

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

# AMERICAN INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

## LURED BY OUTLAWS



"REMEMBER! THE SECRET  
PASSAGE AT MID-NIGHT!"  
WHISPERED JUANITA.



# AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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## LURED BY OUTLAWS

OR

### THE MOUNTED RANGER'S DESPERATE RIDE

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

#### PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

**ALARIC BARBEL, alias KITTY CARY, alias "DANCE-HOUSE TIM"**—A stalwart young member of the Mounted Rangers sent from Norton Sound, the United States Military Reservation in Alaska, to Fort Hope, far out in the Arctic Ocean, to blot out the outlaw gang lead by Hank Wayland. The disguises that the young Ranger assumed in accomplishing the duty assigned him, and the hair-breadth escapes from death he met with, followed by the counterplot by which he lured the bandits to their doom, in spite of the lure they spread for him, is a story of the American North-West of interest.

**ANNE TOWNSEND**—She is a Chicago girl who braves Alaskan terrors to regain the fortune that she feels sure is due her, from documents found among her father's papers after his death. No sweeter girl ever lived than pretty Anne. Around her drifts, swirls and eddies the noisome depths of a plot to murder her. How she aided the Mounted Ranger to escape the depths of evil the plotters had assigned to her; how she escaped with her life, makes up another thread of this story worth reading.

**JUANITA DISIDERO**—A wonderfully beautiful young Mexican girl, whose glorious black eyes nearly lured the Mounted Ranger to death. Her life was part of the inner chord that rings about the dreadful stockade-den, in Alaska where her father keeps a dance-house. And after all there is a lovable side to this dainty maiden. Do you think you can find it?

**HANK WAYLAND**—Chief of the outlaw band that has shed grim terror all over the Alaskan peninsula. His deeds of blood have made him a blight of horror, and as in addition he was the Mine-boss of the richest coal mine

in all Alaska, his capacity for evil was ten-fold increased. His life, his death, are as gigantic as the wilds in which he lived and died, a death-dealing ruffian, whose steps but once faltered from the paths of wickedness, and that was when he first met sweet Anne Townsend on the fur-packet the *Frontier Belle*, rushing through the waters of the Kupuk River.

**ALAVA RICARDO**—Chief aide to Hank Wayland, and an assassin ready to buy or sell lives, to serve one man, and sell him out to another; a truculent outlaw who meets a deserved fate.

**THOMAS TOWNSEND**—The miserly owner of the richest coal mine in Alaska, and who lost his life because of his trickery in attempting to murder his niece, Anne, and thus save to his foolish self the money he would have had to pay her. His life is a study of why man will follow his gold to his grave, even when he knows that he can not take it beyond the grave.

**"MIKE" BRENNAN**—A real old fashioned "harp" who sees the "Ghost of The Mine" first, and in deadly fear yells the mystic presence in the great mine, until sure that the banshee has taken toll from those who work in the mine in the dreadful death of his companion, Bill Bradley.

**BYE-BYE**—An Eskimo Indian steersman of the ill-fated fur-packet the *Frontier Belle*.

**COU-GEE**—An Indian employee upon the *Frontier-Belle*.

**GHOST-DANCER**—An Indian Assassin.

**JAKEY MANDEL**—The Hebrew Engineer of the *Frontier Belle* with a sense of humor and who knew when he was funny.

**LITTLE FISHHOOK**—A Chipewayan Indian.

## CHAPTER I.

## A SHOT-GUN ARGUMENT.

The outlaws swarmed over the frail fur-packet.

The boat creaked and rocked as the renegade gang boarded it.

Shots rang out in the still air. Oaths fierce and wild were hurled at the heads of the defenceless passengers.

A scene of wild turmoil, ungoverned wrath, and horrible menace was in a second sweeping its terrors over the deck of the *Frontier Belle*, a panting light-draught little steam-boat, on its way toward Fort Hope, Alaska, at the extreme end of Point Hope, which juts out into the Arctic Ocean far up in the North-West corner of North America.

Bye-Bye, the Eskimo Indian steersmen of the craft in frantic haste tried to claw away from the rugged sides of Fishgut Canyon, on the Kupuk River, along which the boat was speeding.

In his effort to keep in the deepest water in the river, he had run close in to shore.

The river after all is only fifteen feet wide at this point, and it was therefore an easy matter for the bandits to jump from their concealed nook on shore to the deck of the boat as it passed them.

"White outlaw, he board us, Cap' Bell!" yelled Bye-Bye, when he saw the fierce attack bid fair to be successful.

Captain Bell rushed aft when he heard the hail, but he found his eyes traveling along a gleaming double-barreled shot-gun held by a tall, bearded man.

"Don't ye move, you cur, or I'll blow you into the river!"

A voice behind the shot-gun roared these words.

"Boarded by Hank Wayland, the desperado, and his gang!" gasped Bell.

"Aye!" howled the resolute voice of the robber-chief, "Hank Wayland has ye in his grip."

There had been no struggle at all with the passengers on the ill-fated boat.

The renegades had rushed hither and thither, covering unfortunate travelers with their death-giving weapons.

"Hands up!"

The command was heard from all quarters of the boat.

A truculent bandit, Alava Ricardo, grasped the wheel of the boat and proceeded to "stick-up" Bye-Bye, the steersman, without ceremony.

"Keep them yaller-brown paws o' yars up in the air," Ricardo screamed and Bye-Bye knew better than not to obey.

A bullet in the head is the greatest art of the outlaw; only the bullet usually goes in the wrong man's head.

Bye-Bye, born in the bleak Alaskan country, knew this fact.

"No fear," he sputtered, "I no move."

"Caramba!" cried Ricardo, a Spaniard by birth, and a bandit by choice, "you do well. No move, I no shoot."

"Keep the boat in the deepest water," yelled Hank Wayland, the head of the attacking forces.

"Aye! Aye!" cried Ricardo, as he twisted the wheel that steered the *Frontier Belle* so that she shot away from the shore.

A bandit held a revolver close to the head of the engineer of the boat, Jakey Mandel, a Hebrew, while the two deck-hands Cou-gee and Little Fishhook, two Chipewayan Indians, at the first of the attack had resignedly sat down in easy positions on the deck of the boat and had held their respective hands high in the air.

Anne Townsend, an extremely pretty young girl of twenty years of age, was stifling the tears of another young woman, who seemed to be frightened out of her wits by the attack of the outlaws.

"Boohooo-hoo!" cried this girl, in abandon that narrowly skirted the border-land of feminine hysterics.

"Oh, Kitty Cary, don't make such a fuss. The bandits won't kill defenceless women, I feel sure," consoled Anne.

But Kitty was too frightened to do anything but cry.

"Who's this making a water-fall of herself?" said a voice at Anne's ear that made her jump.

Anne turned.

There stood Hank Wayland, the outlaw chief.

"This girl is afraid of you," said Anne, with her accustomed candor.

The outlaw looked astonished.

He doffed his wide-brimmed gray-felt hat, and it swept the deck as he bowed low.

"Hank Wayland's reputation never advanced a hint that he was a woman-killer," the desperado said, with his best bow, "I have been accused of being a lady-killer, but not that way this girl seems to think. As for you, you are perfectly safe in my hands. Girl, you are too infernally pretty to kill. There's other uses for your bright eyes, than to see them close in death."

"What a gallant bandit," mocked Anne.

"Why call me a bandit?" said Wayland.

"Your reputation goes far in these trackless wilds," rejoined Anne.

"Then my reputation is——"

"A reputation for deeds of blood, and of rapine, murder, and——"

"General cussedness?" put in Hank with a smile.

Anne nodded.

"Well, some of the gun-men up here have reputations and often they appear to be not what they ought to be."

"The men or their reputations?" queried Anne pertly.

"The men—and their reputations. You are a pert miss, are you not? For I take it that no minister has handed your pretty self over to a husband, or you wouldn't be so talkative."

"Mr. Outlaw, I will have you to know that no man could stop my talking."

"Then Heaven be thanked that I am not your husband."

"I am quite thankful, myself, that you are not," replied she, a depth of quiet fun in her brown eyes.

She felt this airy talk with an outlaw of the fame of Hank Wayland was an event in her life.

"But this roly-poly little girl here, what of her? Where did she come from and where is she going?" added Hank.

"I do not know. She is in the steerage, or center of the boat, and is not a cabin passenger as I am."

"There's two classes of passengers on this boat, eh? First and second?"

"Yes."

"You being the first class have the forward cabin to yourself?"

"Yes."

"This little fat, dumpy blonded, round-eyed, blue-eyed girl, here, she has the center cabin of the boat?"

"Where most of the luggage is stored—yes."

"When did she get on?"

Kitty Cary was now squirming down under a pile of blankets and Anne answered for her.

"At Fort Kalla."

"You mean the fort where the Alaska Seal Company, that great American rival to the Hudson's Bay Company, have an agent who trades for furs with the Alaskan Indians, and white trappers?"

"Yes. The fort is about fifty miles from here up the Kupuk River. We all left there yesterday morning."

"You are bound for Fort Hope, on Point Hope, where the main fort up this way of the Alaska Seal Company is situated?"

"Yes."

"Are you two women the only ones on board the boat this trip down the river?"

"Yes."

"You are a mighty pretty freight?"

"Thank you—is this all? I hope it is because as matters now stand poor Kitty is liable to cry herself into a crazy-house."

"Never fear! No girl as pretty as Kitty is very much scared at any man, bandit or otherwise."

Kitty gave a wiggle as Wayland spoke that projected her further down into the blankets.

But Wayland continued his cross-examination of Anne.

"Is this boat making weekly trips this summer between Fort Kala and Fort Hope?"

"Don't you know?"

"If I did I would not ask you. I have been, when away on—ahem, another mission, and you see, I am not as well informed as to the trip schedule of this boat as I might be."

"Oh."

"And I shall have to presume upon your courtesy to help me in getting at the facts I want. I should hate to be disobliging to a lady——"

The gleam in Hank's eyes, and the truculent manner his hand sought his revolver, made Anne blanch and quiver with fear.

"I am ready to answer any question you may wish to ask," faintly replied Anne.

Kitty Cary had stopped her struggles and moans. She laid still under her covering of blankets into which she had wormed herself.

But Anne could hardly help betraying her wonderment, when she caught the steely glitter in the blue eyes of Kitty, who only a few seconds before had been in the depths of sobbing despair.

Anne, however, turned to the bandit chief.

"Did any man come aboard the boat, besides the crew?" asked Hank, after he had reduced Anne to a state of abject fear.

"Not that I saw."

"This boat only draws four feet of water, and isn't very large. If there had been any male passenger aboard you would probably know it?"

"Yes. I think I would know it."

With no further remark Hank turned and Anne soon could hear his powerful voice, with many strange oaths booming out his orders to the members of his gang.

Anne stared when she saw Kitty sitting up and apparently listening to the noises with her fears all gone.

"Are they gone?" whispered Kitty.

"Do you mean, Hank Wayland, who was just here?"

"Not only Hank, but all his band."

"No. They are just outside."

"Try hard to hear what they say."

Anne looked at Kitty in surprise.

"What?" she cried. "Are you crazy?"

Kitty grasped Anne's wrist. The force was that of a strong hand. It made Anne's flesh quiver.

"Girl," hissed a voice in her ear, "don't be a fool. Do as I bid you."

Anne wrenched her arm free with effort.

"Woman, who are you that you dare order me to do your bidding?" Anne cried.

"You little idiot," whispered the form that clad in woman's clothes she had always thought to be Kitty

Cary, "don't you see that I am not a woman, I am a man."

"What?"

Anne sank upon the pile of blankets as she spoke.

