impulsive fashion she grasped the pad and wrote her sorrow and then the strangely assorted couple be-

gan a strange conversation in writing, in a strange situation, a bandits' camp, far out from civilization in a tiny hamlet, strangely bearing the name of "City."

"Where are you from?" wrote Marie.

"I am Mr. No One from Nowhere," was the swiftly written reply.

"Police?"

"Partially."

"Shooting?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"New York."

"I thought your name was Jacques Diogo."

"As well that as any other."

"We don't care for names out here."

"That is why I came here, I want to use any name any time, and yet no one will care."

Marie speculated over the answers to her cross and direct examination and then continued:

"Why did you ship with Pop?"

"Is Mr. Falloux your father?"

Marie nodded in the affirmative.

Diogo watched her quietly.

Then he wrote her his answer.

"Because I needed the money. Any old ship that would get me out of harm's way, and would give me food and drink and a place to sleep, for my labor was good enough for me, when your father said he wanted a steersman."

"How did you know enough about Red River traffic to steer a boat up it from the Canadian border, if you recently came from New York?" wrote Marie.

Diogo laughed with the joy of a young man who sees a clever girl trying to pin down his words.

"You are a bright girl," he wrote. "A very bright girl. If I was an Indian Chief or Medicine Man, I would name you, 'Pretty Long Pencil.'"

With this rebuke Diogo bowed with much ceremony, and walked over to the further rail of the craft, rolled a cigarette, lighted it with great calm, and began studying the landscape about fifteen miles over Marie Falloux's head.

Marie turned red. Then she turned white. Her hand stole down to her pistol-belt; then she laughed, turned on her heel, and with her head bent walked slowly ashore, and retraced her steps up the long pier.

"I never was so insulted in my life," she cried softly to herself. "Of all the impudent, fresh, young Fly-by-Night men I ever met, that chap is a premium winner."

The girl walked further.

"But he looks to me on the level," she finally ejaculated.

Jacques Diogo, Soldier of Fortune, meanwhile was covertly examining the scraps of paper which he had seen Marie Falloux write.

"By George," the young man said in the unmistakable accents of Jack Stewart, Sergeant in the American Mounted Scouts. "Marie Falloux did not write that note about the 'sandwiches,' that is dead sure. I wonder if this note is a *decoy message*?"

Jack Stewart had kept his word. He was within the dreaded home of Henri Falloux, the renegade, and his band of desperate outlaws.

Would Jack Stewart recover his stolen papers? Or was a death in terrible torment to be his portion?

For discovery in the camp of Henri Falloux, would not mean an easy death, Stewart well knew.

"Marie is a bright girl," said Stewart half aloud in spite of the risk of being overheard. "I fooled her that trip, however, quite as well as she fooled me under the brightness of the rising moon."

Stewart lapsed into silence.

His meditations were interrupted by the quick sound of a rifle shot proceeding from the shore.

Then he saw Marie Falloux rush down the pier with a bright revolver in her hand.

"What is the matter?" almost came to the lips of Stewart; but just in time he remembered his rôle of a deaf young man, and sank back to his musing attitude when the shot rang out.

Other shots followed.

Then came screams and cries.

But true to his part, Jack Stewart never moved.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "GANG'S UP."

Marie Falloux dashed directly at Jack Stewart, alias Jacques Diogo.

But true to the record made so far by Diogo, Stewart did not move.

Marie clapped her hands on the back of the young Scout with no little force and when the gallant fellow turned to her in apparent amaze, Marie said a naughty little French word.

"Oh, this idiot is deaf. I suppose he hasn't heard the infernal racket those yellow dogs are making."

Marie then wrote rapidly on a bit of paper.

"The Gang's up. Help me," she wrote rapidly and then shoved her missive directly at the so-called Diogo.

Diogo came to earth with remarkable swiftness.

Here was just the chance he wanted to impress on the Falloux's his great bravery and his desire to aid them.

"This matching-wits is a game, after all," thought the young Scout, as he ran directly toward a cluster

of men. "If I don't land the Falloux gang of desperadoes they will land me."

So with his weapon at full cock, Diogo, as he was known, dashed ahead anxious to join in the fray.

A sound like the swift explosion of a package of fire-crackers tied within a tin can came from a low building at Diogo's right.

Thither the Scout ran.

As he approached he saw three Chinamen, their hands tucked under their blouses, run out of the door and scuttle rapidly away toward the fringe of woods back from the house.

Hardly had they disappeared when a third Chinaman staggered out from the house, one hand clutching at a bullet wound in his abdomen.

The man staggered a few feet; then he collapsed in the roadway.

He had hardly fallen when the Scout was over him, and had run a quick hand over his chest as if to find his wound.

No one saw the swift motion with which a packet of papers was transferred from the Chinaman's body to the pocket of the wily Scout.

Then the white man hurried within the low building, which was hardly more than a hut.

Across the door sill lay the body of a dead white man.

The Scout was able to identify it as that of a French-Canadian thug.

"Half Indian, half French-Canadian," thought the Scout. "Mighty mean combination; but he is past his troubles. He got a shot between the eyes."

There was another Chinaman sprawled over a table, the Scout saw, and it required only a cursory glance to see that the man was dying.

"Been a hot little scrap," thought the Scout as he glanced about.

There was little question that he was right.

On the floor of the untidy room were the weapons that must have been used in the fight.

A big revolver, with six chambers exploded lay in one corner; near the door was another heavy revolver with three empty chambers, each being a long barreled gun of the type favored by Chinese gun-fighters.

"Hum," said the Scout to himself. "I wonder what all the fight was about?"

A pack of cards, of American make, thrown down aimlessly, a whiskey bottle with a Canadian label, and a little pile of gold coins, might have been the cause of the trouble.

But the Scout did not think so; he quickly counted the gold, and found only a few dollars in the pile.

"Ten dollars would cover that pile," thought the Scout. "No, this fight was too bitter for that. It wasn't that cash they were fighting over. Money comes to this gang pretty easily. They are used to real money of size; hundreds might have caused trouble; not tens."

Then the Scout sniffed the air.

"Hum," he said. "Opium."

Then the Scout glanced stealthily about.

"Smugglers fall out," he muttered. "Fight over smuggling profits, I rather fancy."

The Scout ran through the package of papers he had taken from the dead Chinaman, then abstracted one, which quickly vanished in the lining of his hat, a pretty safe place to hide things, he well knew; and then he turned to leave the fetid hole, which he saw

was only a square dirty room used as a sleeping place for the lesser members of the Falloux outlaw camp.

The Scout saw a form move, which had been crouching under the table.

"Come out of there, quick," was on the tip of his tongue, but the Scout remembered just in time, that he was supposed to be a mute, and so he threateningly waved his revolver.

A withered-up little man, so frightened that when he was yanked out from under the table by the strong arm of the Scout, could only roll up his eyes and gasp, was the proceeds of the Scout's attempt to get some facts from the moving form.

"Thunder," thought the Scout to himself, "What have I unearthed? Is this a man with a pig's head, or is this a pig, with a man's form?"

The frightened person, looked exactly like a pig, his jaws having the peculiar snout-like formation of a pig, which was accentuated by his beady little eyes, and his habit of holding his head down low, like a sort of human hog.

The little pig-like man was snorting and rolling up his eyes, and the Scout was standing like a nunny, scratching his puzzled head, when he heard a smothered laugh.

He faced about the wrong way, well knowing that just now to face the right way would be his death warrant.

Soon a hand on his shoulder, gave him the opportunity to turn, for he well knew that the laughter came from the red lips of Marie Falloux.

The Scout found the girl writing a note for his eye, as cool amid the carnage as if she had been in a young ladies' seminary, writing a polite note to a polite friend.

The Scout could not help admiring the girl.

"Been quite a scrap," Marie wrote. "Where did you dig up Pig-Faced Butts?"

"Neat scrap," wrote the Scout in return. "I dug your Piggy friend out from under the table."

"Anything else to tell me?" wrote the girl.

The Scout shrugged his shoulders.

Then without a written word he laid in the girl's white hand the papers he had taken from the dead Chinaman, save the one he had secreted in the lining of his hat.

Marie gave the Scout a glance of shrewd suspicion. Then she examined the papers carefully. His face was like a mask. No hint of her inner speculations could be read by the watchful eyes of the Scout.

Marie then wrote rapidly on her tablet.

"Why did you give me the papers?" read Stewart.

"Why shouldn't I," he wrote in return. "They were yours not mine."

"Did you read the papers?"

"Why should I?"

"The papers are important to me—to us here in Line City."

The Scout shrugged his shoulders as he handed back his answer.

Marie did not write anything further. But with averted face she looked over the papers and then with head bent started thoughtfully for the boat, the Scout suspecting that she was going to hand the papers to her father.

But half way between the Scout and the boat, Marie hesitated.

She slowly retraced her steps, and when she was near the young man, began writing hurriedly on her pad.

Stewart could not help but notice that Marie had quickly provided herself with a pad of paper and a pencil, after she had become convinced that he was deaf, although in the early stages of his arrival the girl had used Stewart's pad.

"I will see that someone comes and buries the dead Chinaman here, and looks after that dying chap," the girl wrote. "We don't pay much attention to fights among the Chinks and the Redders; they are pretty frequent in Line City."

Stewart nodded; but he was by no means convinced that the shooting and killing was merely a sudden brawl. There was much that signalled an inner and important reason for the shooting and as he was in search of all the facts that he could get in his dangerous visit to the outlaw camp he decided to try and sift these inner reasons.

"It is one thing to see the smuggling loot of this robber gang piled up on that boat over there, and to convince a United States court jury that there was such a boat, without good evidence to prove that there was. It is equally hard to prove that on that boat were some ten Chinamen coming in to dear America in violation of the Chinese exclusion law, without producing some facts—why, this has got to be a regular detective job—and I never was much of a detective. But I'm in this to win, and I will bet that I will trick that girl, and win back my papers, after all. But say, isn't she a peach?"

These thoughts chased each other through the mind of the gallant Scout.

But he was soon distracted from his musings by hearing a squeaky, tiny little voice at his elbow.

He managed to maintain his reputation for deafness, however, and so when the squeaky little voice stopped, and a tiny arm began pulling at his jacket sleeve, Stewart turned about as if he had first heard the summons.

He extended his pad to the speaker who proved to be frightened little Pig-faced Butts.

"I am deaf," read Butts.

"Sorry," he wrote back in trembling letters. "But can't you talk?"

"No, I am dumb," wrote Stewart, and then the conversation began its painful way.

"You saved my life," wrote Pig-faced.

"You saved it yourself, when you crawled under the table, at the first shot," wrote Stewart.

"Wrong," answered Pig-faced. "I got under the table before the first shot was fired."

Stewart laughed in the distressing long half wail, of the amused mute.

"That is one way to escape a shot; get away from it before it is fired," wrote Stewart.

"I didn't try to escape a shot," replied Pig-faced whose writing really had an injured tone. "I was hiding under the table before the row began."

"Why were you hiding?"

"I wanted to know things."

"Ho, ho! So the bandits got 'next'?"

"Yes."

"Did they discover you?"

"Yes."

"Then what happened?"

"They decided to kill me."

"If they did that, why didn't they kill you?"

"Because two of the party were my friends; they started to intercede for me."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Then there was a lot of words, and then someone fired a shot, and the trouble began."

"There was lots of trouble when it began, eh?" wrote Stewart.

"All anyone wanted," replied Pig-faced.

"Who won?"

"My friends."

"Those three bloused Chinks that went scuttling away toward the woods just as I was running up here—they were your friends, eh?"

"Yes."

"What are their names?"

"Chee Loo, Wing Tung, and Quong Duck."

"Gee! Sounds like a chess board when you talk those names," wrote Stewart.

Pig-faced Butts laughed.

"Were they all members of this Line City, line-up, of thugs, and renegades?"

"Sure."

"Are you a thug?"

"Not much. I'm Pig-faced Butts."

"Aren't you even a bandit?"

"No, sir, I am not a bandit sir, no sir."

The robin-like wrath of Pig-faced was enough to make the sun rise on a cloudy day.

Stewart almost forgot his rôle of a mute when the little man bristled up.

"Then how came you here?" Stewart wrote.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"That's it—I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"Sometimes I think I was someone else, but I can't make it all come just right."

"Here was a mystery for a fact," thought the Scout.

There was, he saw reasons for pressing home his questions before the return of Marie.

He wrote quite rapidly now.

"How long have you been here in this desperado camp?"

"Oh, a long, long time."

"Don't you know how long?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There is something the matter with my head when I try to think."

Pig-faced pushed back his long hair as he spoke.

Stewart saw a great jagged scar.

"Oh, ho," the Scout thought. "This man's skull has been fractured in the past; that accounts for his lack of memory."

"Was your name always Pig-faced Butts?"

"It doesn't seem as if it was—but, oh, I can't remember much of my past, except that I have not always been here in this guerrilla camp."

"Can't you remember a single thing?"

There was a world of simple, infinite cunning in the eyes of Pig-faced Butts when he replied.

"There is only one thing I remember, and the Fal-loux would murder me if they knew what I have

discovered," the half-crazy little man whispered to Stewart.

"What is it?" asked Stewart, by means of his pad. Silently the little man drew Stewart to one side.

"You will not tell if I show you?" Pig-faced Butts wrote.

Stewart shook his head in the negative.

"Then follow me."

Pig-faced Butts stole over to the extreme end of the room.

He stooped over what the scout saw was a big door with a heavy iron ring upon it, let into the solid flooring of the hut.

Then he lifted the ring, after tugging with all his feeble strength for several seconds.

Then he pulled up the trap door.

A terrible odor seemed to fill the room; it was like that which comes from a charnel-house, filled with decaying and festering corpses of the human dead.

Then there came the sound of clanking chains, and a long, long sob of terror, which seemed to float in the room, like the wail of a tortured soul.

"My God!" whispered Stewart, forgetting in his horror his rôle of a deaf mute.

"Listen to that dreadful moan; it comes from a woman's lips," the Scout wrote quickly on his pad, seeing that Pig-faced Butts had not heard the words he had spoken.

"Hush," cried Butts aloud, also forgetting that Stewart had told him that he was deaf. "Yes, it is a woman's cry for help."

CHAPTER V.

THE HIDING PLACE OF THE SMUGGLERS.

"Strong-Hand, you big rascal, what?"

"Why for, eh?"

Two Indians quarreled up the River Trail, near the village or hamlet of Line City, in the early night following the dreadful discovery made by Jack Stewart.

They carried between them a heavy box, and as each wanted to get the easy end of the *portage* there was a conflict nearly all the way.

"Sacré!" cried Strong-Hand, an active looking man, with Indian pirate written all over him.

He wore a hunting shirt, leggings, and moccasins, and tight-fitting trousers of moose-skin; a revolver sticking from a deer-skin belt, a heavy rifle, a hunting knife, and a fur peaked cap, completed his costume.

His companion, Broken-Wing, wore much the same garb, excepting that his hunting shirt was fancifully ornamented with a sort of fringe of dyed porcupine quills.

But the strangest part of the distinguishing mark of the two outlaws, was that their reddish-bronze faces were painted deep ebony-black.

Their dark eyes, glancing and changeful, gave a horrible expression to each face, but their disguise was perfect.

No person seeing them could ever testify afterward that they were anything but "two Indians;" the

paint made a perfect disguise; no man alive could ever swear that the two men were Strong-Hand and Broken-Wing, two vagrant Dog Rib Indians from the far Canadian North-West.

"Why you not tote fair, eh?" cried Broken-Wing again in huge wrath.

"Dame! I tote fair all right. Why you fine me no good man, eh?"

"You no tote right. Broken-Wing he *portage* half this load," replied that Indian, but their quarrels were stopped when a wrathful voice further up the trail was heard to lustily swear, first in French and then in English.

"Hurry up, you lame ducks of *portage* Indian devils, h-u-r-ry, opp, I say, ye——" and the voice rolled away in a regular artillery discharge of strange French-English oaths.

The speaker was Henri Falloux, the outlaw chief, who brooked no delay on the part of the two Indians, who stopped quarrelling as to who would lift the bulk of their load, and shouldered each his half, and staggered up the trail in a vast hurry.

"Dat, de Boss," Strong-Hand whispered to his companion. "Bet-e-r-r work dam hard, or he shoot us, eh."

"He qu-e-e-k wiz he gun," cried Broken-Wing in return, and the two Indians made such excellent time that they soon were on top of the hill on which the trail was winding, with their burden.

"Oh, you blankety blank lazy Indian cur dogs," yelled Falloux when he saw the two men. "Is that all you two big brutes can *portage* up this hill at one t-r-e-e-p?"

"Ugh," replied Strong-Hand. "Hill he steep."

"Sure it's steep," rejoined Falloux angrily. "That is why you get so much wampum from me, you lazy dogs. Go back climb that hill. Get bizzy thar'. If it is zat h-i-l-l, *C'est la le diable*." (There lies the difficulty.)

The two Indians dropped their load at Falloux's feet, and with shrugs and many muttered oaths hurried back down to the Red River, where they grasped another great box, and soon were toiling up the trail again, but in more harmony than on previous trips, now that the eye of their master was upon them.

Soon other men joined the two Indians.

Chinamen, impassive, but steady in their work; red men, gathered from almost every tribe in the great West; white men, whose faces were never seen in civilized cities any more, lest the authorities take uncomfortable action; half-breeds from French-Canada, and dominating them all, was Henri Falloux, as tough a man as ever slit a throat or stole a purse.

In the secreting of the smuggled goods none was more active than Stewart.

After a long bit of hard work he turned to Marie.

"Where do we put this stuff?" Stewart wrote.

"It has to be carried about two miles back in the woods," cried Marie. "I am going that way and I will show you."

"No, you remain here," roared the girl's father. "I need you here. Write to the Dummy that all he has to do is to hurry along the trail until he comes to an ash tree—then stop and when he sees by looking up the mountain side a rock that appears to be carved into the form of a Fox, then he is to await our coming."

"You have changed things there since I was out with you last trip, have you not?" queried Marie.

"Yes. The Mounted Scouts this side of the border, and those—Mounted Police the other side of it, are getting pretty numerous. When I get rid of this trip's loot, I will quit Line City, and go further North. It's getting pretty hard to work hereabouts."

While the conversation between father and daughter was continuing Stewart stood with his back to the two plotters but his eager ears took in every bit of what was said.

"I am getting to everything I need slowly but surely," he thought. "The secrets of this guerrilla gang is getting to be all mine, slowly but surely. I shall soon get to the secret place where the smugglers store their thousands upon thousands of dollars' worth of contraband stuff. Well, I fancy that the Mounted Scouts may get to that place again, some day."

As Marie handed him a paper giving directions upon it as to his route, Stewart turned with his best manner.

"How shall I know the ash tree," he wrote in return. "There are many ash trees in this wood."

Marie laughed.

"Tell him that he can't miss this tree. It is the largest one in this part of the country; he can not miss it, for it stands up big as a house directly in a turn of the trail, two miles from here."

Although Stewart heard the words perfectly he made no sign.

He waited until Marie had written the directions out; then he turned on his heel and started away as if in great haste.

Stewart progressed along the trail for about three quarters of a mile.

He was completely hidden by the rank growth of the woods in the summer, from the river. But he took every precaution to be sure that he was not being followed.

First for a long space he walked firmly along on hard ground making no track.

Then he noiselessly climbed a tree; taking a long look at the surrounding country, to see if anywhere signs of human life could be seen.

Next he removed his top-boots and reversed them on his feet.

Then he made for more than half a mile numerous tracks in the soft ground.

Under a great tree Stewart resumed the proper fashion in wearing top boots, and then he made many tracks, which he took care to have run hither and thither.

Next he removed his boots and put on a pair of moccasins with which he made many tracks, and finally led his trail to a broad creek, on the bank of which he made many more blurring tracks.

"If anyone follows me they will be sure I swam that creek, which is fifty feet wide and very deep here, and I will be pretty safe from spying eyes," remarked Stewart to himself. "Gosh I am glad to be able to talk. It has been a long time since I could talk; it hurt to swear inwardly when the dickens is in things, I found out when I started in to play the dumb-man. But the secret of the dungeon beats me at that. I have made a startling discovery anyway."

Soon Stewart was hurrying along toward the ash

tree, peering every now and then into the bushes that lined the road.

"Hist!"

Stewart heard the low hail.

He looked up toward the top of a slight knoll.

There stood a tall figure waving its hand toward him.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAPPED BY THE YELLOW MEN.

"Come out of there, you she-devil."

There was the clanking of chains and a drawn, white face appeared framed in the blackness of a dungeon.

Marie Falloux laughed coldly when she saw the face.

She had opened the trap door which Stewart knew of, thanks to Pig-faced Butts, and was kneeling by the side of the cavern-like space the door had revealed.

Gazing up at her was a woman's face.

In spite of the anguish upon the pallid countenance it was evident that the prisoner was a beautiful girl in the early flush of young woman-hood.

"I can not come further," the imprisoned girl replied in the faint accents of utter exhaustion. "You know I am chained to this dreadful cell."

Marie laughed a low wicked sneering laugh.

"It isn't comfortable down there, is it?" she sneered.

The prisoner shuddered.

"Rats make poor playmates, now don't they?" added Marie.

The prisoner was crying feebly.

"And bread and water is not good fare, eh?"

The voice of the prisoner was low with longing as she asked for food.

"Nothing but bread and water," replied Marie, "nothing else until you have signed the papers."

The prisoner's head went up with a proud air. Her dim eyes even in the darkness could be seen flashing with inflexible will.

Her voice became firmer in its tone.

"I will starve in this hole before I sign the papers," she said with a tone of absolute finality.

"As you choose," replied Marie, equally as firm in her tone. "If you would rather starve here in that rat-hole, with no food, you are at liberty to do so. I give you one chance, and one only for your freedom."

"What is that chance?"

"Every chance in the world. If you sign the papers you will be freed tomorrow. You may go where you choose and when you choose. My father and I will agree to send you to any city you may name, and you will be free to go back to your old life."

"Is there any mental reservation in that offer?"

"None, except that you must swear that you will never reveal the secret of our hamlet here. Line City, must never be told of by you, to anyone."

"How can you trust me?"

"If you swear a solemn oath that you will not reveal any of our secrets here I know you will not."

"You feel sure that I will not betray you if I take such an oath, even after the horrible sufferings you have inflicted upon me?"

"Yes."

"Remember I have been here for many months."

"I know."

"You have chained me here in irons to a post in this fearful cell."

"Yes."

"I can not walk more than a few steps."

"Yes."

"I am beset with vermin."

"Yes."

"You have almost starved me to death."

"Yes."

"At times I pray for death, rather than the madness that seems to be creeping over me?"

"Yes. And one little act of yours, the mere signing of your name to a paper will free you at once."

"You are not a woman, Marie Falloux, you are a devil."

Marie sneered.

"Devil or woman, I care not what I am," she replied. "But you will live here in that dungeon, which we built to tame the spirits of the band my father has organized in his race for a fortune without working hard for it, until you are ready to sign those papers, or you will die here, with the papers unsigned. I care not really which course you take."

"And I reply to you, Marie Falloux, that I would rather die knowing that my corpse would be eaten by rats that infest my horrible cell, before I accept your infamous terms."

"Die, then," shouted Marie as she dashed the trap-door shut, and turned to leave the room.

Three forms softly blocked her way.

The girl's hand stole to her revolver.

But before she could move, a great *serape* was thrown over her head.

She felt herself lifted from her feet.

She was carried with incredible swiftness from the room, and by a man whose iron grip brooked no struggles; and then she felt herself lifted to a horse.

Her feet were tied to the saddle.

Her arms were pinioned behind her.

The terrible pressure on her throat from the hand of the man who had first grasped her was released.

But she felt someone press a revolver barrel against her forehead.

She well knew then, that she dared not scream.

"Melican girl, no cry; I kill."

Marie felt that she was in the grasp of Chee Loo, the most desperate of the Chinese rovers in her father's band; she, with all her bravery, dared not resist the hissing command for quietness.

Then the horse that carried the girl dashed forward at top speed.

She knew that she was a prisoner in the hands of Chee Loo, and felt that Quong Duck, and Chee Loo, was aided in the work of abduction by Wing Tung; these three Chinamen, she remembered, having been the trio to disappear into the woods after the terrible fight in the old hut.

Marie was a girl whose life since she could remem-

ber had been a struggle amid fierce, disloyal, traitorous men.

Before she was in her early "teens" her revolver had blazed quick death to one man who had insulted her. As she was much alone at Line City, when her father was away on his smuggling and other swindling trips, she had gotten used to looking out for herself, and her wits in the first mile of the journey began to frame some plan for an escape.

Marie knew, however, that it would be impossible to escape by means of screams for help.

One cry for help would be her last; a bullet would end her life in a trice for not a man among her abductors would hesitate to take her life the instant she made a sound.

But she could hear the Chinamen talking in Chinese to each other and as she knew a few words of their speech, she managed to gain the information that she was the victim of a plot, but as to who was at the bottom of the plot she could not learn.

After a long spirited ride the girl had come to no conclusion as to the reason for her summary treatment.

As she was turning the puzzle over in her mind she heard one of the Chinamen speak to the others in the party, and her horse came to a quick stop.

She felt herself lifted from her horse and then her head was uncovered and she found herself deep in the forest.

She looked about as well as she was able but could see no trail leading to the spot where a halt was made.

In every direction she could only see thick underbrush, and tall trees.

"I am in the depths of the woods about three or four miles from Line City," the girl thought, "and while I was sure that there was not a foot of forest about Line City for twenty miles that I did not know, I confess that I do not know this spot. I wonder where I am?"

Marie was not given much opportunity for further investigation.

Chee Loo, who seemed to be the leader in the party which had snatched her away from her father's band of brigands, came forward and after loosening her bonds and removing her gag so that she could speak, stood before her and began asking questions.

"How likee you dis?" he said in pigeon English affected by the Chinamen of the West, when in conversation with the white race.

"I don't like it at all," Marie replied with spirit, "why have you taken me here?"

"Bimeby tell, velly well now, you no try runee, you get killee," gravely answered the Chinaman with a dark scowl of menace.

"Look here, Chee Loo," replied Marie, "Don't you get gay with me, for you know you are going to get shot if you do."

"Who shootee me, velly quick no?" replied Chee Loo.

"My father," answered Marie. "You know him well enough to be sure that he won't stand for this. Even if you killed me he would hunt you out if you were in the middle of China—then pop, dead goes Chee Loo."

"Me no scaree," sneered the mysterious yellow man, "you know we gottee you. Dad, he no be tellee where you at, eh?"

"You mean that I am your prisoner and that no one can tell my father where I am?" questioned Marie. Chee Loo bowed many, many times in the affirmative, like a great Chinese doll.

"Oh, stop wagging your yellow head," cried Marie in a temper at once. "You make me ill with your nodding head, and your sneaking little slant eyes. Why if I had my gun here, I would fill you full of holes like a horseradish grater."

"No can do, no savez gun, eh?" the Chinaman replied.

Marie was silent. She knew the words were too true; her weapons had been taken from her. She had no trusty revolver swinging easy to her hand; but she had after all, some sort of a weapon in a keen stiletto she wore buried deep beneath her skirt in a convenient pocket, and she trusted to this weapon as a last resort, although she knew that an open search for it would only end in her being deprived of the weapon.

So the girl played hard for time and opportunity to bring the stiletto into play.

"You haven't told me why you have brought me here?" she asked next.

"Goin' tellee you, pretty quick, soon," answered Chee Loo.

"Fire ahead, and tell then," rejoined Marie.

She looked about cautiously as she spoke.

She saw that Quong Duck and Wing Tung, were acknowledging Chee Loo as the master, and as the leader of the party.

They had withdrawn apart and were holding their own horses and the one that Chee Loo had ridden.

Marie's horse was standing by her side, and she held the animal's bridle in her hand.