"A man!" she cried in a stifled voice. "A man."

A hand of virile strength closed over her mouth.

"Stop that kind of talk," a hissing voice said close to Anne's face. "Would you have the bandits murder us both, if they caught you with me, a man disguised as a woman?"

"Who are you?" gasped Anne, in a faint whisper.

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## CHAPTER II.

### ANNE AND KITTY TREAD A MEASURE.

"Here, you Captain Bell, come here and come blanked quick."

Hank Wayland shouted these words at the captain of the *Frontier Belle*.

Poor Captain Bell, moved uneasily to where Hank stood, his huge red-beard standing out at an angle from his face, that made him have the air of a blood-thirsty bull dog.

"Say, Cap, where's the boat's manifest?" said Hank when the commander of the tiny craft had drawn near.

"Here it is," meekly answered Bell.

Hank snatched the document from the cowed commander and then with his large fore-finger rapidly ran down the list of articles on the boat as shown by the manifest, or ship's papers, which gave the contents of the cargo carried aboard.

"General cargo of merchandise, and say, Bell, where in blank is the cash box?" snarled the outlaw.

"Ain't much on board, Hank," replied Captain Bell. "Ye see we are makin' our down trip this time. If ye had got us on the up-trip we would hev a lot of cash aboard."

"It ain't cash I'm after this time, nor it ain't supplies," howled Hank.

"Is it wives fer ye, or yer men? There's two pretty good lookin' gals forward."

"Naw! I ain't got my eyes out for any girls, this trip," replied Hank. "We have seen the girls, and they are pretty enough. But you can take them on their way, Cap. What we are after is something more important than girls."

"Oh! Well ef it's stores, Hank, help yourself. I'm helpless to stop ye."

"You bet you are. I'll take what I want any time, see?"

"You've been a-doin' of it for ten years out here,"

meekly replied Bell. "There ain't no one seems anxious to stop ye, Hank, as yet."

"You bet there ain't. And that's just why I'm here."

"Eh?"

"That's just why I am here. There's news been sent to us that there has been despatchd from the United States Military Reservation, at Norton Sound, one of those infernal *Mounted Rangers* to clean us up. Now, I ain't goin' to be cleaned up if I can help it."

"Who are them Mounted Rangers? Seems to me I've never hern tell o' them chaps?"

"Oh, it's a new game they are putting up to stop us fellows from doing business in Alaska."

"Soldiers, eh?"

"That's what."

"What can one soldier do against you, Hank?"

"One man can do a lot. He ain't much to be feared alone but I ain't any too popular up here and one man, if he had good sandy grit in him, might stir things up so that a whole lot of men who would like to see me six-foot under, would follow him in a raid on my camp."

"Did ye think this Ranger chap, was a comin' up on my boat?"

"I heard tell he was."

"Then that is where you were fooled. There ain't no man on this boat but the crew."

"I ain't going to take your word for it."

"Just as you say."

"I'm going to have this boat pretty well searched. Ho, boys! Search the boat. If you find that Ranger bring him here. I can show him a thing or so in a second."

The bandits began to spread all over the boat, and to search every nook and cranny of it.

This did not take long for the boat was a small one run by gasoline.

It was broad on the bottom, however, and while it had no storage room between the bottom of the boat and its single deck, and no berths below, amidship was a great cabin-sort of affair where articles of general merchandise were carried along with steerage passengers, as they were called, although properly speaking there was no steerage! poor folk bunked in with the freight.

A cabin forward with three or four side-berths marked the richer class of passengers, while the crew's quarters, and the galley or cooking part of the ship was aft, near the steersman's wheel.

The boat ran four months, and only in the summer.

In the winters, which in these latitudes begin to force their snowy months upon the Alaskan's when Eastern people are baking in heat, dogs and sleds make up the transportation system between Fort Hope and Fort Kalla, a distance of about two hundred miles by river and a third as much less by land.

"There's no one hiding anywhere," cried one of the outlaws to Hank after a thorough search of the boat.

"Didn't I tell ye so?" asked Bell of the outlaw chief.

"It's lucky for you that there wasn't," cried Hank. "If I had found that Ranger aboard this craft after I had been told that he wasn't, I would have put a bullet through your head in short order."

The snap in Hank's eyes told Bell that he was hearing no idle threat.

While he turned rather pale, Bell tried to laugh the remark off.

"You know that I wouldn't play with you or put you up again' a bum steer," Bell whined in fear.

"I don't think you have the nerve. I never had much opinion of your nerve, any way, Bell."

"Thank you, Hank."

"Oh, don't mention it."

The outlaws were now gathered around their chief awaiting his next order.

There was the sound of gay music that quickly came through the air and the music was such a dancing tune, that every foot in the bandit ranks began to keep time.

It was "rag-time" too; that syncopated jumble that the bandits knew so well.

Rumit-rumitidy, rang the music of some one playing on a violin.

A wild shout of roaring applause burst from the outlaws.

"Hey, whose playing rag-time out here on this confounded Kupuk River miles away from any white man?" yelled Hank.

"An' where Indian are not so many, at that," cried Alava Ricardo, the Spanish outlaw, whose black eyes were snapping with the lilt of the fascinating music.

"Who is playing that tune?" cried Hank.

The music suddenly stopped.

"I say, who is playing that rag-time?" roared Hank again.

"Me," replied a very small, thin voice.

"Who the blank is me?" cried Hank.

Little, roly-poly, blonde, and dimpling, came a tiny figure forward from the cabin, from which the head of Anne Townsend could be seen to be peeping.

Hank Wayland looked at the small figure in astonishment.

There was dread of censure in the soft blue eyes turned toward the outlaw.

The soft feminine touch of the figure before him made Hank laugh as he turned to the gang that stood near him.

"This gal can play all right, can't she boys?" Hank cried. "Say, she is the goods all right."

Again the rag-time began to peal from the violin.

"Say, if I had a partner?" cried Hank, "I'd show you fellows how to dance you bet."

"What's the matter with the gal in that cabin?" smoothly put in Ricardo who had the faculty of proposing something that always made trouble for some one.

"Hurrah! Just the thing! Here you gal in there, come out and dance with me."

Anne Townsend nearly fainted when she heard the message.

To think that she must dance with this bandit-chief, while a gang of truculent, blood-thirsty ruffians watched the dance was a terrifying thing and yet Anne knew that she would dance.

"It's that little beast of a man-woman, Kitty Cary, that has made all this trouble," thought Anne, "but it's a case of dance or a case of death for me—I think I will dance."

Her appearance at the door of the cabin was the signal for a wild cheer from the outlaw band.

"Here comes the gal," cried Bad Bill Sennett, a very well-known gun-fighter of Alaskan dance-houses.

"Hurrah!" yelled the other outlaws.

"Here I am, gal, are ye ready to dance with me?" shouted Hank.

Anne shot one vindictive glance at Kitty Cary, who, apparently oblivious to everything but the violin, was sawing away like mad, changing the time until at length the air burst into that popular melody, "Turkey in the straw."

"That's the stuff, chaw it down hard, gal," cried Hank.

He grasped Anne by the waist, whirled her off her feet with amazing strength and then began to dance with the grace of the historical bull as he entered the China-shop.

Anne gave in with good grace.

She footed it neatly along with the gigantic bandit.

Forward and back, ladies change, balance to corners, all were turned with a precision truly marvellous.

Anne danced like a spirit of Terpsichore.

For a big six-foot man, brawny and broad-shouldered as could be, Hank danced with great grace, and with remarkable lightness.

It was a scene that never will be duplicated again.

Here was Anne Townsend, niece of the owner of a great coal mine not far from Point Hope, dancing her best steps for the pleasure of the toughest lot of men in the entire North-West America.

Here was the leader of the outlaw gang dancing as if his life depended on it with this slip of a girl, while a tiny fur-packet steamer, drifted at its own sweet will on the bosom of the murky Kupuk river.

For bandits and packet crew all crowded around to see the wonderful dance.

All forgot the terrible command "hands up!" and hands went down to applaud when Hank executed an old-fashioned pigeon-wing, with the grace of a dancing master.

"Here you, you can't have all the fun," shouted Ricardo, as he grasped the personage known as Kitty Cary around the waist.

The sawing of the violin at intervals, the quick stamping of the outlaws as they kept time, the tapping of the feet of the dancers echoed for a mile through the beautifully clear atmosphere.

"Hurrah!" cried Hank, as utterly spent with his violent exertions, he sank on a seat near the rail of the boat. "Boys, let's take up a collection for the gals."

There was a yell of approval.

Into Hank's sombrero there rained a shower of nuggets, virgin gold, from the pockets of the outlaws, and making a bundle of the gold, Hank handed it to Anne with his best smile.

"Here's something to buy an English husband with," cried Hank to the girl.

"Thanks, but I won't buy me a husband if I can't get one for nothing," she replied.

"Steer the boat ashore," cried Hank in the next breath, "Gals, I've had a lot of fun. Boys, git ashore there. The man we are after isn't here. Instead of a nice little lynching bee that we have planned, we have had a splendid little dance. Bye-bye, girls."

The bandits left the boat.

Soon the craft was hustling along like mad toward its destination.

The boat had not gotten five hundred feet from the outlaws who were waving hats and waving good wishes toward the fast disappearing boat, than Anne grasped the hand of her companion.

"Why did you make me dance with that unspeakable thug?" she cried. "And why are you disguised?"

"Because I wanted to fool Hank Wayland," came the suave reply. "Listen and I will tell you all."

### CHAPTER III.

#### A FRANK CONFESSION.

"Don't I make a pretty good looking girl?" cried the figure that confronted Anne, in the most unblushing manner after promising an explanation of the untoward conduct that had so excited her indignation.

"What has that got to do with your confession?"

"Much."

"I don't see why."

"You are very obtuse."

"Why?"

"Because you ought to see why I am disguised."

"You are really a man?"

"Assuredly."

"You are such a little chap."

"That isn't my fault. I wanted to be tall but nature denied me the boon of Imperial height. But then, Julius Cæsar, Napoleon, Alexander the Great, and—oh spare my blushes, I, all seem to have been little men—not that I consider myself a 'have been.'"

Anne could not help smiling.

"Of all the nerve," she cried—

"I hate to interrupt a lady but that ever was my strong point."

"What was your strong point?"

"My nerve."

"Did you tell me you were going to confess, just to make me listen to your self-congratulation on having plenty of 'nerve'?"

"Oh, don't mention my nerve. It has always been a sore spot with me. I always feel sorry for myself when I think of my nerve."

"Never mind your nerve. Tell me why you made me dance with that thug?"

"I don't see as I made you dance with him. He was the one that made you, if you were forced at all to dance, but the way you footed it, it seemed to me that you rather enjoyed it."

Anne burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"It must have been awfully funny," she cried.

"It was."

"That great bear of a bandit could dance well."

"Couldn't he?"

"He was so heartily in love with the dance."

"Wasn't he?"

Anne giggled merrily.

"As a maiden you did extremely well in your dance with that deputy bandit," she snippily said.

"Don't mention it," cried the source of all the trouble, "the chap was a Spaniard and he smelled dreadfully of garlic."

Anne looked down at the double handful of nuggets she held in her hands.

"This gold?" she asked. "What shall I do with it?"

"I know what I would do with it."

"What?"

"Spend it."

"Eh?"

"That's all gold is for—to spend. What good is it if it's not circulating. I'd buy a lot of fun if I had that gold. Why don't you?"

"You don't think I am going to keep it?"

"Aren't you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it is contaminated by the touch of those outlaws."

"Don't you worry about that. There won't any one at any of the branches of the United States mint, or at its headquarters in Washington, ask you any question as to how you acquired the gold, you know? They will take it all right, no matter how you got it."