The horse was eagerly cropping the shrubs about them, and Marie gave him as full liberty as his bridle rein permitted.

Marie further saw that the spot where the Chinamen had taken her was without doubt their camp, and it was probable that the three men had secretly hurried to this spot while awaiting an opportunity to abduct her, after their fight in her father's hut, in which so much blood had been shed.

Marie was determined if possible to get to the bottom of the reason for her forcible removal, and to the trouble that led to the fatal fight so close to her father's house, and in which these three men had demonstrated their wonderful ability with revolvers.

"I said tell me why you have brought me here?"

"You know, pretty much quickee," replied Chee Loo.

"Do you expect to get money for my return?"

The Chinaman shook his head in a negative reply, not wishing that Marie should learn too much of the real motive behind her abduction.

"Do you do this because you want to kill me?"

Again a negative shake.

"Has someone offered you money to bring me here?"

"No."

The yellow fiend spoke this single word in seeming sincerity, hoping to deceive the girl.

"Then why have you brought me here?"

"You makee touble."

"I make trouble?"

"Yes."

"Who for?"

"Our fiend."

"I make trouble for your friend?"

"Yes."

"Who is your friend?"

"Piggy Butts."

"What?"

"Piggy Butts."

"You mean to say that you have brought me here to this hole, because you think I make trouble for your friend, who is Pig-faced Butts?"

"Yes."

"But man, Pig-faced Butts is half crazy?"

"Not clazey."

"Yes, he is, I say, crazy as a loon."

"Not clazey. He goodee man."

Marie puzzled over this reply for some time.

"I don't know that I see what you mean," she at length replied, "will you explain?"

"You gottee girl lockee up in darkee cellee, you lettee girl go, or—"

Chee Loo as he replied brought an accurate mental picture of a girl being shot to death by Chinese thugs, to the mind of Marie, by a clever pantomime.

In spite of her undoubted courage she grew a trifle white about the mouth.

"You are crazy, sure, Chee Loo," Marie continued. "Now let's make this thing up between us. I will pay you good money to let me go."

Chee Loo shook his head again like an animated Chinese doll.

"Well, what do you want me to do to buy my freedom—you surely do not wish to kill me?"

The Chinaman leaned forward in his anxiety. His eyes glanced like those of an attacking serpent.

"We keepee you here, till we gettee out dat gal, you gettee free like easy after dat, bimebye."

Chee Loo said these words in his silkiest tone.

Marie saw in a moment that the three men were in league to aid Pig-faced Butts in getting to the bottom of the Mystery of the Dungeon. Her heart was filled with rage, and she swore a mental oath to kill Pig-faced Butts on sight if she ever got out of the dilemma in which she found herself.

But Marie saw it was time to play her trump card. She had only one desperate chance of escape before her.

She had sank down near her horse which she contrived to covertly pull between her and Chee Loo.

Then her hands went to her face as she burst into tears, which were real enough but proceeded entirely from rage.

One white hand stole down to her dress skirt.

She seemed to be fumbling from time to time for a pocket handkerchief.

At length she grasped the handle of her stiletto.

With a swift motion she drew the handkerchief out of her pocket, but entwined within it was her deadly stiletto.

"Oh, Chee Loo," she said in agony apparently. "I give in. Come here and I will do anything to get away from your clutches. You shall know all about the Mystery of the Dungeon."

Chee Loo drew nearer to the girl, his face aflame with pleasure at his easy victory.

When he was within two feet of her, Marie jumped up.

With the speed of the tiger jumping upon the deer, she grasped the Chinaman by the arm.

Flash!

There was the glint of light on the deadly stiletto as it was poised above Marie's head.

With all the force of her supple frame the girl buried the weapon in the yellow neck of the Chinaman.

With just a slight moan, hardly loud enough to be heard by his companions, Chee Loo fell forward. His legs drummed like a partridge's wing on the ground; he died almost immediately.

But Marie did not await the final ending of her blow.

She jerked her horse around toward the most open part of the woods; with a splendid spring vaulted into the saddle, and with a lash of her quirt across the flanks of her horse, and with one foot goading the animal to frenzy with her spur, she darted down the glade, while Wing Tung, and Quong Duck sent shot after shot, in vain after her, as she flew along.

Marie was safe so far as the shots were concerned in the first one hundred yards of her reckless burst for safety.

The woods closed over her and shielded her from the two remaining outlaws.

Marie rode almost stretched out on the back of her horse, not only to escape the shots of the Chinamen, but also to keep from being swept off her horse by low hanging tree limbs as she darted through the forest.

"I am safe at last," the girl cried, in triumph, as she pulled up her almost spent horse after a two mile run at the animal's utmost speed.

But just as she spoke a man grasped her bridle.

Her steed stopped with one or two mad plunges.

She felt herself literally lifted from her seat, and felt herself again pinioned by a man whose strength she saw was great.

"You are my prisoner," a voice yelled in her ear.

Marie Falloux fainted with the stress of the terrible emotions pent up in her wildly beating heart.

CHAPTER VII.

PAUL VANCE TO THE RESCUE.

Jack Stewart, *alias* Jacques Diogo, *alias* "Dummy," saw that the strange shape hailing him, was none other than his friend, and fellow member of the American Mounted Scouts, Paul Vance.

"Hello, Paul," Stewart said simply.

"Hello, Stewart," cried Paul in return.

"Better draw off into the woods on the top of that little hill there, where the road leads to the left, and crosses the trail at right angles. We can see both road and trail there. I may be followed."

"Good scheme," answered Paul. "We can see both ways up or down, trail or road, for about a mile. Anyone coming either way we can quickly detect."

"Exactly."

Upon arriving at the point Vance gave his horse about twenty-five feet of lariat for grazing room, and

having passed one end of the raw-hide about a big tree, and secured it firmly with a half-hitch or two, Vance rejoined Stewart.

He found his friend and fellow Scout calmly smoking his pipe, seated on a great log.

"Well, how did you get here?" Vance asked Stewart.

"Walked."

"I noticed that; but why?"

"Didn't have a horse."

"Well, why are you here?"

"To try and find some more of the dread secrets of the Falloux gang of bandits."

"Are you succeeding?"

"Never had better luck."

"How did you get into the ranks of the gang?"

"It was easy. After I left you in camp I hurried to a point on the Red River where I knew a lot of smugglers used to hang out."

"You mean near Robbers' Row, as they call the hamlet on the Red River where Henri Falloux first secretes his plunder when he has smuggled it over the border from Canada?"

"Exactly."

"The place where he loads his big flat-boat for the trip to Line City, up the Red River?"

"Yes."

"Did you get in with Falloux there?"

"I did."

"How?"

"I got there about the time I knew he was over the border. When his stuff began to come in to the ranch he owns near Robbers' Row, I mixed with his gang."

"You are a pretty good mixer?"

"Fairish. Anyway, he packed his stuff in by the wagon load."

"Pretty brazen, eh?"

"Yes. I found he used twelve canvas-covered wagons, the regular old time ships-of-the-desert, style, which the Argonauts of '49 used to use in the first great dash for California over the plains."

"Why those wagons hold twice what the average wagon will hold nowadays."

"That's right. He had six big mules hitched to each wagon, and each wagon was loaded down to the limit with stuff."

"Whew! What do you estimate the smuggled stuff he had in his wagons?"

"It will hit many hundred thousand dollars I think."

"That's quite a haul."

"Yes, and there's more behind it. He has been doing this same haul every month for years."

"Then he has smuggled—why, he must have smuggled millions of dollars' worth of goods over the border."

"I guess you've hit it all right."

"How does he get rid of all the stuff?"

"I am not clear as to that yet. But it looks to me as if he bulked his stuff in a *cache* in the woods near Line City. Probably he has a lot of wooden buildings buried in the woods, somewhere, near here, and he leaves his plunder there until he gets someone East or West to handle it for him, and he ships it out in small lots, so that custom house men will not get wise."

"Do you know where he *caches* his stuff?"

"Yes."

Stewart laughed gaily.

"I flatter myself I got away with it all this trip," he added. "I didn't have a bit of trouble until I got to Line City. Then Marie Falloux got into the game—say that girl is a human wildcat, isn't she?"

"Didn't I tell you so? Have you got over the romance that those pretty hazel eyes started in your heart."

Stewart grinned sheepishly.

"Oh, yes," he rejoined, "I am not very much in love with the lady. She is rather too quick with her weapons to please this American Scout."

"Did she try to trap you?"

"I should reply, yes. She tried me out in a dozen ways and several times she had me up against it. But I crawled over them all."

"Then she didn't suspect you?"

"She suspected me for some time. But I thought every minute of the bullet she presented me, which is still roaming about my system somewhere and I just said to myself, that I'd fool her, just as hard as she fooled me in the forest that night."

"Have you recovered your papers yet?"

"No. And I haven't yet the slightest idea where she has secreted them. But I will get to them before long, you bet."

"I think you will."

"Oh, I am sure to get them back. I feel that if the gang don't get my alley and get next to me that I will land them all in prison."

"Is there anything else to tell me? We had better get away from each other. We have been talking some time. They may send out some one to watch you."

"I have provided for that. But whether they do or not, there is one thing to remember—I'm inside the ramparts. I told you I would go to Line City. I have done it. I told you I would get into the Falloux gang. I have done it. I told you I would get back my papers—and I am going to do it."

Vance was filled with admiration, when Stewart told him that he was posing in the Falloux camp as Jacques Diogo, a dumb boatman.

"But we must get on, my boy, although I will confess that Marie is a fascinating subject to dwell upon."

Vance then thought of matters for a second or two and then remarked that it was up to him to get the Mounted Scouts in a camp near the Line City gang ready for any use that Stewart might put them to.

"Quite right," replied Stewart. "Make a quick skip. I see some one coming up the trail."

As soon as Vance had vanished in the woods, Stewart retraced his way to the trail and soon came face to face with the man who was toiling up the steep path-like way, puffing and blowing.

Stewart saw that the man was Henri Falloux and that his face was white with wrath.

Falloux greeted Stewart in a long roll of queer French-English oaths, and in the funniest kind of mixture of French and English.

Stewart stood smiling as the words twisted away from Falloux, and when he had finished a speech in

which he gave Stewart a remarkable insight into the bad opinion that Falloux had conceived of him, blandly wrote a few words on his pad, which he handed to the bandit chief.

"I am deaf and dumb."

"You are deaf and dumb, you dago, Mexican son of a horse thief, are you?" yelled Falloux as he stamped on the paper Stewart had handed him. Then he simply foamed at the mouth with rage.

"Where is Marie?" at length the bandit yelled. "Have you seen her?"

True to his rôle Stewart did not "bat an eye-lid," but wrote again, his usual song, "I am deaf and dumb."

This second effort seemed to allay Falloux's wrath.

He grasped Stewart's pad and wrote rapidly.

"Have you seen Marie?" he wrote.

"Not since I left her in camp with you," replied Stewart.

"She isn't in camp, we can't find any trace of her," wrote Falloux his face now desperately wan and old and wrinkled.

"Where did she go?"

"I do not know. We last saw her enter the hut where the Chinks and the others had a fight."

"Did no one see her come out?"

"No, but we found traces of several moccasins about the door of the hut, and tracks made by three horses leading to the woods."

"Whose moccasins made the tracks?"

"Several of our men are sure that one of the tracks were made by the Chinaman, Chee Loo."

"What?"

"Yes, the bloody yellow devil, who kicked up the muss and skipped after putting bullets into two of my men, and both of them were among my best men."

"Both are dead?"

"Sure."

"It looks to me as if they have abducted your daughter."

There was a dreadfully cruel light in Falloux's eyes.

"If they have, and any harm comes to her, I will chase those devils into the other world if I have to do it to get them. What I will do to those Chinks when I get them hasn't been written in the history of torture."

Stewart was deeply stirred by what Falloux said. He knew that the Chinamen had better not been born, than to risk falling into the hands of Henri Falloux.

Before he could answer a horse rushed out of the forest.

He bore down upon the two men.

As he dashed by like a huge phantom of a horse, going at wonderful speed there fell from his saddle a bit of blue-ribbon.

Falloux rushed to the bit of bright color and picked it up.

"Marie wore it when I last saw her, only a few hours ago," the desperado yelled. "She has been spirited away by those yellow devils. Get back to camp, turn out the entire band, for I will rescue her and kill her abductors before twenty-four hours are over."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIE FALLOUX'S FLIGHT.

When Marie Falloux came to herself, she found that her horse had disappeared.

She looked about with swimming head but could see nothing of the animal.

"Ho, ho, Hee! Hee!"

A man's voice roared near her.

She turned to see who was making the sound expecting to have her eyes focus on the evil face of the Chinaman, Wing Tung, or his equally evil companion, Quong Duck.

Instead her eyes fell upon the laughter wreathed face of Paul Vance, who leaned on his rifle in an easy position.

"Paul Vance," cried Marie. "Another one of those cursed American Scouts."

Paul's wide-brimmed hat swept the ground as he mockingly made the girl a sweeping bow.

"I cry you mercy," he tittered. "Indeed, had I known that the wood nymph who rushed by me on a steed of mettlesome fire, was my dear old friend Marie Falloux, I would have hesitated before I had plucked her from her saddle. Marie Falloux is rather quick in bending her trigger finger to suit me; she shoots rather too well at pursuing American Scouts."

"I suppose that is a fling because I shot your side-partner," boldly answered the girl. "What became of him?"

"At the present time he is lying in his lonely grave, not aware that you let his foolish life out with your deadly bullet."

"I wonder if you are lying?"

"I lie to such a fair lady, oh fie!"

"Anyway I didn't try to kill him. That's the trouble with your American made gun, it kills, but an English made gun, stops your enemy, but doesn't kill him."

"Now, Sweet Marie, why don't you get your father to smuggle an English gun over the border, the next time he jumps said border?"

Marie turned pale.

"Nonsense," she cried. "My father does no smuggling. He is a decent trader, who does nothing but legitimate trading."

"Oh, Marie, Marie, how you can lie? I am really ashamed of you, for you know Marie, you are now under arrest charged by me with being a smuggler and a desperate member of the Falloux band of outlaws."

"How dare you make such a charge? I will make you prove them."

"You are a little mixed in your language, but let me tell you that I propose to charge you with smuggling, and I propose to prove 'them,' as you put it, in the United States courts."

"How absurd."

"Is it not?"

"Why you haven't a chance in the world to prove your charges."

"We will see about that; but any way we won't go further into this matter, not if we know it. Just now you are my fair prisoner."

"Where is my horse?"

"The last time I saw him he was hitting up a record pace through the woods."

"Which way was he going?"

"Both ways, it seemed to me, but fast enough to get both ends of him out of my sight in a jiffy."

"Why didn't you leave me alone?"

"Because you are needed to round out my career. I have arrested many a male smuggler, but never before did I arrest such a pretty thing as you are—one so faithless."

Marie bit her lip.

She saw that Vance was playing with her; but she further perceived that Vance did not propose to release her.

She knew that she had no weapon now. Her stiletto was left sticking in the throat of Chee Loo.

"I am lost indeed," the girl thought. "I am in the hands of this American Scout, a prisoner, and he will undoubtedly make good his threat to have me tried by a jury for smuggling."

Marie turned cold, at the thought.

The smuggling charge did not dismay her. She was young and a few years' imprisonment she did not dread.

But there was the ugly threat of murder and a trial that might end in her execution, for shooting the companion scout, to Vance; and her heart was heavy as she turned toward Vance—determined to find out really, whether she had killed Stewart or not.

"Where did you bury the body of the scout I shot?" she asked.

"In a deep grave, amid flowers and where the birds sing daily over the corpse of our hero," mourned Vance.

"Honest?"

"Honest Injun."

"I never met one."

"Never met what?"

"An honest Injun."

Vance roared.

"Well, now you remind me of it, neither have I. But in this case, you will have to wait and see what you will undoubtedly get next to in time. I am unable to submit the corpse of Jack Stewart as an exhibit in this case to prove to you that you killed him, but I again implore you to believe that you did."

Marie saw that future questioning would not solve the problem.

She hung her head a prey to many fears.

As for Vance, he also was not as easy in his mind as he pretended to be.

In the first place he knew that he had no evidence upon which to arrest Marie.

He knew further that if there was any evidence in the hand of the American scouts against the Falloux gang for smuggling, that Jack Stewart held it entirely.

But he knew first, last, and all the time that Stewart was anxious to get Marie out of the way, and he knew that he might bluff the girl into not trying to escape him, until Stewart had time to carry out his plans.

"I will have to let this little she-devil go sooner or later, of course," Vance thought. "But I will bluff her into staying as long as she wishes, and then when she don't wish, I can't hold her. She would kick up all kind of a riot in Washington, if I detained her too long. Claim false imprisonment, and Washington always believes any charge made against its men who are as far away as we are. So I'll bluff as long as I can, to help out Stewart."

Vance was very serious in his next words to Marie. "Now, it will be necessary for me to ask you to deliver to me any weapons you may have," he said.

Marie's even white teeth were shown in her broad smile.

"Goodness, man," she cried, "do you think if I had any weapon about me that I wouldn't have used it on you ages ago, and made my escape?" she said.

Poor Vance blushed at his stupidity.

"Was there ever such a charming little murderess," he shouted. "What a cunning little cut-throat it is?"

"Why, what do you expect? You tell me that I am under arrest for being a member of a smugglers' gang; then you tell me I may be tried for the murder of an American scout? Well, to kill you will only be two murders. No one can hang me twice. So, I might as well take a chance and push you after your partner. Some of those little birds can sing for two dead scouts as easily as one."

Now Paul Vance was a very brave man. But he felt a somber feeling of dread clutch at his heart, when he heard Marie speak. He knew she would kill him in a second had she a weapon with which to do it.

"I think without doubt that you are the most remorseless woman I ever met," cried Vance. "Your like does not live on this earth."

Marie laughed with a sarcastic intonation.

"Don't fool yourself that way," she said. "Any woman I know would take a longer chance than killing you to get away from exposure."

Vance shook his head.

"But in this case I am safe, am I not? Having no weapon you can not kill me?"

"Exactly."

"Now there is one question more to ask you."

"Why not ask it?"

"I hate to bind you to my horse, and I hate to ask you to walk, but if I mount the horse without binding you to it, and try to carry you, or if I bind you to it and walk, it seems to me that you may resent the bonds."

"I would, of course."

"Now will you give me your parole, that if I do not bind you, you will not try to escape?"

Vance hid his face in his glove to not let Marie see the smile that crept over it.

"Much she will abide by her promise not to escape," Vance thought.

Marie on her side was thinking that she cared little for a broken parole if it let her escape.

So she answered.

"I would not break my parole," she asserted vehemently. "If I gave my word that I would not try to escape I would not try."

"I wonder if your word is good for anything?"

"Try me and find out."

Marie drew near as she spoke.

Into her beautiful hazel eyes there crept a piteous note of appeal.

She folded her hands in supplication and crept near to Vance, her pretty face clouded with dread.

Vance felt sorry for the girl, after all.

"Poor little thing," he thought, "it's a pity that such a beautiful girl has not been brought up to a different life. She simply doesn't know anything but crime—and—"

Vance received a blow that sent him reeling backward.

He measured his length in the leaves that had fallen from the trees. His head sang, and for a second he lay gasping, hardly conscious of his surroundings.

When he came partly to himself and sat up to stare stupidly around he found himself alone.

Marie had dealt him a beautiful blow exactly at the point where his chin made an inviting mark.

No pugilist could have "put one over" better.

Paul Vance had been in ring language "flooded" with a stiff straight arm punch, by Marie Falloux, and his fair prisoner had, while he was "groggy," jumped on his horse with wonderful agility, and had flown away, free as a bird, on the back of the scout's gallant animal.

While Vance ruefully rubbed his aching jaw, he could hear the high shrill laughter of the girl ringing through the woods as she escaped.

"By thunder," cried Vance. "She didn't violate her parole, but tricked me as easily as she did Jack Stewart. Confound her for a —"

The humor of the situation so strongly appealed to the scout that he lay down in the shrubbery and laughed until his head swam again and again.

His laughter came to a sudden stop as his eyes caught sight of the form of a man stealing toward him with a rifle trained upon him.

"Halt," cried Vance, as he jerked his own rifle to his shoulder. "Halt, or I will fire."

For reply there came the vicious snap of a rifle, aimed directly at his heart.

CHAPTER IX.

A ONE SIDED LOVE AFFAIR.

Far in the lead of the large gang of infuriated bandits, far in fact ahead of Henri Falloux, who had almost exhausted himself by the imprecations and threats he had uttered against the Chinese abductors of Marie, strode Jack Stewart, now once more in the robber-gang, as Jacques Diogo.

"This game is mighty interesting," quoth Jack to himself. "But if Marie was fifty times worse than she is I wouldn't leave her longer than I could help in the hands of those Chinamen. That would come under our law against cruel and unusual punishments."

Jack felt in his soul that Marie was able to take care of herself; but he also felt sorry for her father, Henri Falloux, for never had he seen such a tempest of wrath sweep over any man, as it had over Falloux when he became convinced that the Chinamen had spirited away his only daughter, in fact the only human being in the world that Falloux cared for.

"No matter how perfidious, how unaccountably wicked a man may be, he at least loves his child," thought Jack. "I can't feel much sympathy for Falloux, for he must have known what the end of a daughter must be who was being brought up merely as a criminal, but—"

Here Jack's thoughts suddenly terminated, for riding quite at ease through the dense woods came the subject of the search, pretty Marie, herself, riding quite as easily as if escape from the hands of two desperadoes, was what she usually did every day.

"What, how!" stammered Jack.

It was fortunate that in his surprise he hardly whispered the words, but Marie was too overjoyed to see him to notice that he had spoken, anyway.

She almost snatched his pad from his hand and began writing the history of her escape from the Chinamen.

When she told of her killing Chee Loo, Stewart's blood ran cold.

"Did you really kill him?" he wrote.

"Why not? He was willing to kill me if I hadn't killed him first."

Stewart nodded.

"Where did you get that horse?"

"It belonged to Paul Vance, that infernal American scout who is prowling about these diggings."

"What?"

"Sure."

Marie then wrote briefly her version of the blow she had given Vance.

"I left him grinning like a big monkey over his swelled jaw," wrote the girl merrily.

Stewart simply laughed until the tears rolled down his face. He now had a medium for the stopping of all future comments upon his anxiety to catch Marie, and which ended in the reception of an uncomfortable bullet in his lungs.

"What did you say to Vance?" asked Jack at length.

"Not anything that could hurt us here," the girl replied. "He seemed to know a lot about our smuggling plans, but what of it? He can not really prove anything against us."

"Of course not."

Stewart thought a moment, then he continued writing.

"Was he alone?" he wrote.

"Yes. He says I killed the fellow that was with him, a scout named Jack Stewart."

"Write me about that matter, will you please?"

The girl detailed her trickery passed upon Stewart, apparently never thinking that the man, Jacques Diogo, was the fellow that she had shot; but poor Stewart's cheeks burned when he read the final words to the merry description the girl gave of her talk with Stewart, just before she shot him.

"I sold him the sweetest gold-brick, any man ever bought," the girl wrote.

"Yes, he-he—yes, now wasn't it great?" Stewart wrote in reply. "Say, you know how to fool a fellow, don't you?"

"All except you," cried the girl, but with a blush, she wrote much the same words, when she remembered that Diogo, as she knew Stewart, was a mute.

Stewart was "up against it" at once.

"Confound the girl," he thought, "is she going to make love to me?"

Then he wrote, just the very thing you see, he ought not to have written under the circumstances.

"What do you mean?" he pencilled.

If he had stopped to think he would have put down words that would have taken the conversation away from the question he knew the girl would write next.

The question came:

"Why don't you marry me?" wrote Marie, with a great vivid wave of color that swept over her face.

Stewart swallowed about the way a fish does when it is pulled out of its native element.

He did not know how to answer the girl. He was man enough not to wish to use her affections to lure her onward, where he could arrest her and her father, and break up the entire desperate Falloux gang; in fact he was in a dreadfully awkward position, with the direct appeal of the girl here in her own handwriting under his eyes, and her eyes dwelling anxiously upon him.

"Darn it," thought Stewart, "I wish I hadn't come here. I don't want to 'rope' this girl, this way, why did the addled headed little vixen ever get the idea that she was in love with the 'Dummy?'"

Fortunately Stewart was saved the need of an answer just then, for with a cry of relief he dashed Henri Falloux, and behind him came the bulk of the smuggling crew all armed to the teeth, and as fine a looking gang of guerrillas, as Stewart had ever seen.

Stewart was surprised also at the depth of affection shown by Henri Falloux when he saw his daughter.

The sight of a man whose cruel nature made him a by-word far and near, weeping great salt tears, was something that Stewart, even in his checkered life had never seen before; it startled and pained him.

"By thunder," he thought, "I wish I was out of this gang, and hadn't gone into this thing quite so recklessly. Revenge is a note that we ought not to touch very much I see. I am sorry for Falloux and his daughter—confound the girl, if I don't skip quick she will marry me out of hand."

And there was more danger in this than Stewart really knew, for if Marie had really known that he was Jack Stewart, the little tigress would undoubtedly have married him for revenge and shot him the next moment out of spite.

Stewart managed to keep a respectful distance from his too ardent wooer the remainder of the way back to Line City.

The girl tried often to get near him, but by use of many subterfuges Stewart managed to keep her from getting him where she could resume the conversation.

"She is a devilish pretty girl, at that," he thought, "but I would hate to be her husband. Most women take their quarrels out of their husband by dint of a long tongue; this girl has got a long revolver, which she would be liable to use on hubby, any old time, he came home with one of his usual jags on. Not any for me. I'd rather marry a powder-magazine; it's safer."

Marie told her father the fact that the American scouts were on the trail of his bravo-party the first chance she got.

Falloux's face was black with rage when he had heard the story.

"We must try to get rid of our stuff at once," he decided quickly. "It's a dead serious matter to have the American scouts after us. We must get out of Line City at once."

"What, and leave all these valuable building lots," cried Marie. "Say, father, why don't you get to be a real estate man and sell off the lots. There ought to be a lot of money in the game of selling them off to

Eastern men who have the 'small-farm' bee in their bonnets."

"We must pull up as quick as we can and dodge over the border into Canada," insisted Falloux.

"Would we be any safer there than here?" cried Marie. "We aren't popular over in Canada, you know, since our last visit there."

"Then we had better throw up our cards," replied her father. "Any way, we can clean up enough now in a short time to let us get into the far North West. There we can change our names and live respectfully on our gains."

"Father, you can't live decently. You have been at this game too long. I couldn't stand for anything around me but the old gang. They are dead tough I know, and we live every moment in danger of sudden death, but I like the life. Anyway, what can the Mounted Scouts do? You have the stuff safely hid now in the *cache*—if the scouts raided us tomorrow there would be nothing here that would incriminate us."

"Nevertheless, it's getting pretty hot here for us. That girl you insisted in shutting up in the dungeon would be pretty bad medicine for us, if she should be found."

Marie's teeth clenched upon her under lip.

She had thought of Pig-faced Butts, just then.

"There is just one man I need just now," the girl said to her father.

"Who is that?"

"Pig-faced Butts."

"What do you want of him?"

"The moment I see him I am going to shoot him."

"What has he done to you?"

"Betrayed us."

"What?"

"Betrayed us."

"How?"

Marie told her father what Chee Loo had said to her about poor Pig-faced Butts being implicated in her abduction.

A deadly cruel gleam came into the eyes of Falloux.

"The minute we get back to camp I will send for Pig-faced," he roared. "If you don't kill him on sight, I will."

Stewart who was close behind Marie and her father while the foregoing conversation was going forward heard every word of it.

"I will have to go to the front for Pig-faced," he thought. "But how?"

His active mind dwelt upon ways and means to save the half crazed unfortunate Pig-faced Butts; but no where did he see a gleam of light to point to the saving of the man who had earned his gratitude and sympathy.