"Wh-o-o spoke of goldt?" cried a new voice. "So-help-me I could nefer hear goldt spoken of that I don't want to know about it. Believe me."

The speaker was Jakey Mandel, engineer of the boat, a Hebrew with a taste for adventure.

"I ca-a-me oudt here," Jakey often explained, "to make my vortune, but I don't see no chance for a sthore to sell things to polar-bears and Eskimos from, so I goes me into dees En-gin-eer-in business. So-help-me, it makes money for me better than no sthore. See?"

Anne who knew some of Jakey's racial attributes laughed as she held up a gleaming nugget worth easily fifty dollars.

"This is the gold we were talking about, Jakey," the girl said.

"Suf'frin Moses!" yelled Jackey, "It's real goldt."

"Take one," Anne cried, as she tossed the bit of yellow metal at the engineer.

The celerity with which Jakey caught the girl's gift



and hurried off to examine it, was a poem in sudden departures.

"Jake knows gold when he sees it," cried Kitty Cary.

"Yes—but while I make up my mind as to the gold, you had better take your share."

"Oh, no, Gold hath no charms to soothe my savage breast," came the mocking reply.

"But you haven't confessed."

"I'm ready too, Mother Confessor! Ply me with your questions."

"First—who are you?"

"A mere man."

"I know, but what's your name?"

"Alaric Barbel."

"Is that a real or stage name?"

"Real. I'll change it for yours if you'll say the word."

Anne could not repress a smile.

"Never mind such airy persiflage," she added.

"Now what is your business, pray?"

"A soldier."

"What regiment?"

"No regiment."

"What's the name of your organization?"

"Mounted Rangers."

"Western troop aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Why are you here?"

"You see, I am under sealed orders. But as a matter of fact I think I may confess to you that I am after Hank Wayland, as Hank made the open confession that he was after me."

"Then you are the Ranger he boarded the boat to try and find and kill?"

"I am the individual that Outlaw Hank said he required."

"Whew! Does the captain of this boat know you are the man that Hank is after?"

"No."

"Does any of the crew know?"

"Not one."

"No one knows but me, then?"

"My fate is in your fair hands."

"I have half a mind to ask Captain Bell to turn back and deliver you over to the thugs after what you did in making me dance with that outlaw."

"My dear girl, why don't you do it? It would rid me of so much worry that I really wonder why I don't give myself up to Hank and get shot at once."

"I wonder!" cried Anne.

She looked into the eyes of the young Ranger.

Something there made her catch her breath quickly.

"You are such a little man," Anne cried, "how do you expect you, you poor little man, are going to be successful against the huge bulk of Hank Wayland?"

"Said the mouse to the lion—" replied the "little man."

"But what is your plan—why did you come on board in this disguise?"

"Because I thirsted to get to Fort Hope—alive."

"Could you not get there in your usual—ahem, in your usual uniform?"

"Do you think I would have stood much chance if Hank Wayland had found me aboard, with my usual, ahem! uniform on?"

Anne knew that the speaker would have been immediately killed had he been in his proper garb.

"I never knew just why I was born, short, dimpling, blue-eyed, and with a girlish face, until I put on some of your womanly clothing. I now begin to wish I was born a girl, except I don't like your confounded clothes. They pinch me everywhere a man's clothes don't."

"That is one of the blessed prerogatives of being a girl," cried Anne.

"If it wasn't for the clothes I'd rather be a girl than a boy."

"Why?"

"Because you get so much consideration; so much the better of it."

"Nonsense. But did we come here to talk about the relative values of being a boy or a girl—or did we come to talk about why you are disguised as a girl?"

"I think we came to talk about me, but we drifted, you see, to a more pleasing topic; girls."

"Let us drift back to you?"

"Drift away. Question No. 2264! What is it?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know, except that I am going to do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Arrest Hank Wayland."

"That's a contract?"

"And I am a contractor."

Anne opened her mouth to reply.

Just as she did so the most remarkable change came over her vision. She saw with the greatest astonishment the tiny smoke stack of the *Frontier Belle* make a dancing-master of itself. It was whirling about in the most wonderful way.

The boat seemed, further, to be rocking about unaccountably.

There was somewhere with all these strange performances the memory in Anne's mind of a fearful, roaring sound, as if a hundred thunderstorms had broken loose.

Anne felt herself hurled with a force she could not withstand directly over the low-rail of the boat.

She saw the dull-white waters of the Kupuk River rise up to angrily smite her.

"What has happened?" shrieked the girl, as she felt herself carried by a terrible force far away from the rocking boat to where the water hungrily gleamed.

"What can have happened?" thought Anne.

Then oblivion swept over her.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GHOST OF THE MINE.

"Oh, wirra, wirra! This is me finish, be Gobs!"

The plaint of a truly Irish voice sounded through the atmosphere that clear and sharp, hung around the Kupuk River Mining Company, a few miles from Fort Hope, and which sold to whalers and all fishery craft, "steam-Coal" from its intricate mines.

"Here, you, Mike Brennan, what are you bleating about like some big calf?" cried the voice of the Mine-boss, or field superintendent, Hank Wayland.

While it was known all over the Alaskan country

that Hank led as desperate a band of ruffians as the world afforded, in some queer way he had "locoed" as the Alaskans put it, Tom Townsend, owner of the mine, and as the irony of this world's events had it, the uncle of Anne Townsend who at the present moment was struggling for life in the waters of the Kupuk River, many miles away.

"Oh, wirra, oh, I'm a dead mon."

Tears streamed down Mike Brennan's face as he continued his howls.

"For the love of Moses, what's in the wind?" shouted Hank, as he ran over to where the Irishman sat, his dinner pail over-turned at his feet, his pick and shovel flung carelessly away, a strange fact that showed how deep the nature of the Irishman had been stirred, for that pick and shovel was all that stood between Mike and starvation; for he was a "soft-coal miner," who at the present moment ought to have been engaged in mining, and not in howling.

"I see it, oh, oh, I did," sobbed Mike.

"You saw what?" questioned Hank.

"Oh, the eyes of it, like coals o' fire!"

"Eh?"

"And face uv ut, whoite an' death-like. Wirra!"

"Huh?"

"An' the han's uv ut—saints be wit us, all withered and skinny-like. The saints save us. Oh, wirra, wirra!"

Hank's hand came down on Mike's shoulder hard and fast.

"Here, you harp, what the blank are ye talking about?"

"Oh, sorr, I tell ye I seen it."

"Seen what, man? Brace up. Get into the game. Have some style about you. Be all wheat!"

But Mike sobbed on utterly disregarding the requests to "be a man and brace up."

Hank at length lost patience.

His foot gave the Irishman a smart kick.

This seemed to steady Mike for he sat up and began wiping the tears from his eyes, with the sleeve of his shirt, thereby adding a fresco effect of dirt, to the not over-clean face, when Mike began the rubbing process.

"Hush, Mister Wayland, sorr," wailed Mike. "Don't yeez ivver go down in the mine again."

"Why not?"

"It's there."

"What's there?"

"The banshee."

Hank stared.

"What's a banshee?" he asked.

"Don't ye know what a banshee is?"

"Sure not."

"Where woz yez born, mon?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Yez niver comes from the owld sod, or ye'd know what a banshee was, sorr."

"Produce, will ye? I don't know what a ban—what the blank is at that."

"Sure, ye are foolin'."

"No, I'm not."

"Why there isn't ut dacent Irish gentry family thot don't hev one sorr, right in their house, sorr, or any way if not in their house, sorr, about the grounds, sorr."

"Well, if they are as common as that I'll buy one, if it takes my last cent—"

"Buy one?" howled Mike, "are you crazy?"

"Not—yes come to think of it I must be to listen to you."

Mike burst into tears again.

Hank looked at him carefully.

He was convinced that the honest chap was frightened and had lost all of his scant wits in the fright. So Hank became determined to get immediately at the bottom of the mystery.

"Now, Mike, stop this riddle-talking and listen quietly to me."

Mike straightened up.

"Now you tell me first what a banshee is?"

"A ghost, sorr, an' Irish ghost. It's a fairy that comes from the good—polite people, an' is niver sent till it's toime fer yez to die. I'm a dead man, sorr."

Hank well knew the susceptible Irish disposition; its belief in the supernatural, its superstition and its fear of anything that partakes of the dreaded world beyond the grave.

He did not want to lose a good laborer in a country where labor is scarce, and he thought best to try and allay the fears of the poor Irishman.

"Nonsense, there's no such thing as ghosts," Hank cried.

"How do yez know, sorr?"

"Well, I know because I never saw one."

"Did yez ivver see the South pole?"

"Oh, of course not."

"But yez sure there is a South pole, sorr?"

"Of course. A good American citizen has just discovered the North pole so there must be a South pole, eh?"

"Sure, sorr, an' no argymint on me part would make yez think there was no South pole."

"Certainly not. What I know I know and no ignorant mick could make me change my views."

"Yis, sorr, an' no fool uv a mine-boss kin make me believe ther ain't no banshees; for sorr, I seed one, right in this mine."

Hank's face was very grave in a second.

He knew what it meant if the story as Mike related it should get about generally. Not a miner would work in the underground world, and this meant loss. His place came to him because he could get more out of the mine than any one else, and get better prices for what he got out.

Tom Townsend, the mine-owner, was money-mad.

He well knew that Hank was leader of a band of thugs; but he also well knew that Hank was a good mine-boss; and as he "delivered the goods, I do not care what band he leads," said Tom, when remonstrated with for keeping in a position of trust and responsibility a man who was of the deadly stamp of Hank Wayland.

As for Wayland, he was making money "at both ends of the game," and he and Townsend thoroughly understood each other.

Hank knew that labor troubles due to the starting of the banshee story would mean his sure dismissal at the hands of Townsend, and with the United States authorities after him with a Ranger from their Military Reservation near Norton Sound, he was in a sore straight.

"This story of the banshee must not get around," cried Hank softly in his heart. "Not a man out here will work, if this story mick tell's his tale. I must placate the chap."

"Well, Mike," Hank added soothingly, after mak-

ing up his mind with quick decision what course to pursue, "there may be a banshee after all. If there's one in our mine we will root him out."

"That won't do any good, sorr. Wen he's claimed his dead man, then sorr, the banshee will go away, sorr. I'm thinkin' I'm the man he's arter."

"Nonsense! I tell you what ye do. You lay off for a few days, under full pay. Now, if it's a real banshee down there in the mine, we ought to know it, eh? If it's a fake one there ain't no danger for ye, is there?"

"Sure, not."

"It may be that some one has a grudge against ye, and it may be that some one is tryin' to scare you off the job, to get your place—Mike you know this job is a good one, others know this job is a good one."

Mike felt encouraged. This view of the apparition might be as Hank put it; and, any way, he wasn't dead, and "ye know sorr, I might beat the banshee out, at thet?" cried Mike finally.

Seeing that Mike was reassured Hank began questioning him.

"First, tell me where you saw this ghost?"

"At the end of the five hundred foot level in the mine."

"You mean the North level where you go down the shaft five hundred feet, and then get out and travel along the tunnel for about two thousand feet more?"

"Yis."

"Well, go ahead. Tell me all about it."

"I was goin' along, sorr, to git to me work at the ind o' thot tunnel. We are driftin', sorr, there and git-tin' the coal out on great chunks, sorr, o' good stuff, sorr."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, me an' Bill Bradley work on the morning shift, sorr, wit' two boys, sorr, ter help us. I was that airy on the job, sorr, thet I sits me down and waits right about half way down the tunnel."

"Yes, go ahead."

"It was plum dark, sorr, all 'roun me, 'cept the little light I hez in me hat, sorr, so I sits a-waitin' an' a-waitin' and then, poof, it comes."

"What comes?"

"The banshee?"

"The ghost. Oh, it comes then. How?"

"Dancin' along, wid out onny feet. Its eyes, oh the bigness uv em. Its hans', oh the skinniness uv em oh, murther, oh—"

"Shut up," cried Hank seeing that Mike was about to work himself up into another frenzy.

Mike calmed down.

"Was that all?" questioned Hank further.

"Wasn't thet enough? I try's te' git me wits a wurr-kin, but while I was a lookin' an' a lookin'—poof the ghost, is gone, sorr."

"Hum. Did you look about you to see what was going on; whether the ghost was really a man playing a joke on ye?"

"I did not, sorr. I jest run as fast as me legs would carry me to the bottom of the shaft. I didn't wait fer the bucket, sorr, to carry me up, but I hustled up them ladders, sorr, my, how I hurried."

Hank laughed.

"I guess ye hurried all right," he cried, "but, Mike, before ye gets in the dumps and caches in, just wait till I get to the bottom of this matter. If it's a man playing a joke on ye, I'll find out who he is and I'll

break any bone his body may have in it, as soon as I find out."

"If it's a banshee, soor? What then?"

"I'll see ye get's a good Christian burial and will send some money over to good Father Coyne, at Norton Sound, to say a few masses fer ye, Mike."

At this Mike broke into renewed howls.

"But Mike, why die in advance? Just wait till we find out whether this is a case of die or a case of scarce? See?"

Mike saw.

He dried his tears and when Hank gave him a bit of money and told him to "drown his sorrows," Mike actually smiled.

"It may be thet I'm not the one the banshee is arter, soor, and onny way a drop of the crature 'ill cheer me up," quoth Mike as he strode away to "drown his sorrow forthwith."

"And, Mike?" cried Hank after him.

"Yis soor?"

"No talking about the banshee—if ye talks we can't do anything. See?"

Mike nodded. He felt that it was better not to talk about the supernatural events, just then. Not to talk was a hard cross, he knew, but he determined not to do it.

Mike hurried away, and Hank with a darkening face turned to face his employer, Tom Townsend.

"Hank," said Tom, through his thin, dried up lips, for he was a thin-dried up, almost ready-to-blow-away little man, about sixty years of age, "you know some time ago I told you that my niece, Anne Townsend, was coming out here?"

Hank nodded. He well remembered the conversation and he also well knew that the girl Tom was talking about was the one that had danced with him, at his insistent request on board the fur-trader's boat the *Frontier Belle*.

But Hank for certain reasons of his own, didn't care to tell why he had boarded the boat in question, or of his meeting Anne Townsend.

"A most unfortunate thing has happened," droned on Tom Townsend.

Hank raised his eye-brows.

"It seems that Anne Townsend is dead."

As he spoke Tom Townsend's eyes which had been shiftily looking anywhere in the room except at Hank, settled on the thug's face.

"Dead?" cried Hank, in surprise—"oh, I see—"

A glance of cunning and meaning passed between the two men.

It was a devilish, conspiring kind of glance that showed that each man had taken the measure of the other.

"Dead, eh?" replied Hank cynically. "Dead? Well, well!"

## CHAPTER V.

"NOT DEAD YET."

"If I were you I would wring some of the water out of that skirt."

Anne Townsend heard these words in a dreamy trance, as she sat up hurriedly.

Her wits were wool-gathering at first and she did not seem to get a clear view of where she was.

Then her senses returned.

Here she was sitting on a steep bank of the Kupuk River, wet as a drowned rat.

By her side sat Alaric Barbel, the Ranger, still clad in the garments of pretty Kitty Cary, and just then busily engaged in wringing the water from his short skirt.

Anne, it appears, was not so far dead as her dear Old Uncle Tom Townsend had announced; but as there was no telegraph wire from the seat of the supposed drowning; no postman or post office within a hundred miles, it is a reason for surprise how Tom Townsend got his information of the death of his niece; possibly by occult wires?

Anne gasped a few times like a fish fresh from the water.

She turned to the Ranger who sat by her side still smilingly trying to repair damages.

"Say, Anne," he cried, "how does this infernal braid go, any way? Look at my hair? How is my rat?"

Anne roared.

"You bought that rat, didn't you?"

"Bet your life. No one is buying my clothes yet."

"Well, let me tell you it doesn't match your hair."

"Shucks! That rat cost me one-twenty-five at the biggest department store at Norton Sound. I bought it in the blubber department, just ahead of a fat Eskimo."

"But you saved my life."

"Saved nothing! If you hadn't insisted in kneeling down in that water you would have been all right. It's only fifteen feet across the whole giddy river where you and I (and the rest of the gang) tumbled out of that boat."

"But you saved my life just the same. I can't swim, and fifteen feet is a long way in deep water for a girl to wade that can't swim, in spite of your trying to make light of it."

"All right, crown me with laurels if you wish; there's a fine laurel bush over there—but what ever you do make my crown fit. The old chaps that used to use laurel crowns never had a fit, it seems to me. They had either too much crown for their deeds, or not enough crown. Things didn't fit, you see."

Anne smiled broadly.

"Any way," she said, "much obliged for my life. If you insist in making light of your gallant deed——"

"My dear girl, pause. These thanks press hard upon me. What did happen was this; you seemed to have an insane desire to stick your heels up——"

"Oh! Oh!" cried Anne.

"And your head down," continued Barbel. "All the rest of you was submerged save the heels of two shoes."

"Thank you for the information."

"Now I argued that no woman can stand in twenty feet of water, in the slightly undignified position in which you found yourself, and do it successfully, for long."

"Oh."

"She has got to either resume her natural position in society by standing on her feet, or she will drown."

"Ah."

"So feeling that way, I jumped over board, Jakey

says I 'umped' by the way—and performed the feat of pulling you up with your head where it ought to be."

"What did I say?"

"G-l-k-e-w-r."

"Translate my language."

"I couldn't. However, all you said was something that was drowned when you tried to strangle yourself with Kupuk River water. So, I just took six strokes with my strong, and tried ar-m-s—and swam here—and there you are."

Anne giggled.

"Any way you are my gallant preserver."

"No question about that. Ugh, how cold women's clothes are when they are wet."

Anne did not reply.

She could not understand just yet what had really happened.

She voiced her desire to know in a single question along those lines.

"Oh," cheerfully answered Barbel. "How did the accident happen? Oh, the boat blew up. We all were tumbled into the water in short order, except Jakey Mandel, who says he 'umped in'."

"The boat blew up?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"A sudden rocking, a second of trembling—then bang—boat, all in the air with passengers flying! Note—Owing to the high cost of passengers this *great scene* will not be presented at matinees; only can be seen at evening performances," Barbel rattled on.

"What blew up the boat, I again ask? Boats don't blow up every trip out here, do they?"

"Ask Jakey, he is the engineer, and here he comes."

Jakey wet, and excited came hurrying up spluttering and shaking.

"Sh' he-lp me!" he cried when he saw the two, "I tot yah was drowned."

"Guess again, Jakey," answered Barbel. "Miss Townsend wants to know what caused the explosion—I told her you were to blame."

Jakey spluttered a long Hebrew phrase.

"Hold on, Jakey," warned Barbel, "this is Alaska, not Seventh Avenue in Harlem. We don't know Jerusalem talk out here in Alaska."

Jakey laughed. He knew he was funny and appreciated the fact. There's a good many people who don't know when they are funny. Jakey wasn't one of them.

"If I die for it," went on Jakey, "I doan't know vy we blow oop. We go along youst so fine—den b-a-n-g, we b-lo-w opp."

"Graphic! Great! Fine description," cried Barbel. "I can see us going 'oop' as you call it. How far 'oop' did I go?"

Anne smiled.

"Not so far as you deserve," she said, "for you came down in time to save me."

Barbel's answer was interrupted by the arrival of Captain Bell, who with a face of solicitude came hurrying toward the rest of the party.

Behind him came the two Indians, Bye-Bye, and Cou-gee, each as grave and stolid as if being blown from a gasoline steamer was an every day bit of life for them.

"Are you hurted?" asked Bell of Barbel.

"No only bruised," rejoined Barbel. "I like being

blown out of a new, neat boat, into an Alaskan river. If you do it every trip I'll take perpetual passage."

Bell looked astonished.

"No use," he said. "We don't do it every trip. This is the first time I have ever done it at that. But step over here. I have something to tell you."

Barbel obeyed.

"Say, do you know what blew up this boat?"

"No, of course not."

"I do."

"Steam-gauge stuck; no water in boiler—bang?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Dynamite."

"What?"

"Just that—dynamite."

"Oh, you surely are mistaken."

"I am not."

"Where was the dynamite?"

"Hidden in the coal."

"What?"

"Just that—hidden in the coal."

"Who hid it there—the bandits?"

"No."

"Why do you say no, so surely?"

"Not one of them went near the coal supply while they were aboard."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I watched them all the time they were on board us. I was afraid every minute that they would disable our engines."

"Humph!"

"Then you feel sure that the stuff was put aboard us before we started from Fort Kalla?"

"I am."

"Why?"

"Because we have't stopped since we left the fort yesterday morning at eight o'clock."

"I see."

"And with the exception of the bandits no one has boarded us since we left Fort Kalla."

"That is good work. You have doped out this game in fine shape."

"I think I have. Now, then, having made sure that we could not have taken that dynamite aboard since we left the Fort, and having pretty well proved that we got the stuff sneaked into our coal supply before we left the fort, there is only one thing to produce before my story is done."

"What is that?"

"This is it," cried Bell.

He produced a small, eight day clock.

"Behold," he shouted.

"Behold what—a clock?"

"The instrument by which the explosion was produced—this is it."

Barbel saw the point in a minute.

"This is a clock by which some sort of an infernal machine was made to explode the dynamite?" he yelled.

"Yes."

"See the clock stopped at 4.15 P. M. It was—look at my watch?"

Bell looked.

"The watch went into the water and stopped at 4.15 P. M.," cried Barbel. "I had it in my pocket when I was blown over board. The explosion therefore,

for clock and watch agree, happened at 4.15 this afternoon."

"That was the time the clock was set to explode the dynamite."

"It looks that way."

"When we were far away from Fort Kalla."

"Yes."

"Time and distance being so great that it would be almost impossible to connect the thug who put that infernal machine aboard us, with the crime."

"Exactly."

"It looks to me as if we have proved that this crime was accomplished by burying an infernal machine in our coal, so that late in our journey it would explode and wreck the boat, and presumably kill us all."

"Yes. There's no question that you are right. Only while the crime went through all right, and the poor *Frontier Belle* has her hold with a big hole in it, and is deep under water, out there in the river, we by God's mercy have escaped with our lives."

"Yes, the crime succeeded in all but our deaths."

Barbel mused a long while over the sudden aspect of this crime, and he marveled greatly as to who was behind the sneaking attempt to assassinate the entire crew and passengers of the *Frontier Belle*.

"If Hank Wayland's gang had put that infernal machine aboard, he would not have attempted to find me on board, with his gang."

"He would have known that the infernal machine was enough of a trick to cause my death."

These two thoughts ran through Barbel's active mind.

"There is more than my fate behind this attempt at wholesale murder," Barbel summed up. "Who else is in danger of death by the secret assassin?"

Just as he spoke, pretty Anne Townsend called him.

"Ah," thought Barbel. "Is Anne Townsend a solution to the question I am searching my soul for an answer? I must ask Anne Townsend some questions immediately."

Anne was looking curiously at the knit brows of the handsome young Ranger, never more handsome than in his woman's clothes.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A GLANCE INTO THE PAST.