"The only way to do," Stewart finally decided, "is to let things drift. That is about all the course any of us can steer when such problems face us. I will drift along and when the right time comes, why, I will know just what I ought to do."

Marie on her side was equally in a quandry.

She had managed to work upon her feelings to such an extent that she was very sure that she wanted to marry the supposed mute; and being, as it is plain to see, a girl of very willful disposition, utterly unused to any subterfuges, she had thought the proper thing

to do was to go direct to the man she loved and tell him of her affection.

"He is nothing by Jove," she thought, "but a busted outlaw. He don't dare to dig up any of his old friends. He can't talk, or hear, and here I am ready to marry him. Pop has lots of cash, and is getting old, and will retire from this game soon. We can go to any old place and live like lords from England. There's better men than he is in our gang who would be tickled to death if I wanted to marry them."

Falloux was musing as to the dreaded presence of the American scouts.

"I don't like that game at all," he thought, "Marie don't see that while we can cope with one, two, twenty or fifty scouts, that they will still send others out here to get us, and sooner or later they will get us. I fear it's a case of close and jump, but before we go, I'll fill that infernal sneak Pig-faced Butts so full of lead that he will sink in water a hundred fathoms without more lead tied to his cur body."

Soon the party saw the smoke from the various huts at Line City, dimly spouting through the woods.

Stewart's heart gave a great jump.

"Here comes the time when I have got to do something to help out poor old Piggy," he thought, as he narrowed the space between him and the Falloux's so as to be within easy distance of them, when the time came to jump forward and rescue the unfortunate fellow whose death seemed to be now coming to him in great jumps.

The bandits separated as soon as the camp was reached.

Marie still sat astride of the horse she had stolen from Paul Vance.

She had worked herself into a white rage.

Her eyes were brilliant with her passion. Never had she looked prettier to Stewart.

He could hear her calling to several members of the bandit gang who had not joined in the search for her to send Pig-faced Butts to her.

Stewart's hand began playing with his revolver.

He knew now that he would shoot Marie in cold blood before he would let her harm a hair of the head of Pig-faced.

"Pig-faced," yelled several of the bandits. "Where are you, Marie wants to see you."

There came no answering cry.

But from the hut of the dungeon of mystery, there came a great cry of horror.

"Piggy has run away, and taken the girl from the dungeon with him," one of the bandits, a tall, strong rover shouted as he ran up to Marie.

Marie's eyes were dark with wrath.

She brought her revolver butt down upon the head of the foolish speaker who stretched his length upon the ground, with a deep scalp wound, from which the blood streamed in torrents.

"You lie, you fool, what do you know about dungeons, and girls that have escaped anyway?" Marie fairly yelled.

Under her impatient spurring her horse bounded over toward the hut.

Marie vanished within the building.

She returned almost immediately, just as her father came running to the spot where she raged.

"Pig-faced Butts and the woman are missing," the girl howled. "They have escaped."

"What," just whispered Falloux, to the intense sur-

prise of Stewart, who open-mouthed was watching the dreadful scene, fierce as a cyclone in its exhibition of terrible rage.

Falloux sank to the ground, a white and trembling wreck of a man.

"What mystery is there in all this?" thought Stewart. "How can the escape of Pig-faced Butts with that pallid-faced half dead woman whom I saw in that cell, so frighten this fierce demon of a man, so that he cowers to the earth like a frightened child?"

CHAPTER X.

PAUL VANCE DOES SOME QUICK THINKING.

Paul Vance had no time to escape the shot, he saw. Dire peril makes a man think quick.

The round hole of the tube of the rifle pointed at him, did not give out its deadly missile, as quick as Paul's mind worked.

He fell prone upon his face with the very flash from the weapon.

So splendidly did he fall, that the assassin who had aimed at his life, was sure that he had killed the brave scout.

The man dropped his rifle and with a guttural exclamation rushed at what he felt sure was his prostrate, dying victim.

Vance pretended to be in the throes of death, for he was unhurt. He threshed about among the bushes, and managed to thus crawl to a half stooping position.

The assassin, unmindful of the exact reception he was about to get, leaped down upon Paul.

The Scout straightened up.

He whirled his long rifle over his head.

The gun came down directly upon the head of the on-charging assassin.

Whack!

The assassin crumpled up in a heap of senseless flesh. His head was almost crushed by the terrific blow Vance dealt him.

In two seconds more Vance turned the fellow over after he had firmly bound him.

He saw through the blood on the man's face that he was a Chinaman.

"Sure it is a Chink," Paul cried to himself. "A white skull would have now been split clear to the chap's heels, with the blow I struck. You can't kill a Chinaman with a blow, I guess. I never could, anyway."

Vance fearing that the Chinaman had others with him made a quick circuit of the immediate vicinity of the woods but found no companion of the assassin.

"Now, I just wonder why that Chink tried to kill me," Vance mused. "I haven't any feud with Chinamen on that I know of. We scouts never have had any brushes with them—well, it's a mystery to me, I can't fathom it."

When he had at length returned to the Chinaman, he found the man's eyes were open.

"Didn't I say that I never could brain a Chinaman," quoth Paul, as he frowned at the recumbent yellow man.

The Chinaman gasped.

Paul felt sorry for the fellow in spite of his attempt at murder and lifted him up and examined the cut in his head.

It was wide and gaping, but was without question only a flesh wound.

Paul ran to a near-by spring, got some water in his hat, sprinkled the man with it, gave him a stiff drink from his canteen, and soon saw that the Chinaman was back to earth again.

"Why you try killee me?" he asked in true Western Pigeon-English always used when talking to a yellow man, by the whites.

The yellow man grinned.

"Game bird, anyhow," thought Paul. "That head needs a stitch or two."

Paul took from his pocket a surgeon's needle and twine. He carried the needle for just such a time as the one that confronted him.

Within a half hour after he had tried his best to kill the Chinaman, Paul was just as busily engaged in trying to save his life.

"Stop that," he cried, as the fellow winced under the stitches he was getting through his scalp. "I am not much of a sewing machine, but here's where I sew up that cut. It's sure a nasty one, and would have killed any one but a fool Chinaman."

Soon Paul had the Chinaman's head neatly bundled up.

"Look like an accident ward in a hospital," Paul commented. "Well, there you are, dear old assassin that didn't assassinate. All ready now to get on the job again, but don't you put your ugly head again where I can hit it. Next time I'll make a Chinese sausage of your head."

The Chinaman moaned feebly.

Then he sat up and blinked at Paul.

"Gosh, but you are an ugly brute," added Paul. "What do you call yourself when you are home?"

"Wing Tung," replied the man.

"Better change your name—call yourself Winged Done," answered Paul.

The Chinaman impassively winked again.

"Now my boy," cried Paul as he cocked his rifle, "you speak right out in meeting. You confess all about yourself or I will make a better job of it this time and will put a bullet into you that no surgeon can get at, to save your dirty life, this trip."

The Chinaman became exceedingly bland.

"For ways that are dark and tricks that are vain, the heathen Chinese is peculiar, the which I do rise to maintain," quoted Paul. "Now tell your little story. Get on to the history of your life and do it quick."

"No shootee," cried Wing Tung. "All bloody mistakee."

"It's bloody enough," returned Paul, "as to the mistake part, we will hear about that right now."

"Thought yo' be Henri Falloux, savez?" replied Wing Tung.

"Oh, you thought I was that dear bandit, one Henri Falloux. I've a notion to shoot you just for mistaking me for that fiend."

"I frien' o-Piggy."

"What?"

"Iss."

"You're a friend of Pig-faced Butts," replied Vance, who knew all about the little man from Stewart.

"Iss."

"You mean yes?"

"Iss."

"If you are a friend of Butts why did you try to kill me—I know something about Piggy."

"Thought-you-one-dam-scoundrel-Henri-Falloux," rejoined the Chinaman, in a breathless burst of words.

"None of that, my boy, or this gun is going off. I won't be taken by any one for Henri Falloux."

"We try helpee Piggy, we get-Marie-Falloux-she killee—Chee Loo. I tink you gal's dad, try findee gal, I shootee you, too dam-queek."

The story was out at length.

"Oh, I see," answered Paul. "You are the man that aided in the abduction of Marie. Was she trying to get away from you when she came flying my way?"

The Chinaman nodded.

Vance felt of his jaw which was very tender.

"I wish hereafter you would be a leetle careful of your prisoners, for that same Marie Falloux handed me about as neat a blow as I ever got in all my life. For her weight she is the neatest hitter I ever saw. She has got a nice punch with her."

The Chinaman blinked.

"How you knowee, we glet gal?" he asked.

"I don't know it. But I pieced it all out. When she flew by me in the woods I felt sure she didn't ride that way for fun. She is a harum-scarum lady at that, but she wouldn't fly through the woods at the risk of her pretty neck unless she was flying from some one. When you hove in sight and tried to kill me I tumbled to your game."

"We knowee Henri Falloux follow; try gettee us. We try gettee him first. We mix you wrong, savez?"

"Oh, you thought that Falloux was after you for abducting his daughter so you started out to get him, and thought I was he, eh?"

"Iss. I go one way, Quong Duck go odder."

"So you two bandits were stealing through the woods after Falloux for the purpose of murdering him?"

"Iss."

"Where is Quong Duck?"

"Back with Piggy-faced, and gal."

"What?"

"Iss."

"Do you mean to tell me that Piggy-faced Butts is back in the woods with a girl—what girl?"

"Dug up gal out dungeon."

"Well I will be darned."

Vance uncocked his rifle. He strode over to the Chinaman.

"Can you walk," he asked.

Wing Tung nodded.

"Then you hike fast to where that gal is and where Piggy is, see?"

The Chinaman struggled to his feet, and led the way through the woods.

"If Jack Stewart hasn't gotten down to the bottom of the Dungeon Mystery," remarked Vance in

great glee, "It looks as if I was going to beat him out to the game."

The two men then hurried away through the woods in search of the rescued girl and Pig-faced Butts.

"Well, I have at least got the message through to the rest of the Scouts," Vance thought. "They will be here to reinforce us soon; but now I must hurry to the relief of the mysterious woman of the dungeon, and find how Pig-faced Butts found wit enough to rescue her."

While he spoke Vance, with true woodman's suspicion darted his glances hither and thither through the woods.

He got his rifle in working order when he saw under a great elm tree the shadow of a man walking back and forth like an uneasy spirit.

The man unquestionably saw Vance quite as quickly as Vance saw him.

He raised his weapon to his shoulder to warn off the Scout from daring further approach.

"Don't shoot," screamed a woman's voice, just as the two weapons were about to belch forth their murderous contents.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BANDIT SERGEANT'S DISCOVERY.

Although a veritable fury in language and actions, Marie Falloux did not collapse under the discovery that the mysterious woman of the dungeon had escaped, owing to the efforts of Pig-faced Butts, whom Marie had designed to murder.

"Oh, Pop, what's the use of your making such an idiot of yourself," Marie cried to her cowering sire.

"Lost! All is lost," was all the white lips of Henri Falloux could utter.

"Rats," cried Marie, "lost, nothing! Nothing is lost while we have the life left to fight with. Don't be such a coward."

Marie's voice trailed off into an almost incoherent splutter of French oaths for on occasion Marie could say things in French, that she would blush to translate into English.

Stewart, who was growing pop-eyed from curiosity, now managed to curb his looks so that they did not appear to be so curious, and he drew near to Marie writing on his pad a request to be allowed to aid her in some way.

The girl cast a grateful look on him.

"You are all right. I am glad there's going to be a real man in the family that knows what to do when there's trouble in the air. Pop is about as much good as the painted picture of him in our parlor."

Marie rapidly wrote these words.

"Why did he go up in the air?" wrote Stewart in reply.

"He is afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Shadows."

"What kind of shadows?"

"Those he raises in his mind."

"Those are the worst kind."

"Surely they are, but Pop has raised a whole house full of them."

"Why?"

"Lordy only knows. Don't ask me."

"Was he afraid because the girl escaped?"

"You bet."

"Who is she?"

"That's our secret."

"Excuse me."

"Don't apologize."

"I did not mean to offend."

"I know you didn't—but look here, Pop's on the blink, and isn't any good. Say, you had better marry me to-night, then after you are my husband I will tell you all the mystery; but not before."

A river of perspiration began to stream down Stewart's face.

He feared that Marie would marry him out of hand.

"She'll marry me when I ain't looking," Stewart inwardly said. "Hully Gee! Is there no escape?"

Then a bright thought struck him.

He wrote his reply quickly.

"There is no clergyman here."

"There is one ten miles from here in Lame Horse Gulch. I will send the Sergeant over there for him; he will be back by early evening with the sky pilot."

"The time has come when Jack Stewart skips," said the Scout in his mind. "No marriage with this bandit girl for mine. It's a quick escape or a quick marriage for mine."

To gain time to think Stewart asked by medium of his writing pad, "who the Sergeant was?"

"The Sergeant is a half-breed Indian," Marie replied. "He used to be in the regiment of Indians Uncle Sam organized for one brief season out here and holds the name of 'Sergeant' which he held in the army."

"Didn't the Indian regiment prove to be the thing?"

"I should say not. The Indians were too quick with weapons to be good soldiers. It took a lot of real soldiers and a lot of shootin' of real Indians to disband the regiment, when it mutinied."

"Ha!"

"The Sergeant as we call him—his real name is 'The Rattlesnake'—was the worst of the mutineers. He would have been hanged if caught after the bloody mutiny was put down, so he skipped to us and joined our band."

"Well, you are going to send him for the clergyman?"

"Yes. He can take my horse Queen Bess. She will get him over there and back in a few hours. I don't suppose the Dominie can ride fast coming back—but we ought to get him here and get us hitched up in time to take the road late tonight."

"Take the road?"

"Sure as you're born. We have got to round-up Pig-faced Butts and that girl. I'll tell you why and you'll see I'm right after we are married."

Stewart tried to look sentimental, but he looked unhappy.

"Oh, don't cry about it," brusksly said Marie. "I won't be such a bad wife at that. You'll have to lead the gang now, for Pop's gone to the willy-boys, and

when he gets this way he usually fills up on booze to get over his fright, and say, when Pop's full of red eye, he is a holy terror."

Stewart smiled in the most satisfied manner that his inner misgivings allowed.

"Of all the dead queer things I have been up against, this is the rawest. To think that this girl, who really is a very pretty woman, is desirous of marrying me right in a few hours, then is going to make me the leader of the desperadoes her father commands, and starts me out to get hold of a poor girl she has been torturing, get's me nervous," thought poor Stewart. "And I, an American Scout, trying hard to imprison this girl and her father and to break up the outlaws who have been her only associates since childhood."

Stewart mused over the strange destiny that had thrown him in his unfortunate position.

Marie did not go further into the trouble over the escape of the mysterious woman but turned to Jack and continued her writing.

"You know that fellow Jack Stewart," she wrote. "The chap I shot, and whom Paul Vance strung me to believe I had killed?"

Stewart had hard work from allowing his face to betray his feelings.

"Yes," he replied, "it seems to me that you did tell me something about that chap."

"I'm just dead sorry I didn't plant him, but one of our boys came in last night. He said he heard up at Grand Forks that a lot of American Scouts were coming down here to clean up the Falloux gang, and that Jack Stewart was to command them."

"Ghosts don't hold commissions in the American Scouts, do they?" wrote Stewart.

"I dunno. Do you?"

"I dunno either," wrote Jack. "But what are your plans?"

"I haven't got any, except to fight the Scouts. It will take more Scouts than there are on the border to get us, you bet, without about the stiffest fight they ever put up."

"You bet," rejoined Jack.

The couple were interrupted by the return of the Sergeant, a tall, scowling, copper-colored, half-breed Indian, who looked his Indian name, "The Rattlesnake," to perfection.

"Hey, Sergeant," cried Marie, "what's the matter?"

"I got a note for you," the Indian replied as he writhed in his saddle as if anxious to hurry off for the clergyman, in which action he had been interrupted.

To Stewart's surprise he spoke very good English, and which Stewart saw made the bandit gang more dangerous than most of the bands that he had had to cope with in his official position.

This Falloux gang was more or less composed of educated persons, who had brains to craftily plan criminal campaigns, and the brute courage to carry them through.

"Where did you get this note?" snapped Marie, as she turned to the Sergeant.

"I found it sticking to a tree with a bowie knife."

"Let's see the knife," cried the girl.

The Sergeant handed Marie a shining Bowie knife, with a pearl handle.

Stewart nearly gave a betraying start of surprise.

He saw the Bowie knife was one that had belonged to Paul Vance.

Without further information Stewart saw that the plan was one hit upon by his American Scout friend, Vance, to communicate some grave news to him.

"Fine fellow, that Vance," thought Stewart. "There's something up. He is anxious to have me know the news."

"Did you hear anything, Sergeant, while you were at Grand Forks, as to this chap Stewart—why didn't I kill him when I had the chance?" put in Marie.

"I heard that he was headin' them Scouts, a comin' here to do us all up," replied the Sergeant.

"That's what I told you, Jacques," ventured Marie turning to Stewart as she spoke.

"You found the note, you say?" questioned the Scout.

"Yes. A stickin' in a big tree, right 'long side of our trail. Say, it gin me a shock."

The Sergeant held the note out toward Jack.

"It's from the villain Stewart, I'll wager," exclaimed the Sergeant further, as he handed the note to Jack.

Jack Stewart, the supposed writer of the note, as Jacques Diogo, future husband of Marie Falloux, Queen of the bandits, took the missive and looked it over quietly.

"Open it," insisted Marie.

The Scout obeyed.

"What does the note say?" insisted the girl.

The Scout wrote to Marie asking her to read it aloud.

"To the Falloux Gang—

"I have got your girl prisoner, the Girl of the dungeon. I have got your friend Pig-faced, and with what they have told me, I am going to Get Your Gang. Remember!

"JACK STEWART,
"Mounted Scout."

Stewart who heard calmly this note supposed to be written by him, to the gang, was amazed at the audacity of Paul Vance.

"He is the goods," thought Jack, "he has turned this game up so that I can be told that Pig-faced Butts and the mysterious woman are safe within the hands of the American Scouts, whom I see now have gotten my message and are encamped in the forest in force large enough to break up this bandit gang in a trice. Good, old Paul."

Marie was stamping her foot in rage.

"What do you think of the nerve of that Stewart," cried the girl? "Jacques if you don't kill that Stewart when you meet him, you never can be my husband. Say, you will kill him."

The Scout took a solemn obligation that when he met the American Mounted Scout, Jack Stewart, he would shoot him full of holes.

"When I meet him, mind," wrote the Scout to Marie. "I am not looking for trouble with Jack Stewart and if I did not want to please you I wouldn't promise to kill him on sight, at that, Marie."

Marie dimpled and blushed. She was intensely pleased at the bold stand of her associate, and her eyes shone with a soft light as she looked at the Scout.

"It's nice to know you are going to marry a real man," she said softly.

The Scout threw back his shoulders and tried to look very brave.

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied carelessly. "I wouldn't mind killing Jack Stewart, any day, I meet him, riding through the forest, if it would please you, my girl."

"But in the meantime," answered Marie, whose thumbs ached and whose fingers were cramped as all the conversation had to be held with pencil and paper, owing to the supposed muteness of the Scout, "I wish I didn't have to write all these things."

The Sergeant grinned and nodded his head in approbation. Talking to the Scout on his part had been no end of a task, as he could shoot better than he could write, which made the Scout consider that this seemed to be Marie's failing, also.

Stewart wrote rapidly.

"Sorry I can't hear or talk; was born that way. But you needn't write more just now, if your fingers are tired."

"Never mind my fingers. I've just got to talk to you."

Marie then ordered the Sergeant to hurry away for the clergyman, and she continued her written conversation with Stewart.

"This finding of Pig-faced Butts, and that girl, by the Scouts means trouble for us, Jacques," the girl wrote.

"Does it?"

"It does."

"Why?"

"I dare not tell you yet. But remember that at all costs, even of our lives we must regain custody of that girl."

"Do you want Piggy back?"

Marie's eyes flashed fire.

Her breath came in quick gasps; there was the sullen light of murder in her eyes.

"No, I only want to see Pig-faced Butts for two seconds," the girl replied.

"What would you do in that time?"

Marie stretched out her forefinger as if it were a revolver barrel.

She took aim along it directly at Stewart.

"Click!" she said. "Dead Pig in our house."

There was such tigerish beauty about the action, such a truculent wave of hate in Marie's eyes, that Stewart felt a chill run down his backbone.

"Gosh!" he thought, "this woman is a born murderess. She would kill me in less than two seconds if she knew what I was thinking of."

But inwardly Stewart summed up the situation, outwardly he was all outlaw, for he smiled at the expressive pantomime and wrote his congratulations on the pad which he extended to Marie.

"Do you know any plan we can put in practice?" Marie wrote.

"Just one."

"What is it?"

"To kill Jack Stewart."

"Of course, but how?"

"I will kill him."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"How?"

"Shoot him."

"But how are you going to get near enough to shoot him."

"I am going to leave camp here about dusk, ride through the woods until I get within a mile of the camp of the American Scouts, then creep near enough to shoot Stewart out of the bushes."

"A great plan," Marie rejoined rubbing her hands in ecstasy, "but oh dear—don't you remember I have sent for the clergyman? We are to be married to-night."

"Do you think I don't remember?" wrote Stewart, quite in a sentimental way. "Now, I can get over to the Scout's camp, shoot Jack Stewart, and get back."

"I don't know a wedding present you could give me more acceptable than the news that you had shot and killed Jack Stewart," cried Marie. "But do you think that I would be doing right to let you go? Stewart might kill you, and that would rather put an end to my plans for our wedding."

"You could get a second husband soon?"

"We won't talk about a second until I get my first. But I see you are right. There is no other way out of this. We must kill Jack Stewart. If we get him in the confusion we can get away ourselves. I see Pop was right. The game's up at Line City. We have got to quit the claim. Well, I am dead sorry. I've been very happy here with the gang."

"What are you going to do with all the stuff in the cache?"

"It is safe enough. No one will ever find it deep in those woods, but some of us who know the secret trail to get to the place. You know it now don't you?"

"You mean I know how to get to it by following the big tree mark—yes."

"That's enough for any of us. But pshaw, I don't care if we never get any of that smuggled stuff. There's enough cash in different banks all over Europe to keep us going all our lives. Say Pop's been a *Border Jumper* for twenty years, and a smuggler for five more—man, we are all rich, and won't have to worry about money matters."

"That's fine," wrote the Scout. "Now Marie, you keep a stiff upper lip. I'll ride off to kill Jack Stewart."

"Good bye, then, but Jacques, can't you take along a few of the Falloux sandwiches and after you have killed Stewart take a detour around by Grand Forks and leave a saddle-bag full of them."

Stewart jumped as if shot.

Here came the solution of the note found by Paul Vance on the dead Chinaman.

The note was burned into Stewart's brain. He repeated it in his mind from his memory where it was engraved ever since he had begun puzzling over it.

"Bill—*The Sandwiches Will be redde, by the first or second, at Pops. Get wise and bizy.*

"MARIE."

"look out for them d—d American Scouts; two are heer; i git I."

"All right, Marie," replied Stewart, who hung his head for fear the girl would see the fierce joy in his eyes. "Just as you say."

"Say," wrote Marie. "I will show you some papers I got off Stewart when I shot him; one of the papers seems to be a warrant for the arrest of the Falloux

gang; if I'd known that I would have taken more care when I aimed at him to kill him."

"Better let me look through the papers, Marie."

Stewart's heart beat heavily with fear of a rebuffing answer when he wrote these words.

"All right," wrote Marie in return. "Sure, you might as well take the papers along with you and read them on the way. They are no good to me."

Stewart's heart beat again with the feeling that he had won nearly all he had started out to win.

He was about to recover the papers just as he told Paul Vance that he would.

"Come on, boy, and get those sandwiches," Marie cried, "and I want to kiss you good bye, for somehow my heart is heavy, and I never expect to see you return."

The beautiful girl spoke truer than she knew.

CHAPTER XII.

PAUL VANCE AWAITS JACK STEWART.

Paul Vance strode up and down in front of the cluster of tents, in which could be seen many members of the American Mounted Scouts taking their ease.

He had kept his pledged word to Stewart and had summoned the Scouts, in force enough to cope with the Falloux gang.

"If Jack Stewart gets my note," cried Vance, "all will be well."

Vance turned when he heard a sentry stationed without the camp challenge someone with a loud, "Halt."

Then Vance heard a familiar voice.

"By Jove," he cried, "here comes Jack Stewart now."

In ten seconds Jack and Vance were warmly shaking hands.

"How goes it?"

Vance asked this question.

"Fine."

"Got all your case ready?"

"Yes."

"Get back your papers?"

Stewart who was happy at not having to write his replies, on a pad, and to guard his tongue, lest it betray him, handed Vance his wallet which Marie Falloux had stolen from him, in the far off days behind them both now, when the girl, now so violently in love with the supposed Jacques Diogo, had tried to kill the brave Jack Stewart.

"Thunder and ages," cried Vance. "You got it back, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You got to the bottom of all the stuff you need to convict the Falloux gang, eh?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

Jack Stewart had not gotten over the parting with Marie, who had forgotten the bandit side of her nature and was all loving girl.

"Sorry I went into the game," he said.

"Oh! Ho! Why?"

"I hate to double-cross that girl."

Vance gave a whistle of amazement.

"Now tell me all about it," he requested.

Stewart blurted out the entire love affair which even Vance could see had been entirely on the side of the girl.

"Confounded little viper, why did she go and fall in love with you?" Vance shouted.

"I don't know. I didn't ask her to do it, and I didn't want her after she said she had done it—say, I'm dead glad to get away from that camp. Why, man, that clergyman will be there at nightfall. I just got out three or four leaps ahead of him. If I hadn't that girl would have married me, sure pop."

Stewart's face was red under the mockery of his companion.

"Gallant Jack Stewart!" cried Vance. "King of Detectives. Gets his e-vi-dence against a bandit by the simp-le method of ma-king the out-law's fair dau-gh-ter fall in love with him. Gent-le-men I ass-ure you there is no decep-tion prac-ticed by me. My lips do n-o-t move when the fig-ure of the g-i-r-l speaks."

"Oh you go chase yourself," cried Stewart. "You make me weary. You wouldn't try to double-cross that girl any more than I have, under the circumstances, no matter what she may be. It's dead tough to have to pull her gang."

"Duty, my boy, often makes things hard for us."

Vance and Stewart were quiet for several minutes each being busy with his own thoughts.

"By the way," Vance broke the silence with this question. "Where are your saddle-bags?"

"I'm sitting on them."

"Oh! What for?"

"They are valuable."

"How valuable?"

"Worth about twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Oh, gwan."

"Sure thing."

"Explain."

In answer Stewart handed Vance a tiny roll, such as one uses on a breakfast table.

Vance turned the roll over.

"What is this?" he asked.

"A breakfast roll."

"What's it made of?"

"Flour, milk, butter, yeast, and salt."

Vance looked puzzled.

"Then what's the answer?" he asked.

"You guess, I had to."

"What is there to guess?" replied Vance as he turned the roll over and over. "This is just a roll which one has with one's coffee in the morning—if the cook is good enough natured to give you one."

"That's what I thought until Marie showed me the combination."

"A combination? Say, Jack, what's the matter? Has love turned your head? Safes have combinations; not breakfast rolls."

"Oh, I dunno," rejoined Jack.

He gave a roll a dexterous twist.

In the center was then to be seen, a hollowed out space.

In fact almost all of the interior of the roll was missing, leaving only the crust.

In the vacant space was to be seen a reddish colored juice-like substance.

"What is this?" asked Vance, as a bitter, acrid, nauseous, persistent odor swept to his nostrils.

"Oh, that?" replied Stewart. "That is what is known as Papaver Somniferum."

"It smells as nasty as its name, eh?"

Stewart laughed.