Anne awaited the questions from the lips of Barbel.

The couple could hear the compliments that Captain Bell was showering upon Kitty Cary's head to the crew of two Indians.

"That girl has got hoss sense," they heard Bell say.

"You see what it is to be a clever young woman?" cried Anne to Barbel.

"A sheep in wolf's clothing?" smiled Barbel.

"Or the other way around, a wolf in sheep's clothing," cried Anne.

"For shame—I'm the tamest wolf you ever had on your staff, Anne. I am willing to be fed any time."

"I am not running a boarding house yet. You will, have to hustle for your own food."

"All right! Been doing it for years. Guess I can continue the game, at that."

"Did you want to tell me your fine work as a food getter—or was there something else?"

"There was something else."

"Speak, I pray you."

"Will you answer seriously?"

"Assuredly."

"Then how old is Anne?"

"Nonsense!"

"I said will you not answer seriously and at my first question you cry, 'nonsense.' Now please answer this?"

"Oh, you mean it. I thought it was a joke."

"Not a bit of it. I really desire to know how old this Anne is."

"Well sir, she was twenty this last Spring."

"Hum. Then she will be twenty-one next Spring?"

"And twenty-two the Spring after, and twenty-three the next—if she isn't blown out of another steam-boat, like this one."

"Precisely. Now then, Sister Anne, why are you going to Fort Hope?"

"To see my uncle, Thomas Townsend."

"Yes, so I understood. But have you ever seen Tom Townsend?"

"Never."

"Did he invite you to come out here and see him?"

"Oh no, but in fact he tried to dissuade me from coming."

"Do you know why?"

"I do not."

"When did you write to him that you were coming?"

"About three or four months ago."

"Where were you then living?"

"In Chicago."

"Who with?"

"My mother."

"Is she dead?"

"No."

"Is she living in Chicago?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you leave her to come out to Alaska, to see Tom Townsend, your uncle, when you knew that Townsend did not want you to come."

"That was why I came."

"What was why you came?"

"Because it was evident that Tom didn't want me to come."

"Oh. Would you mind explaining?"

"Not a bit. You see, my father was half-brother only to Tom Townsend."

"I understand."

"When he died he had all his property in things that they are in yet."

"Poor investments?"

"Poor isn't expressive enough. Make that word worthless."

"Ah."

"I found that there was one note for \$50,000 which was what represented a loan made twenty years ago to Tom Townsend by my father."

"But the note was outlawed."

"No it wasn't. It bore on it certain payments that showed that Tom Townsend, had yearly paid the interest and something on the principal, and there was a letter besides that seemed to me pretty valuable."

"What was in the letter?"

"It spoke of hard times in Alaska, said the little coal mine that Tom Townsend was interested in wasn't producing much, and added that the writer was pretty hard up generally. But as he had borrowed the money so many years ago in such good faith, and things had prevented paying only a few thousand dollars on it, he would try in view of my father's necessities, as per his last letter to raise \$2,500 and would give that in full settlement of all my father's claims, if in return my father would execute the necessary papers whereby the mortgage he held on Townsend's mine could be cleared off."

"Ah! What did your father do?"

"Nothing. He died ten days after receiving the letter, of heart failure."

"Sad! Then what did you do?"

"I suppose I am unduly suspicious, but I told my mother that I was going to look Tom Townsend up. We had no lawyer that we could pay to do this, or could trust if we paid him, and there came such conflicting correspondence back to us from Alaska, always when we had written there at my father's request to find out about the financial standing of Tom Townsend, that I just thought that I would rush out to Alaska myself and see what I could do—it's every cent my father left, my mother isn't well, and it looks bigger than a mountain, does that money, and it seems to me that if Tom can raise \$2,500 there must be some value to the property, and he might raise the full amount of my claim."

"Hum! Got the papers with you?"

Anne pulled a gold chain about her neck from some depths below the chain.

A package came promptly to view.

She unfastened it and handed it to Barbel.

He sat over the papers for at least half an hour, his brow knitted with thought.

At last he spoke.

"These are original papers?"

"Yes."

"Have you read them carefully?"

"I have but I didn't understand half of what they said."

"Well, let me explain them to you. This is a note for \$25,000."

"Yes. I saw that."

"Bearing interest at six per cent per annum."

"Yes."

"The interest has been kept up for the twenty years since the note was made, payable on demand, to your father, by Thomas Townsend."

"Yes."

"And during that time something like \$3,000 has been paid on the note?"

"Yes."

"So its present value is some \$22,000."

"Exactly."

"So much for the note—but did you ever look through this paper?"

"No."

"It is an agreement made by your father, on the part of Tom Townsend, that your father was to furnish the sum of fifty thousand dollars to Thomas Townsend, the share of the said Thomas Townsend, to be secured by a note for \$25,000 bearing interest at six per cent; the twenty-five thousand dollars which your father furnished

to be his share of the *adventure for wealth to be prosecuted by the said Thomas Townsend.*"

"Ah."

"In other words this was one of those common agreements twenty years ago when one man went out to the North-West to seek a fortune, borrowing cash to go on from the person who also put in some money besides, to prosecute the fortune-quest, *and with the understanding that in case of the discovery of any property, in gold, coal, diamonds; in fact in any kind of business, that each party to the agreement should share alike in the discovery made by the one going to the distant country.*"

Anne looked frightened.

"This unusual legal subject that you have so suddenly burst upon my listening ears surprises me. Now will you translate all this?"

"Certainly," replied Barbel. "It means that you have a claim on Tom Townsend for the value of his note made to your father."

"Oh."

"And also that you own one half of any property he may have accumulated as a result of his work in Alaska."

"That can't be much, for you see, Tom Townsend is so hard put for cash that he finds it hard to raise the small sum of \$2,500, as he wrote."

"As he wrote?"

"Yes, as he wrote."

"You know he wrote so to your father?"

"Oh, yes, he wrote so all right."

"But did he tell the truth when he wrote?"

A light burst on Anne.

"Has Tom Townsend any property?"

"He owns a coal mine for one thing."

"Do you know the value of that coal mine?"

"Oh, only comparatively."

"What is it worth in your judgment?"

"About one million dollars."

Anne was astonished.

"What?" she cried.

"I should think it was worth a million," went on Barbel, "or it might be worth more. No one knows just what such property is worth up here. Tom makes a mint of money selling his coal out here, having almost a monopoly of the business. There are other mines, but, I am told, none are so productive or as well situated as Tom's."

"Then he can pay if he wishes, all he owes me?"

"I think he can pay, if he wishes, all he owes you, out of the cash he has on deposit in one Eastern bank. It is said he has usually on deposit there, about two million dollars."

"Then he is trying to rob me?"

"Unquestionably."

"Why?"

"He has the reputation of being money-crazed."

"Oh. But I am going to force him to pay me what he owes me—man, it means everything to me, this money? Think of what I can do for my mother?"

"And think what you can buy in the way of a husband? No bargain hunter style of hubby for yours, but the sweetest thing with a coronet, and a nice title and an English accent, and no morals——"

"Oh, you!"

"You mean, Ah, me?"

"Why, ah me?"

"To think I knew an heiress once when she was poor?"

"Well, you better understand that this heiress isn't any different, poor or rich—besides all she has is a claim. Every penny of her cash is in a bag around her neck, and all her clothes is in a trunk in the bottom of a river out in Alaska, and I guess her heiressship doesn't show so that you could notice it."

"But, my girl, did you ever see any connection between your claim to part of Tom Townsend's wealth and the blowing up of this boat?"

"Certainly not. What possible connection could there be between the two?"

"Who would reap the benefit in case you died?"

"Tom Townsend."

"Who would save all the money he might have to pay you if you died in the Kupuk River and the papers proving your claim sunk with your dead body?"

"Tom Townsend."

"Then, are you on?"

"That is, do I see?"

"Yes."

"I think I see."

"Plainly?"

"Quite plainly."

"Then you agree with me that the attempt at assassination was directed against you?"

"I am forced to feel so."

"Now I am going to surprise you."

"You can't. I am past surprises."

"I think not."

"Then go ahead."

"Who do you suppose is general superintendent of the Townsend coal mines, near Fort Hope?"

"I don't know—who is?"

"Hank Wayland."

"Hank Wayland, the bandit?"

"Yes."

"Why how——?"

"No one knows why or how Wayland was employed by your uncle. Suffice it to say that he is employed."

"What chance have I got to get back my property from Tom Townsend, who is officered by such a thug as Hank Wayland?"

"You are such a little woman," cried Barbel, "how do you expect you, you poor little girl, are going to be successful against the huge bulk of Hank Wayland?"

It was almost these exact words that Anne had used in asking Barbel how he expected to cope with the outlaw, hours before, on the deck of the little *Frontier Belle*.

Only where "man" had been spoken by Anne, Barbel placed the word "woman."

"Oh, what a vindictive little brute you are!" shrieked Anne, but tempering her words with a dazzling smile.

"Vindictive? Not at all. I merely spoke thus to show you that *we are in the same boat, when we come to speak of the outlaw, Hank Wayland.*"

"I see that our interests are identical."

"You don't understand, that if I am assassinated, that you will be assassinated also?"

"I do."

"Then having an interdependence in a wish to retain our lives, we must work together, don't you see?"

"I do."

"I am going to outline a plan to you, that will save

my life, and will put both Tom Townsend and Hank Wayland where they won't be bothered with Alaskan mosquitoes, and will further save your life into the bargain."

Anne's face was bright with delight.

"And the fortune?"

"You will get your legal share of all the money that is due you."

Anne smiled in a most angelic manner.

"Don't promise me that much—man, what does life hold but fortune and life?"

Barbel looked at Anne with a smile.

"Love," he answered.

Anne blushed, as she laughed and hurried away toward the others of the party.

"Remember that we are interdependent," she cried merrily back to Barbel. "We must win this battle together or we are going to be killed in a short space of time."

"That plan—we will talk it over later—but I feel that it is bound to succeed."

\* \* \* \* \*

*At this very moment in far off Fort Hope, Tom Townsend had just told Hank Wayland, outlaw chief, of the death of Anne Townsend.*

*"The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a'gley."*

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE GHOST OF THE MINE IS BUSY.

"So the girl got here after all," said Hank Wayland, to Tom Townsend ten days later.

"Yes, curse her," replied Tom.

"Thought you said she was dead?"

"I heard so."

"How?"

"Oh, a friend told me."

"Like to see your friend?"

"Why?"

"He must be a wonder."

"Again why?"

"Because he could see over a hundred miles more or less, could see the *Frontier Belle* explode, and get all those facts right, but he couldn't see that your dear niece, had not died; got that all wrong, now didn't he?"

Tom sneered.

"What are you trying to do—make fun of me?"

"Now, Tom, let me ask you one question."

"Go ahead."

"Did you put that infernal machine on the *Frontier Belle* or did some one else, acting under your orders?"

Tom Townsend turned white as paper.

He moistened his dry lips with his furtive tongue as if trying to get up courage to speak.

"Nonsense!" he yelled, "you can't prove it on me."

"That's enough," rejoined Hank. "I guess I have my answer. Now, Tom, why when you want to pull off a trick like that, don't you call on me—am I not to be trusted?"

Tom tried to brazen it out by a vehement denial.

"Oh, very well, if you feel that way I'm going over to the mine."

"Ah."

Tom broke down.

"Say, Hank, you're in this all right, if you want to be."

Then he told his employe the entire story of why he attempted to kill Anne Townsend by means of the infernal machine on the boat.

It was a pitifully cheap story.

Tom had sent the machine to Fort Kalla by an Indian named, Ghost Dancer, an Eskimo.

This man had merely sneaked aboard the *Frontier Belle* when no one was looking, had set the machine-clock, so when the clock indicated 4:15 p. m. that day, the clock-works would explode the dynamite attached to the infernal machine.

Then the boat would sink, and presumably all on board would be drowned.

When the explosion came the boat would be far from Fort Kalla.

No suspicion could be cast upon any one at the Fort.

The great trouble had been that while the dynamite exploded no one had been in the slightest degree injured.

"Except for a wetting not a soul was hurt," added Tom, "a bit of hard luck I can't understand."

Hank sneered.

"Say, I was aboard that boat. I had a chance to git off with that girl," he cried, "and where I would have put her, you can just guess. But I thought it a fool thing to do, seein' as I hadn't no reason to. But if ye had told me she was in your way—say I have just a thought with me as to what had happened to that gal. Why, man, she would be dead for sure, if you hadn't been a fool and tried to get rid of her yourself."

Tom squirmed.

"Well, what is better to do now?"

"Oh, the girl's where we can git her any time. You put up the blarney act with her. How did she get here?"

"They all fished up the boat, patched her hull up, where the dynamite blew her up, Jakey Mandel the engineer fixed up her engine, and she made this port under her own steam."

"Ain't that the luck?"

"Isn't it?"

"Where are the girls now?"

"Stopping at old Mother Halliday's boardin' house in the hamlet down by the fort."

"Yes?"

"Is the girl they call Kitty Cary, with Anne Townsend?"

"Yes, I understand she is."

"Likely skirt, that Kitty Cary. I like here some better than Anne. They seemed to be great chums, a-comin' on the *Frontier Belle*."

"Well, they are both down to the boardin' house. They say Kitty has taken the best rooms in the house for herself downstairs, and that Anne has taken rooms upstairs, and that both girls seem to have money, and are out for a good time. They want to go down into our mine?"

"Go way?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I was there last night to see them."

"Oh, you gay Lothario!"



"Oh, I only went just to jolly Anne along, till I see what she wants to try to do."

"I don't know what she wants to do, and it's up to you to tell me."

Tom hesitated, and then bleated out the reasons why he wanted to get rid of his niece.

"Fudge!" cried Hank, "why don't you pay her cash and let her go off without any more trouble?"

"W-h-a-t? Give up half my mine?"

"Oh, you can buy her off for a hundred thousand dollars, I'll warrant. What's that to you?"

A light born of cupidity came to the eyes of Tom.

"No, sir, part with my gold?" he muttered. "Never!"

Hank looked amazed.

"Oh, ho," he thought. "That's the reason. Crazy, plum locoed over his cash. This chap would rather kill that girl, kill both those girls, that never harmed him, than put up a few of his dirty dollars and buy one o' em off. In the hole I'm in now, seems to me that I'd better get into Tom's confidence. It will mean a lot of cash when I get arrested, to keep me out of prison, or to save my neck; if Tom is used by me the way he ought to be, I can make him drag his jeans for my fall money—for I just guess that some time before long that Mounted Ranger will show up, and do business with me."

On his part Tom Townsend was thinking that he would use Hank Wayland to aid in getting rid of unfortunate Anne Townsend and if anything legally happened to Wayland as a result he, Tom Townsend, was not to blame for another man's misdeeds; oh surely not?

It, therefore, is a study in trickery, to watch the devious paths the two conspirators were about to take in their effort to win their individual victories and yet get a hold on the other conspirator in addition.

"Well, if I do business with you, you will have to part with some of your gold," said Hank Wayland at length.

Tom looked positively pained.

"Aren't you going to help me for old times sake?"

"Help you for your grandmother's foot!" shrieked Hank. "Do you expect me to murder this girl for you, and get a 'thank you' for my pains?"

"I fear it will cost me a lot of money," replied Tom, whose face was filled with dismay, "oh, dear, how much will I have to give up to you?"

Hank thought rapidly just how much it would cost to live comfortably in some South American country where there was no extradition treaty with the United States covering murder.

"Say, you agree to give me \$25,000 and I'll see that Anne Townsend doesn't bother you any more."

As he spoke Hank watched Tom's face out of the tail of his eye.

Tom's face was blank.

But his mind was active.

"It will take one hundred thousand dollars at the least to buy this girl off, and probably more," Tom figured. "If therefore, Hank can get rid of her for \$25,000 I will save \$75,000 and may be more, by dealing with him."

Tom then spoke.

"Too much, oh, very much too much," he said.

"Well, what will you give?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Nonsense! Dip my hands in blood for that sum—never."

"But they are already dipped deep in other victims' blood, man. Why not take the risk in this case for that cash?"

"There's one thing to remember; all the people I have done for I did for in a fair fight, or they appeared to be fair. In this case I must do up a girl, and that's worth more money."

"Oh, you near idiot, you need not kill her. There's some of the Alaskan dens that you could take her to, into which she would disappear as if the grave had covered her; and she never would be heard of again."

"That might do," speculated the outlaw, "and there's that other girl, Kitty Cary, well—we will think it over; that is if you make the sum the twenty-five. Nothing doing for less."

"W-e-l-l, I suppose I'll have to pay up. But how are you going to murder Anne Townsend?"

"That's my business."

Tom sniffed.

"As long as the girl is out of your way, you don't care if she is in a den of filth, where she must drag out a life long imprisonment, or is dead in an unmarked grave, do you?"

"No."

"Then close your face, likewise your eyes."

With this remark, the outlaw walked away leaving Tom angry but content because he knew that Hank Wayland would earn the money if it was possible to do it.

Hank in the meantime strolled to the great pile of coal, which surrounded the entrance to the shaft.

A pale, staggering figure met him at the entrance to the mine.

It was that of Mike Brennan.

"I seen it agin' sorr," yelled Mike.

"Saw what?" snapped Hank.

"The banshee."

"What?"

"Thet's wot, sorr, and within ten minutes arter I see it, sorr, a blash wint off and knocked me soide-partnner, Bill Bradley inter smithereens!"

"A premature explosion of a blast in that mine has killed Bill Bradley?"

"Yis."

"How did it happen?"

"I dunno."

"But ye have an idea?"

"'Twas the banshee, sorr."

"Oh—nonsense!"

"'Twas this away, sorr. Bill he was a puttin' in the p-o-wder, inter the hole in the coal, sorr, we uns hed jist drilled, sorr, win I see a blue-shmoke a-hoverin', sorr, rite over Bill's head."

"What did you do?"

"I yelled, 'lookee out Bill, there's fire-damp for-ninst;' ye see, sorr, a thinkin' thet 'twas thet, and then I seen the ghost."

Mike's knees were now trembling, and his face writhing in fear.

"Well, go on," cried Tom.

"I had jist yelled to Tom, sorr, wen I see a long, white form, wid a dreadful hollow eyes, all afire, a lookin' at me, and sorr, he didn't have no teeth an' yit he wos a grinnin' at my partnner's back, like a fiend, sorr. It was the banshee! I seen him lean over, sorr, and

*light the fuse to the powder that Bill was a pourin' in the drill-hole, sorr. Poof! Bill was dead."*

Tom wiped his forehead. This was rather more serious in his mind than the previous time that Mike claimed to have seen the ghost of the mine. That there had been something happening in the mine, that made Mike firmly believe that Bill Bradley was killed owing to the banshee's wish to claim a victim, Mike's story proved.

While he had no belief in ghosts, or in banshees, Hank saw that there had been some occurrence in the mine that was of a supernatural nature.

"Hey, you," cried Tom to the engineer in charge of the shaft. "I am going down in the mine in a bucket. I will get to the bottom of this mystery quick, you bet, ghost or no ghost."

In a trice Hank was whirling in a great coal bucket, in the midst of awful blackness, down the tremendously steep shaft of the coal-mine downward, through space in search of the ghost of the mine.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A BANDIT'S PERIL.

"All seems well here."

Hank Wayland, the outlaw, was standing at the bottom of the coal shaft as he spoke.

Around him, hollowed out of solid rock, studded with brilliant spangles, stretched a long lane of vaults of grandeur, unequal in size and scope, but all glittering under the rays of the candle held in a pointed cup in the outlaw's hat.

The tiny beams just lighted up the scene for a few feet around in every direction.

The long tunnel, not five feet high, close, damp and spectral could be seen a few feet ahead.

Large drops of water oozed from fissures in the rock and fell to a tiny streamlet along the side of the tunnel.

Like a great gnome with a light on its forehead, Hank stood and watched breathlessly.

"What is that?" cried Hank as he listened.

His blood froze.

He could distinctly hear the dull sound of a pickaxe rising, falling, pulsing and beating through the stillness which was marked, save for the low dripping of the waters in the silvery stream at his feet.

"A pickaxe?" cried Hank softly, "who is there at work in the mine now?"

He had understood that the mine was deserted.

He had been told that the body of Bill Bradley had been removed after the accident, and that this shift, or corridor of the mine, at the time of the disaster had been occupied only by Bradley and Mike Brennan.

"There can be no one down that dark, mysterious tunnel," Hank assured himself, "because with Bradley's body removed to the surface, I saw Mike and talked with him up above; there must be an empty shaft here."

Whack!

Thud!

Whack!

These resounding, yet dull sounds came drifting along the shaft to where Hank stood, and his blood seemed to congeal in his veins.

"There is some one there!" Hank cried.

He had not muttered the words when a strong draft of wind blew out his candle.

Hank stepped back in surprise.

"Why did that candle blow out?" he cried. "There is not enough wind in the tunnel's back-draft to blow out any light."

With fumbling fingers, Hank scratched a match and relighted his tiny candle.

"Ghost or not, I'm going down that tunnel," he whispered to himself, as with his revolver in one huge, hairy hand, and the candle, which he had taken from his cap, in the other, he hurried down the tunnel at his best pace.

A dusky obscure glimmer ahead began to obtrude itself on Hank's mind and sight after he had progressed several hundred feet.

Hank stopped short.

"What's that?" he hissed.

Something was coming toward him!

"What can it be? Who can it be?" whispered Hank as his eyes grew wide with alarm, and in spite of himself his knees began to bend underneath his weight.

The something was advancing.

It was a presence that was enveloped in a misty white light.

The light seemed to be hissing like a thousand demons. As Hank viewed it, spell-bound with wonder, the light shifted to a pale green; then it deepened to purple, then it turned back to white again.

With each change there came a sharp hissing roar.

There was the sickening scent of sulphur stifling the outlaw, and which he saw came from the center of the light, now whirling backward, then forward as if in a spectral dance.

"Is this the banshee?" Hank said to himself, in such a tone of despair that even he shuddered.

There came a terribly brilliant light that made Hank clap his hands to his eyes to keep out the blinding flash; a dull report, and a souging wind, that extinguished his candle in a moment.

When Hank fearfully uncovered his eyes he was in absolute darkness.

There was no brilliant light near him; nothing but darkness. The dancing shadow had disappeared; he was alone in the depths of the vast dark coal-mine tunnel.

This time with trembling hands Hank lighted the candle again.

He rushed down the tunnel again with fleet feet.

He was angry now and dangerous.

But there was no foe to attack.

Nowhere was there a single living thing to be seen.

Hank searched the entire level but nothing was to be seen of any living, or for that matter, of any dead presence.

Hank at length, worn out, breathless, with the joints of his legs knocking together, arrived at the extremity of the tunnel, which formed a right angle to the great shaft that led to the pure, upper air, and there he saw the spot where Bill Bradley had died.

The prematurely exploded blast could be seen to have ripped out nearly two tons of coal from the great

wall of side-rock in which it was embedded and there was a chaotic jumble of coal, rock, and general débris about, while a tiny pool of blood showed where Bradley's skull had been crushed by the flying rock.