"What's the other name of this creature—if it is a creature?"

"What you see then, is the juice obtained from the capsule of the white poppy, or as it is better known to commerce, it is some of the Turkey, or Levant opium, the waxy lustre stuff that the yellow men use to whiff their cares away."

"Thunder!" cried Vance. "It's prime opium, then. I thought opium was blackish?"

"It is after it's been kept awhile, but this is fresh opium, just over probably by the last Turkish steamer to touch at Vancouver, eh?"

"How did you come by it?"

"Marie Falloux wanted me to take it to a certain man in Grand Forks, on this side of the line, who handles the stuff for this part of the country. I've got \$25,000 worth of the stuff in these saddle-bags, and there's easily \$250,000 worth more back in the Falloux camp."

"By Gosh, I see a light," almost screamed Vance.

"Hum," replied Stewart.

"That note about the 'sandwiches,' I pulled off the body of that Chink, you shot the day Marie plunked you one—say, these are the 'sandwiches,' are they not?"

"Yes, you have hit it first guess. This is the way the Falloux gang take to smuggle their opium from point to point, after they have smuggled it over the Canadian border, whence it is smuggled from Turkey. No one would suspect that a barrel of bread-rolls, or breakfast-rolls would contain the dreadful soul destroying drug, in quantities that sum up a wonderful cash total. The opium loot of the Falloux gang is immense."

"Well if this isn't the slickest thing I ever heard of," Vance said in amazement.

"You see Marie did not write that note, but a member of the gang did, it having been arranged that the girl's name should be signed to all letters sent to the Grand Forks 'fence,' or man who got rid of the smuggled drug, for the gang. Having written the note which translated means that a new shipment of prime opium was to be made next by the Falloux's, about the first or second of the current month, which gave the fence a chance to look out for the breakfast-rolls, which were shipped quite openly as rolls that were stale, and were being returned to the Grand Forks baker with whom Falloux dealt, very openly. You know Falloux never has tried to secrete himself at Line City. He always claimed to be a farmer, real estate man, lawyer, what not, and used to claim further that his bandit gang were really his employees who worked at legitimate business under his direction."

"That is why no other American Scout got them 'right,' red-handed, as you have."

"Exactly."

"But isn't that a peach of a smuggling trick?"

"Best that ever. Marie tells me that they have been shipping back old rolls and bread, by her father's bull teams quite as often as they had opium to deliver. She says that half the time they never even headed up barrels of the rolls, and if anyone with any wit had broken one open he would have got next in a second."

"But after he got next?"

"Oh, Marie said she used to go along with each load and watched that no one opened the rolls."

"What would happen if they had?"

"She said she would have shot them quick, under the idea that 'dead men tell no tales.'"

"My but that girl is a monster, isn't she?"

"Yes, but she has extremely fetching eyes—and I wish I hadn't gone to that camp. Oh hum!"

"Say, it's kinder tough at that," replied Vance. "Got to do up the gal who is in love with you?"

Stewart nodded.

"I don't give a hang for old Falloux. He's a man and knew better than to go into such a game, and it serves him right when we jail him."

"But Marie never had no show, eh?"

"Never had a look-in at a decent game, and well—"

"I rather think that when we make the round up, Marie is liable to—"

"Get arrested. Oh, I'll do my duty all right."

"That is the hardest part of our business—doing ones duty. Both men pondered silently over this question."

Then Vance spoke.

"What did you think when you got my note signed 'Jack Stewart'?"

"I was wise in a minute that you had taken that way to communicate with me."

"You see, I had got the woman of mystery and Pig-faced Butts in my care, and after you and I had talked in the woods, and I knew just what you had accomplished inside of the outlaw camp, I made up my mind that somehow I had just got to put you wise to the fact that I had the girl and Piggy safe," replied Vance.

"How did you find the girl?"

"That's quite a story."

Vance then told Stewart of his great fight in the woods with Wing Tung, and his later discovery that the Chinaman was aiding Pig-faced Butts and the woman of mystery to escape, and had taken Vance for Henri Falloux, in pursuit of the flying party.

"Gee!" cried Stewart, "you certainly had your troubles as badly as I had them. You were in some danger yourself."

"Now, then," answered Paul, "it's up to you as commander of this detachment of American Mounted Scouts to talk with the woman and Pig-faced and try to piece out the facts of her story, with what she can tell you, and what you have learned in that renegade's camp."

"I suppose that's what," rejoined Stewart, "but I am not stuck on the job. I wish I could fix up something honorable that Marie might escape. I hate to arrest that girl, under the circumstances."

"Oh, rats," sneered Vance. "You're dead in love with the girl and serves you right for it all. Now, don't you worry a bit. You may wager right here that she hasn't burned up her affections so deep as you think. There's plenty left on tap. I tell you, man, you're in wrong again. Marie Falloux won't com-

mit suicide on your account, you just go put a bet down on that."

Paul laughed loudly as he spoke, but Stewart's eyes were gloomy.

"Anyway I have got back my papers, as I said I would, I have the secrets of the smuggling gang of desperadoes in my hands, and I must do my duty right here for the last time let me say, it's tough."

"Well, let it go at that," snapped Vance. "You had better see the woman of mystery right now and get her story. She and Pig-faced Butts are over in a tent near mine. She—but here she comes with Piggy."

Stewart looked up.

He saw a tall, white-faced, yet very pretty young woman coming toward him, escorted by Pig-faced Butts.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY.

"I am sorry to see you in such a desperate plight?" Stewart said to the woman of mystery.

"Thanks to your good offices and that of the American Scouts," she replied, "my danger is not nearly as great as it was."

"Would you mind telling me something about the mystery of your confinement in that dungeon in the Falloux camp, for that is really what their Line City home is, a bandit camp."

As Stewart spoke he saw that the woman was strikingly beautiful. Her hair, eyes, and regular features, made up a striking type of beauty, as her hair was of the golden hue that goes with beautiful and expressive blue eyes.

"I think I ought to tell you my name, first," she said.

Vance and Pig-faced Butts strolled off toward the woods together at this point, Vance not wishing to be present when Stewart heard the woman's story except upon the expressed wish of his chief, Stewart. Stewart thought it best to hear the woman's story alone.

"Tell me your name, if you wish," replied Stewart.

"My name is Mrs. Agnes Falloux."

"What?" cried Stewart, appalled by the statement. "Why, what relation are you to Marie Falloux, and to her father—why, say, I can't understand?"

The woman smiled faintly.

"I am the wife of Henri Falloux."

"Good Lordy!"

Stewart's eyes were as big as small apples; his face was red with suppressed emotion.

"Yes, I am the wife of the *Border Jumper*, Henri Falloux."

The woman's words at length seemed to reach Stewart's brain.

"But you are only about as old as Marie Falloux, Henri Falloux's daughter you see," said Stewart when he had somewhat recovered from his surprise.

"True, but I am Henri Falloux's second wife."

The woman raised her voice in interrogation as she spoke, and as she thus invited further questioning, Stewart asked her to explain the facts as to her marriage with Falloux.

"I met Falloux at Grand Forks," she continued. "This was about two years ago."

"I suppose it was about the time of one of his periodic visits to Grand Forks on one of his trips to arrange matters there with his fence to dispose of his smuggled opium?" cried Stewart.

"I now think so. But of course I knew nothing about him. He told me he was wealthy, owned nearly all of Line City, was a lawyer, real-estate dealer, and you know the dash and glitter about the man?"

"I do."

"Then I married him, and the matter was that from the first, we did not seem to be congenial."

"Did he abuse you?"

"Dreadfully."

"How?"

"He beat me often, he used to seem mad in his drunken fits, and then would turn on me like a tiger."

"Did Marie, his daughter, assist you?"

"She was worse than her father. She resented his marrying a girl only about her age, and she did every act of cruelty that ingenuity could suggest, and she is ingenious when it comes to cruelty."

"The little fiend," thought Stewart, "I will warrant that she will give anyone a run for their money whom she dislikes."

But he made no answer to Mrs. Falloux, instead awaiting her further confidences.

"Marie made my life nearly as miserable as her father," Mrs. Falloux added. "She tried in every way to have me die by natural means."

"She dared not kill you," Stewart said, "because if she did there might be some investigations on the part of the authorities, that would be awkward for the Falloux's. You see your death, in its self might be easily accounted for if there were no legal reasons behind your death."

"I pray you to explain all your meaning."

"Certainly. The mere fact of your death might be of no great moment, except as to your share in the estate of Falloux, or in any real property he may own. You would, as his wife, be entitled to a share in his estate, and it would be well not to get rid of you, lest some of your heirs, you having no children, might start an investigation to get your share of Falloux's property that might be dangerous to the smuggler chief."

"I understand then why he and Marie just managed to keep the breath of life in me, but at the same time torturing me almost to the verge of death."

"The reason is apparent on its face."

"I now see why they shut me up in that dungeon. The dungeon was built to confine members of the bandit gang who needed correction, by its chief, Henri Falloux. I went to sleep in my room one night and I awoke in that awful hole of torture."

"Whew! They must have carried you there when you were asleep. They must have had a reason for it all."

"They did have. They were constantly threatening me with death if I did not sign some paper, which they refused to tell me about, or to describe, promising me freedom, money, safety, food, clothing, for I was half naked in the darksome hole—anything I wished if I would sign the paper."

"It was lucky that you did not. All they wanted was your signature to a relinquishment of your share in any of Henri Falloux's estate and then, having cleared up the title to any property, he might have of that kind, they would have killed you, having no great fear of a further investigation by anyone, as to your disappearance."

"Do you know why they wished to get my signature?"

"For the reason that the Falloux gang is about to be disbanded by the flight of its leader, and his daughter. In the hat I wear is a paper written by Marie Falloux, in which she writes to her father's lawyer in New York on his behalf stating that you would not sign the paper, he had sent, relinquishing all claims to her father's property, 'in spite of many arguments,' and asking the lawyer whether it was possible to get possession of the property in full, so that it could be sold at once for cash, if your signature could not be gained."

"How did you ever get possession of such a valuable paper?"

"I found it among the papers of the dead Chinaman, killed in the fight in the dungeon-hut. I abstracted it and gave the rest of the papers to Marie, knowing well that she would ask after them; but she did not miss the letter, and—well, I don't see how the dead Chinaman had the letter in his pocket."

"I can tell you," said a dull passionless voice.

Stewart and Mrs. Falloux turned quickly to see who had spoken.

It was Pig-faced Butts.

"I happen to be able to clear up that point. The letter I saw given to the dead Chinaman by Marie, to take to Grand Forks and post. There is no post-office or stage coach line to use at Line City; we have to post all our mail at Grand Forks. Marie, I heard give the Chinaman, strict instructions to hurry off and mail the letter, which I heard her say, 'was very important,'" said Pig-faced Butts.

"Then you also may be able to tell us what was behind the fight in the dungeon-hut?"

"I can, Chee Loo, Wing Tung, and Quong Duck, the three Chinese renegades were all in my employ. They were trying to assist me in getting Mrs. Falloux out of the clutches of Henri Falloux and the devil-cat of a daughter of his."

"Why did you wish to save Mrs. Falloux from the clutches of her jailers?"

"Because she is my only sister."

For the second time that day Stewart's eyes lay out on his cheeks, and he turned red as the comb of a turkey-gobbler in his dire surprise.

"Well this beats all!" he faintly ejaculated.

"You see," continued Butts, "I lived at Grand Forks. When I heard that my sister was being abused by Falloux from some of the members of his gang, I hurried to Line City. I thought then that Falloux was all that he had claimed to be when he married my sister; but I soon got into some of the secrets of the smuggling gang of bandits, and tried to use this as a lever upon Falloux."

"What was the result?"

"A hot fight in which I came out with a fractured skull. Falloux struck me with a hatchet on the head, and for weeks I lay out of my head, un nursed, untouched, and just alive. Such brutal treatment no man ever heard of before."

"What was your next attempt at the rescue of your sister?"

"When I had recovered I found that everyone thought I was crazy. I was not but I pretended to be for my own purpose. The peculiar formation of my face and jaws which makes me look something like a pig, caused the gang to name me 'Pig-faced,' so I kept up the idea by my insane pranks. They finally let me alone as a natural born idiot, and thus I got into touch with the three Chinamen. They were willing to work for me for a certain sum of money I had concealed when I first entered the camp."

"I see," said Stewart.

"Then we tried to find the proper moment to rescue my sister. The day you entered the hut the Chinaman in my employ had tried to get the letter Marie had given another or third Chinaman to mail at Grand Forks, so we could see what was in it in hopes that there would be something found to aid us. A fight ensued—"

"And I fished you out from under the table."

"Where I crawled when I saw the fuss was nearing the shooting point."

Pig-faced Butts and Stewart each laughed as they remembered the incident.

"How did you rescue your sister at last?" asked Stewart.

"I had confidence in you when I first saw you. So I still pretended to be crazy and after mystifying you a while I showed you the secret of the dungeon feeling sure that you would not betray me," replied Pig-faced.

"I see."

"But you know there did not come a time to get my sister out of that hell-hole until you were away on an errand to the *cache* of the Bandits, and Marie was a prisoner in the hands of Vance."

Vance turned pink as Stewart began to nurse a supposed aching jaw.

"Marie can hit hard, anyway," Vance remarked in an injured tone.

A ripple of laughter ran through the little circle.

"We had fixed matters up," continued Pig-faced, "to abduct Marie by the Chinamen. They were to hold her prisoner to exact from her father, as the price of her return, the liberty of his wife, my sister. But Marie murdered Chee Loo, and then when Wing Tung hurried back to Line City and told me of this fact, I knew the affair was desperate. If Marie got back to camp before we all escaped it would mean my death."

"It would," remarked Stewart. "Marie when she got back to Line City hunted all over the camp for you, to shoot you."

"But as luck would have it my sister and I had by then escaped and joined Wing Tung, and Quong Duck in the forest; but knowing that there would be a hue and cry, and bitter search made by Falloux when he discovered the abduction of Marie, I hurried the two Chinamen out to kill Falloux, if they met him, on sight."

"That's why I had to fight one of the yellow men," cried Vance. "But I tumbled to the game when the yellow gent told me he was a 'feind' of Pig-faced Butts, I beg your pardon, of Mr. Butts here."

"Don't apologize. I'm still Pig-faced Butts, after all."

"Well," went on Vance, "when the Chink and I hurried through the woods at my command, to join Pig-faced and Mrs. Falloux here, up goes Piggy's gun, and if Mrs. Falloux hadn't yelled 'don't shoot' there would have been another run in right there, see?"

"As it was," very quickly cried Mrs. Falloux, "my screams stopped the matter before the shots were fired, and I was

brought here, to be given the best of care by the American Scouts, God bless them."

"Then there is not much more for us to do but start to raid the Falloux outfit," mused Stewart half aloud. "I hate to do it at that. But it's a case of duty, and I will have to do it, although a fellow hates to arrest the girl who has sent for the clergyman to marry him to her."

Vance grinned like a Cheshire cat.

"Why didn't you stand it then by remaining there and marrying the girl? Say, I think you would make a swell bandit, at that."

The only answer Stewart made was to sound "boots and saddle" to the Troopers of the American Scouts, who stood about enjoying the relaxing that camp life gave from usual daily duties.

There was a rush of shouting men toward prancing horses; a mounting of kahaki uniformed troopers, and almost in a trice a gallant array of twenty-five of the fine American Mounted Scouts, faced Jack Stewart, their commander.

"Vance," ordered Stewart, "see that Pig-faced gets a mount. Toll off enough men to guard camp, and Mrs. Falloux. Now, then! trot, gallop!" the order sent the Scouts off through the forest trail at high speed on their fine chargers.

The attack on Line City, had begun.

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK STEWART'S PUZZLE.

"Move carefully, boys."

The whispered injunction was not lost upon the Mounted Scouts.

Every effort was made not to make any noise.

"There is Line City there, off to the right a mile."

Jack Stewart whispered the words to Paul Vance, while right behind them visibly excited, and grasping a revolver half as big as he, it seemed to Stewart, came Pig-faced Butts, anxious to "give one" to Henri Falloux, when the fight had fairly begun.

"Take half of our force," Stewart cried finally to Vance. "Cross over to a post directly opposite us. Then you can attack from that side of the little gulch Line City lies in, and I can attack from this. Then we will shut them in by the river, as I will deploy my men so that they will cut off all the avenues of escape on the land side."

"A good idea," replied Vance. "Look out for Marie, Jack. She's more deadly with that clergyman than she was with her revolver when she shot you. She would kill you quick; but my 'boy, she would marry you quicker. Fight hard or she will marry you, enemy or no enemy."

"Stop fooling," answered Stewart. "Just try to be good and happy, and follow your orders as a good soldier should."

Soon Vance was off at the head of his detachment after arranging with Stewart that a single shot would be fired by him when in position, and at the sound of the shot both parties could understand it to be the sure signal for a charge.

"We will cut the bandits to ribbons," remarked Pig-faced, all happiness now that he could see defeat and dire disaster approaching the Falloux's.

Stewart nodded.

"They brought it on themselves by breaking the law," added Pig-faced.

"They did—but still I hate to arrest that girl!"

"Of course you do," added Pig-faced. "Now, it's always hard to arrest a woman but in your case it must be the hardest kind of work; although if ever there was a tough, lost to all feeling of pity-woman, that girl Marie is the woman. She is so pretty also, so nice when she wants to be, so devilish when she doesn't want to be nice—"

"She is an anomaly, that's all," replied Stewart.

As he spoke he was searching the outer side of the gulch, to see if he could trace the movements of Vance.

"He is a wonder," he thought, "no one possibly could detect that he was passing through those woods with twelve men—well, we will get the signal to charge when he is in position. He ought to be in position in a few more minutes."

Stewart sighed.

"Say, Pig-faced," he added a moment later, "See that smoke in the direction of Line City?"

Pig-faced Butts looked through his glasses and gave a startled ejaculation.

"Smoke. I should say I did see it? Why, there's lots of it. Good Gracious, Stewart, Line City is all afire."

Stewart again took a long look through his glasses.

He could see the flames licking up the dungeon-hut; he saw them dart toward the home of Marie and her father; shack after shack, the grocery and supply store, all were soon wrapped in great flames.

Pungent smoke filled the air.

The roar of the conflagration could be heard even where Stewart stood, a mile by the trail away from the burning building.

Then a shot rang out across the gulch.

It came from Paul Vance's revolver; it was the signal to attack and wipe out the Falloux gang of desperate bandits.

"Charge!" yelled Stewart.

He loosed his horse's reins as he cried the order. He flashed down the trail like a thunderbolt.

Behind him streamed his gallant band of American scouts.

Almost in a breath the distance was eaten up by the eager hoofs of the flying detachment.

Paul Vance could be seen charging down the hill from the other side of the gulch, his gallant band right behind him.

The bandits were utterly outwitted and outnumbered.

A few shots; a few men tumbled in the first mad charge, dead, or badly wounded, to the ground.

The remainder of the band threw down their arms and rushed to ask quarter of Stewart.

He soon had the major portion of the band in irons ready to be carted off to jail.

But by this time there was no chance to save Line City.

Every building in the tiny half hamlet, half pirate camp had been utterly destroyed, except the house where Marie and Falloux had lived.

This board-house was also a blaze when Stewart followed by Vance and Pig-faced rushed into it.

"Where do you suppose Marie and Falloux are to be found," cried Pig-faced. "I have seen no trace of them in this fight. I expected he and she would fight like mad wolves rather than see their gang broken up."

"Come on," cried Stewart as he led the way into the parlor of the room.

"What's this?" cried Vance.

He pointed to a man lying on his face on the floor of the room, with the smoke beginning to curl about him, and flames of crimson to dart savage, serpent-like fangs at him.

Stewart gave a cry of amazement.

He turned the body over.

It was that of Henri Falloux, the bandit leader of the *Border Jumpers*.

A bullet hole directly in the center of his forehead showed how he had died.

Pinned to his coat was a letter.

It was addressed to "Jack Stewart, American Scout."

Stewart opened it.

This is what he read aloud to Paul Vance and Pig-faced Butts:

"Dear Jack. For I am going to call you that, after all. You think you fooled me by pretending to be the Dummy, Jacques Diogo. Take it from me you didn't. I knew you were Jack Stewart, the American Scout, the moment I first saw you in our camp.

"You did not fool me a bit. But I knew then that the game was up for Henri Falloux and his gang. And I began then to make preparations to get off without going to jail; and you see here I am, free and no danger of jail for mine.

"So you thought I was in love with you—now maybe I was, and maybe I wasn't; you guess at the right answer. It was really funny to see how you squirmed when I asked you to marry me and sent for the clergyman.

"But it gained time for me to get my plans well laid.

"There is money in the Mountain National bank, at Grand Forks to pay the she-cat, who calls herself Mrs. Henri Falloux, a living for life. I settle her claims on my father's estate this way.

"As you see the old man is dead. He got on a big drunk when his wife escaped because he knew the game was up then for us all, and he feared your band of Mounted Scouts.

"I tried to get him to escape with me, but he would not.

"So I shot him.

"I thought it better to kill him, even if he was my father, than to be burdened with him. All the money is in the bank now far away, under a name you will never know. Why burden myself with him? He never cared much for his daughter or he wouldn't have brought her up here among the bandits that make up his outlaws; killing is just about good enough for him.

"If you ever catch me you can use this as a confession of my guilt. I certainly shot Pop, when he was lying in a drunken slumber on the floor.

"There is one thing more; the revolver you were shot with by me, I have left at the bank where you can get it in Grand Forks. Give it to the girl you finally marry. Possibly some day she will wish my aim was better.

"Don't think you will ever find me; in a foreign land with a large fortune, I will live respected, under another name. The rest of the loot of the Falloux gang you are welcome to, Jack, my boy.

"So you thought I was in love with you? Maybe I was; maybe I wasn't; you try to guess the answer.

"MARIE."

"She set fire to the ramshackle buildings in Line City, of course," said Jack Stewart softly, after they had rushed from the burning house, being forced to save their own lives, and leave the body of Henri Falloux to be incinerated.

"And she has escaped," cried Vance, "but the Henri Falloux gang of bandits is no more."

"Think of the plunder of the gang that you will have recovered," put in Pig-faced Butts to Stewart.

"And think of the honor for breaking up the gang that will be ours," cried Vance.

"Well, it sure was *The Border Jumper's Ruse*," replied Stewart, "after all I am glad Marie Falloux has escaped.

"I hope that letter she left isn't *The Decoy Letter*," cried Vance.

"No danger of that. Marie isn't the kind of a bride a sensible man could care to wed—but I wonder if she really was in love with me?"

Vance roared as he winked at Pig-faced Butts.

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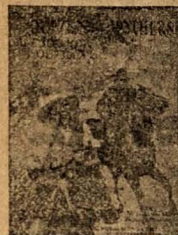


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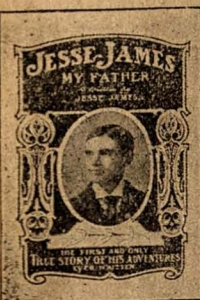
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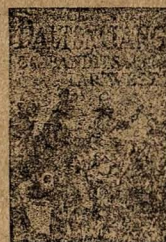
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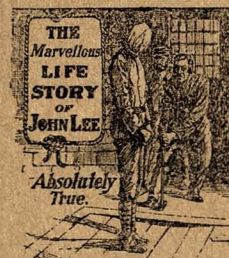
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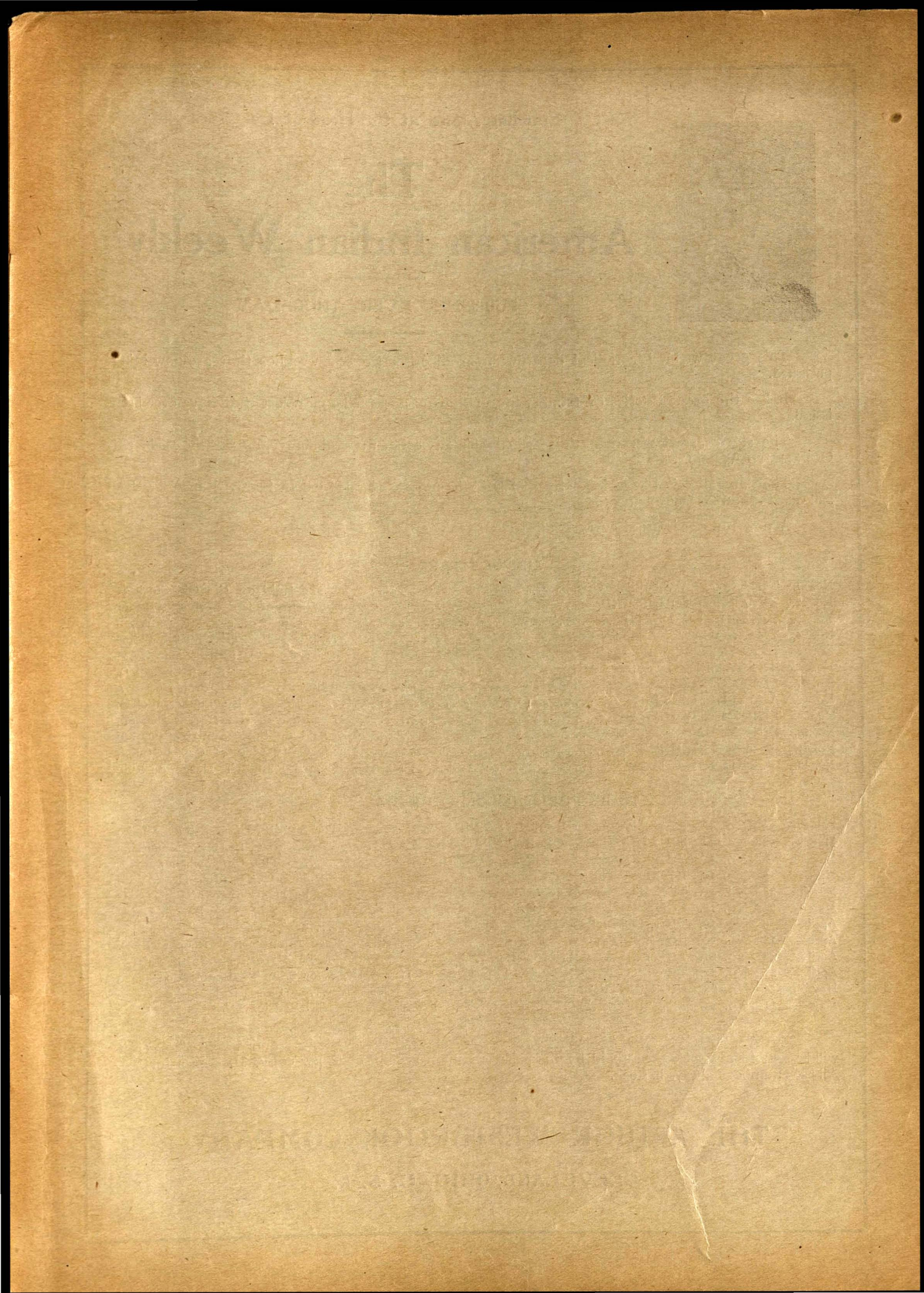
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No. 4. THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGEor Kidnapped by the Piutes
No. 5. TRAPPED BY THE CREESor Tricked by a Renegade Scout
No. 6. BETRAYED BY A MOCCASINor The Round-Up of the Indian Smugglers
No. 7. FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STANDor The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon
No. 8. A DASH FOR LIFEor Tricked by Timber Wolves
No. 9. THE DECOY MESSAGEor The Ruse of the Border Jumpers
No. 10. THE MIDNIGHT ALARMor The Raid on the Paymaster's Camp
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March 2—No. 14. THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH.....or The Ghost of Horn Mountains
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March 16—No. 16. HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN.....or The Renegade's Death-Vote
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March 30—No. 18. THE RED MASSACRE.....or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands
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