"Nothing here?" thought Hank. "Nothing here? No banshee, no ghostly lights—now by thunder what could have made those lights?"

Hank's face was grave as he stood looking down upon the bloody angle where Bill Bradley had died.

"It's beyond me," Hank speculated. "I can't understand it at all. I wonder where that light drifted to, and why it appeared at all? I wonder, now, if either of those two girls, Anne Townsend, or Kitty Cary are behind this light in any way."

But when he had turned over all he knew about the appearance of the ghost of the mine first to Mike Brennan, and remembered that all this happened before the arrival of Anne Townsend and Kitty Cary at Fort Hope, he saw that the spectre had appeared before the girls were hardly away from Fort Kalla.

"It's sure that these girls aren't the ghost?" cried Hank interrogatively. "Dead sure!"

Hank tried then to guess the mission of the ghoul-like presence, that seemed to him as nearly as he could remember it, had been only a light containing the faint suggestion of that terrible thing, which in dwarfish glee feeds on human flesh, that has been freshly wrenched from the grave!

"I don't know whether I saw anything but a light at that," Hank shudderingly repeated over and over to himself, "I really don't! I know I saw a light, but was there a dreaded presence within that light? Or did I dream the whole puzzling mystic occurrence?"

Hank sat down on a rock and began piece by piece to go over all he knew of the spectre of the mine; all he had heard, and all that might possibly throw a light on the mystery.

Over and over again he turned every side of the matter to his inner scrutiny.

Not a single ray of light penetrated the gloomy indecision that enveloped his mind.

Hank Wayland, outlaw chief as he was, this time was thoroughly mystified, and thoroughly frightened.

"Confound it all!" he shouted in his anger. "What am I going to do? I am up against a confounded mystery, in this mine. Ghost, banshee, ghoul or what ever this thing may be, or may not be, there is one substantial thing to depend on. There won't a man in this mine come down here to work again, after that bull-headed Mick has told the story of how Bill Bradley died. That harp had roared his story of the banshee all over the mine, after Bill died, you can bet. Well, this complicates matters! I can't see how we are going to keep labor going in these mines, after that story of the banshee gets about among the men. Curse the luck!"

Hank swore an oath as he turned around to retrace his steps.

But he had not taken ten steps, when a gust of wind blew out his light.

He felt a tremendous blow full upon his face. It seemed to lift up his huge bulk and throw him over backward as if he had been a child.

Hank Wayland tasted all the terrors of death, in darkness, and alone, with no friend at hand to aid him,

as he whirled over and struck the hard stony bottom of the dismal shaft with such horrible force, as to drive the breath from his body, and leave him a senseless, scarce breathing mass upon the slimy, dirty earth.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### ANNE TOWNSEND MEETS HER UNCLE.

"My dear, child, do not become so angry, you know I will do anything for your good!"

The soft purring voice of Tom Townsend snakily floated through the boarding house of Mother Halliday, in the tiny hamlet of Fort Hope, which lay clustered about the long-wood cabin-like structure where the Alaska Seal Company held its headquarters and where it bought furs, sold goods from its counters to traders and trappers, or to fisher-men and whalers, with a desire to make money, truly American and pleasing.

"Don't call me your dear child," petulantly cried Anne. "Pay me what is due me, and I will go back to the home of my mother in Chicago, by the next steamer; yes, I swear it."

"My dear, child, how impulsive you are. And as to what is due you, why really we must talk that over. In fact I called tonight to talk it over with you."

"Well, what do you think is my due?"

"Really, my dear Anne, I can hardly say. I am willing to give you something for your, ahem, shadowy claim upon me."

"My shadowy claim, eh? That is what you call my claim?"

"Really, yes. It is so long since I borrowed that money, and really it has been paid back in such small sums at various times for which I took no receipts, that I am willing to tell you that undoubtedly your claim has been paid long ago, and——"

"Uncle Thomas, don't lie!"

Anne threw these words from her angry tongue at Tom Townsend.

"Let me go on further and tell you where you get off," the now very angry girl added. "Did you make a note some twenty years ago, when you borrowed twenty-five thousand dollars of my father, payable on demand, to him, or did you not?"

"My mind is not clear on that—well, I fancy, if you have the note that—have you any such note?"

There was a vindictive gleam in Tom's eyes as he asked this question.

"Man, I have."

"Where is it?"

"Safe where you can not get it. Do you suppose I would trust myself with that note knowing you were near me? Uncle Tom as the boys say in base-ball time, 'I'm on to your curves.'"

Tom snarled his reply.

"Well if you have the note it's outlawed."

"Not so fast! How about the payments you have been yearly making upon that note?"

Tom shivered.

His eyes opened and closed in sheer dismay.

He saw that he was trapped; that the girl had the note somewhere in her possession at all events.

He gulped. But to his mind it was necessary to find how much more Anne knew about his transactions with her dead father.

"Of course, if you have such a note it probably must have existed, unless it is a forgery, but we will talk of that note, later."

"Forgery! Oh, no, it's no forgery. It's your handwriting all the same, and besides, Uncle Thomas, there are entries upon the back of the notes, and duplicates of receipts sent to you, showing that you had paid on the note each year a small sum on the principle, and had always kept up the interest."

"You seem to have your case well prepared?"

"Oh, I don't know! You, further, my honest, kind, good uncle, have to face a written agreement that shows you were a fellow-adventurer with my father, in the trip to the North-West, and that all you have accumulated must be looked upon as partnership property—Uncle Thomas, I claim my half to all you have got. I want a million dollars at least for my share in your coal mine alone."

Tom Townsend sank back into his chair, a white, wan, wreck of a man; he knew the worst now.

Anne Townsend had full knowledge of all her rights.

She was at Fort Hope to claim them.

The miser saw his ill-gotten gains beginning to take wings.

Here in a breath stood a girl, an arrival out of the silence of his early youth, who had a valid claim for a part of his millions; the thought was intolerable.

It was a face white with fierce purpose that Tom raised to the girl.

"I—I—I, wait a moment, Anne, what an awful temper you have; so like your dead father's. I—I—I don't dispute your claim, may be founded on some—ah, some slight facts, but we will talk of that later. We will see about your claim. Meanwhile I am not feeling very well. I think I will start for my home."

Tom tottered out of the house a panic stricken, hopeless old man.

He was gifted with the heart of a shrimp, in a man's body, and his miserly soul felt as if the hand of grim death was upon him, when he found in all human probability that he would have to give Anne, half of his hardly amassed cash.

"I'd rather die," Tom groaned.

Then a smile of hate convulsed his face.

"May be she will die—oh, Hank Wayland, I hope you will not fail me. If you remove this girl for only \$25,000 how nice it will be for me. I can save at least almost a million by this payment to Hank. Oh, why don't Hank show up?"

As Tom staggered along breathing curses on Anne, Kitty Cary, as the disguised Ranger, Alaric Barbel, was known in the hamlet ever since his arrival, clad in a sweetly fetching suit of black broadcloth minced into the room.

"How does it fit, Anne?" Kittie asked excitedly.

"How does what fit?"

"This new gown. It's the latest thing, honest. It's cut à la Eskimo, that is, scant in the skirts, with the most be-you-t-i-full effect of walking in pants that you ever saw—"

"You vain creature. I really believe all you think

of is your dress. Do you know you ought to be a girl."

Soft, feminine-talking Kitty turned into a man at once.

"What?" roared the Ranger in his deepest base voice. "I am no girl, I am a man ready to fight for you and your fortune."

Anne made a most bewitching courtesy!

"Thank you, sir," she replied, "an' may it please your Highness, I am a doin' some hustlin' for me own, fair fortune."

Anne deeply feeling the interview with her uncle, Tom Townsend, the miser, told the Ranger just how she had treated Tom when he had called on her.

Barbel, forgetting his rôle of Kitty Cary, elevated his feet higher than his head, pulled a cigarette out of his pocket, and began to smoke out the problem, as he put it.

Anne did not let the young man see how delighted she was to witness his descent from his girlish disguise for awhile and then determined to take a fall out of Barbel, she said slyly:

"In the elevated walks of society where you shine supreme, Kitty, in the ranks, my dear girl, of the upper-classes, is it the latest style for you to sit with your feet higher than your head while you inhale cigarette smoke?"

The feet came down with a jolt.

"I beg your pardon," sputtered the disguised young Ranger. "It is darned hard this disguise. If I don't keep my mind on things all the time, I clean forget that I am a girl."

Anne's smile was a broad one.

"I forgive you, because I can see that this disguise is necessary to accomplishing our purpose. Really, it is the only way. But for goodness sake don't forget your rôle. It would be pretty serious if you happened to put up your feet that way when Hank Wayland was around."

But the Ranger was now lost in his thoughts again.

"I have a plan," he announced suddenly.

"Ready to tell it?"

"Quite"

"Then go on."

"It seems to me it's about time for us to allow the plot, that undoubtedly is being concocted to what he hopes will end in your death by your amiable uncle, to succeed."

"You think that he is plotting?"

"I do. As long as life is in his miserly body you may rest assured that Tom Townsend is plotting."

"Well, what of the plot?"

"I figure it that there will be before long an attempt to murder you."

Anne shook her head.

"I don't like the feeling that I am to be murdered," she said, "they might accomplish their attempt. Think how silly I would feel to be murdered."

"To say nothing of the pain the successful accomplishment of the plot would occasion."

"I am trusting in you so thoroughly that I do not in my heart think that any plot the outlaws attempt will succeed."

"I hope not. Only I am not invulnerable. They might kill you, and I may add they might kill me at the same time. That would be an unfortunate ending for us both."

"Well, how about your plan?"

"I am going to let the plan of these thugs apparently succeed."

"What?"

"Just that."

"But how?"

"I would be ready to stake my hope of everything in this world, that Tom Townsend and Hank Wayland have hooked up together."

"How?"

"Wayland is the leader of a bandit band, and is therefore cunning in deeds of blood."

"I admit that."

"If so, therefore, it is not unreasonable for us to figure that he and Tom have gotten together in a plot to outwit you, by the simple mode of killing you."

"I admit that may be possible."

"Now I have admiration deep and eloquent for Hank Wayland."

"Have you?"

"I have."

"Why?"

"From what I saw of him when he boarded the *Frontier Belle*."

"Oh."

"I will explain further. Hank then had a chance to clean up the boat, to kill us all, to loot the craft, and to make just what had happened to us a mystery that probably no one would ever discover."

"Why?"

"Suppose that he had dumped us all in the river, taking pains to see that we were not allowed to land—what would have happened?"

"We would all have been drowned."

"Naturally. And there would have been nothing but the fact that we had drowned showing upon our bodies."

"Nothing."

"Hank could have then looted the boat, and burned it up."

"Well."

"That would be all, that any one ever could have known of the fate of the boat, and its passengers and crew."

"It would have looked like a mere common every day accident; the boat blew up, burned to the water's edge and the passengers were drowned?"

"You have my idea."

"Now what?"

"Here is the crux of my plan. The fact that Hank Wayland did not kill us all then shows me that he knew nothing of any reason to rid the world of you—"

"Rid the world of me—I like that?"

"Well, say, to rid you of the world."

"That's better."

"And so it was not until we arrived, and Hank was back here in his job as mine-boss under your uncle, that there was any definite plan proposed to kill you. Then Tom undoubtedly told his troubles to Hank, and Hank got busy."

"What did Hank do?"

"Of course I am only guessing, but it seems to me that what he did was to agree to murder you for a price, or to get rid of you for a price."

"Oh."

"Now I am going to get into this game myself."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to buy your life, Anne, and mine also, of Hank Wayland."

"What?"

"I don't think Hank wants to murder us, because there is an easier way to get rid of us up here than that way."

"How?"

"To sell us to a dance-house keeper."

"Oh, horrors!"

Anne was trembling with fear.

"Is that often done up here?"

"I am afraid it is. The dance-houses are kept by ruffians who allow any one with the necessary money to enter their resorts and dance with young women in the place, for a fee. The young women are prisoners absolutely."

"Mercy! What a terrible fate!"

"It is. Now, these women can't get out because they are imprisoned in houses surrounded by great stockades. Fierce dogs patrol the stockade walls. If one gets in to those places one never gets out, rest assured. Not until death lets them."

Anne shuddered and turned cold and faint.

"Now, the United States authorities are very active in the work of uprooting just such cattle as the men who run these dives. If I can fix the crime of selling us to a dive-keeper on Wayland, I can arrest him at once for this crime and later I fancy I can fix enough crimes on him, to send him to prison for life, if not to hang him."

"Good!"

"So I am going to shift my plan of work. I am going to be taken ill tonight. I am going to send for you early in the morning, and you are to be supposed to be engaged in nursing me, Kitty Cary."

"Hum."

"But I shall get out of this house secretly and I shall go and buy us both of Hank Wayland. I shall pose as a dive-keeper and then, when Hank comes here, we will go willingly to a place where we are to be left alone, and where I, the dive-keeper am to come. Of course, being in a slightly double-position, I can't come and abduct myself—"

"And we are free!"

"Exactly."

"Then we will—"

"That's another story. Here comes Hank Wayland now, and I will wager one thing that he comes to spy out the lay of the land. Now be careful, keep in the light, Hank might change his mind and kill you in a breath if he thought he could get away with it."

Anne turned, summoning her best smile, to meet Hank Wayland, the outlaw.

Kitty Cary, her sweet blue-eyes turned up in a most angelic way, smiled at the burly bandit as he entered the room.

## CHAPTER X.

### HANK WAYLAND IS PUZZLED.

"Why what is the matter with your eyes?"

Anne Townsend asked this question the moment Hank Wayland had entered the room.

Both of the outlaw's eyes were blackened as if from a fearful neat and well placed blow.

"Mine accident!" he growled. "Tumbled down when I was in the mine and hurt myself. 'Cept for looks it's nothing."

Kitty Cary was laughing merrily.

"You look so remarkably like a prize-fighter I once knew," she said in her low soft tones. "He had a fight once, and he got licked. Mercy but he looked just like you."

Anne joined her laughter with that of Kitty's.

Wayland, not relishing the way the girls were laughing at him, turned a brick-red.

"I didn't git licked," he snarled.

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Kitty, "I thought maybe Tom Townsend put one over—gave you what they call an uppercut, eh?"

Hank glanced shrewdly at Kitty.

"Girl," he growled, "don't be afraid of Tom's ever putting over a blow at me. I could kill him with my two little fingers."

To show his strength Hank caught up a great chair. He crumpled its sides in his wonderful grasp.

The chair fell to the floor a mass of mere kindling wood.

"My! but you are strong. Now, I wonder what Tom Townsend meant when he told us awhile ago, when he called, 'that he could crush you if he wanted to as he would a big mosquito.'"

The seed of suspicion was thus sown in the outlaw's mind against his employer and fellow conspirator.

His suspicious glance was directed at the speaker.

"When was Tom Townsend here?" he asked.

"Just a little while ago," replied Kitty.

Kitty's glance was so timid that it disarmed the outlaw.

His glance softened from its dreadful anger to a pleased expression.

"You are quite a cute little girl," he said.

"Am I not? Quite the cutest thing that ever——"

"Ever what?"

"Breathed."

But Hank harked back to this visit of Tom. He had his suspicions well aroused and he determined to see if his suspicions had any basis of fact to show that Tom was "doing him up."

"What did Tom come here for?"

"Business."

Anne interjected these words.

"Why business?" growled Hank.

"Oh," replied Anne, "you know that Tom is my uncle?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, he wanted to settle some claims I have upon him under my dead father's will."

"What?" yelled Hank, now thoroughly angry and sure that he had gained knowledge of a counter-plot that Tom was attempting.

"Just that," continued Anne. "You know Tom owes me a great deal of money."

The outlaw nodded.

"I heard tell something of that fact."

"Well, Tom came here to propose a settlement," cautiously feeling her way as she spoke and exchanging glances with Kitty, whom she saw had a purpose in deceiving the monster in human form that stood before the couple.

"A settlement?"

Tom fairly howled out the words.

"Yes, a settlement," chimed in pretty Kitty.

"A settlement of the claims against him, held by Anne here."

Anne smiled assent.

"Well, of all the dirty low-lived——"

Hank's anger broke into oaths.

"O-h-h!" cried Anne.

Hank stopped aghast.

It would not do to shock these two Eastern prudish young women, until he had got further down to the dark well of information he was sure they held about the devious path of Tom Townsend.

Hank smothered his wrath with an effort.

"Would you mind telling me—you know how interested I am in your winning your cash from that old miser Tom—how much he was willing to settle for?"

This was a poser.

Anne hesitated.

Her glance strove to read what Kitty advised.

This amiable man-woman, had quietly moved her position so that she stood directly behind the outlaw.

Her hand went up so that Anne could see.

Five fingers were displayed.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice.

Four times.

Anne then saw Kitty's lips distinctly move.

"Thousands."

It required no great ability in lip-reading to understand that Kitty made the denomination of each of her "fives" amount to the thousands.

"Four-times-five-are-twenty," Anne calculated, her mind grasping the school-room of her younger days when she droned out these figures in the hush of the Spring days, when there was a syringa bush right near the school house gate, under which she heartily wished she was playing with her dolls!

"Twenty-thousand dollars," Anne answered bold as brass.

Hank jumped as if a thousand bees, and ten thousand mosquitoes had stung him.

"Thunder!" he yelled.

He was now convinced of Tom's treachery.

"The infernal crook," Hank's thoughts ran, "he offered me \$25,000 to do away with this girl. Then he comes here and offers her \$20,000 to settle with him. He would save five thousand dollars if he could get her to settle, and then, if I had done her up, he could have sworn that he had nothing to do with it at all, and that I lied if I dared accuse him of the crime. He would show his settlement papers with Anne to prove his statement. Thus, he would get rid of the girl forever, do me up too, get his property released for \$20,000, and leave me to be hanged quick, and be darned to me—oh, the plotting hell-hound."

The startled anger that lighted up Hank's eyes as he puzzled out what he believed was the answer to Tom's visit to Anne, boded ill for the miser.

Kitty-Alaric, was in great humor.

She saw that she had planted the seed of suspicion in the heart of Hank, and the feared concentration of purpose of the two conspirators was thus minimized.

"Hank won't trust Tom to the limit any more. He

will be sure and fear a counter-plot in all that he does."

Hank rose gloomily.

"I jest came over to ask how you girls were," he said in a sulky tone, "and now finding that you're all right, I'm going."

"Good bye," cried the two tracked ones in unison. "Come again, when you are not busy."

Hank vanished in a flash of rage.

Kitty Cary, now Alaric Barbel, once more at least in thoughts, if not in dress, laughed consumedly as Hank left.

"Didn't I hand that outlaw a good one?" he asked.

"You did."

"He is dead sure that Tom came here to make you an offer of settlement and while I don't know why, but it was obvious that the news disturbed him, and made him suspicious of Tom. What I wanted to do was to sow the seeds of suspicion in Hank's mind so that what ever plan he and Tom have jointly will be spoiled."

"Now Kitty, I'm sure that you are a gay deceiver," Anne cried with a twinkle in her eye.

"The worst ever," came the swift reply. "Now fair nurse, while I am ill will you hold my hand?"

"Nit."

"Then I go to get my disguise ready for my trial heat with Hank. Say, what sort of a price had I ought to pay for two such beautiful dancers as we are?"

"I'm willing to sell out cheap."

"Well, I'm 'Dance-House' Tim, young girl, now, and I think you can dance well enough fer me ter give up a hunner' dollars fer ye—see?"

Anne knew now that Barbel was certainly a born actor.

Instead of being a tiny little man, as she had thought him, he seemed to suddenly become a big one.

His voice got deep and "bad," as Anne thought; he was a gun-fighting Alaskan dance-house owner, depraved and wicked to the core in a moment.

Anne's breath came quickly. The change from the girlish, sweet Kitty Cary, to this truculent thug, seemed to be sudden transformation that one some times has in an ugly dream.

"Oh, don't!" Anne cried. "Don't look like that. You frighten me."

"I suppose a 'hunner' dollars for the girl that I know dances like a Queen of the Dance, because I saw her dance here with this thug Hank Wayland on the *Frontier Belle*, isn't enough, eh?"

"As I took dancing lessons that cost more than that to arrive at the perfection you assign to me," replied Anne, "I think it's little enough."

"What do you think I'm worth as a dance-house attraction?"

"Oh, about forty cents."

"All right! Here goes, two buxom, good spirited young girls, warranted to be able to dance all night, for the low sum of one-hunner'-dollars-and-forty-cents-go-in'-go-in'-gone——"

And with this the young Ranger darted away to prepare for his contemplated trip to Hank Wayland.

Hank, also, hurried away but in a different frame of mind.

Anger was uppermost in his mind. He hated Tom

Townsend now with a vigor that was bound to make trouble.

It was in this frame of mind that he met Tom.

This was unfortunate for Tom.

Tom as usual purred when he was in the worst humor.

He was, therefore, in a mood that made him the softer and more amiable outside than he was inside; for there he boiled with disappointed rage.

Take all these elements in the hearts of two men and an explosion is pretty sure to come.

In the case of Hank and Tom it came quickly.

"Here you——" roared Hank, who had no thought of dissembling, but went straight at the point without beating around the bush. "What the blank do you mean with going over my head and settling with Anne Townsend?"

Had the moon which rode in the Heavens above just then, suddenly tumbled on its side, and rolled about like a great hoop, Tom couldn't have been more surprised than he was when Hank addressed him with such a question interlarded by a string of oaths.

"Settle with Anne? Hank, are you stark crazy? W-h-y!"

"You lie, you coyote."

There was such hatred in the glance Hank threw at Tom when he spoke, that Tom began to scuttle backward like some gigantic human crab, expecting to bear the brunt of a personal collision with Hank the next second.

"I don't lie," Tom answered in a trembling voice.

"You do," hissed Hank. "You will double-cross me, will you? Confound you!"

Hank flashed his revolver from its holster.

"Man! Don't shoot! I'll explain all," cried Tom in an agony of fear.

"You yellow thief, you kidnapper, you poor dog of a miser, I am going to kill you right now. Your last hour has struck."

The outlaw hissed these words and raised his weapon.

Knowing that he was marked for death Tom Townsend fell with his face buried in his hands, to await the life-ending shot from the renegade's revolver.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A FAIR STRANGER.

"Halt, sir, or you will run me down."

Alaric Barbel, the young Ranger, mounted on a bay horse, heard these words come from directly ahead, as he slung round a turn in the trail at a fast lope.

Barbel, now dressed to take the character of Dance House Tim, the ruffian who proposed to purchase Anne Townsend and Kitty Cary from Hank Wayland, the outlaw, to lend brightness to his unspeakable den, pulled the head of his horse almost backward on its body, as he heard the cry.

"'Twould be better if ye wos a bit careful," he cried not forgetting his rôle of Dance House Tim. "Riding along these yar roads as ye are may or it may not be safe. What the——"

Barbel came to a sudden halt in his words.

For before him stood about the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

She could not have been more than eighteen years of age. She wore a beautiful gown of transparent muslin, through which her rounded arms and the contour of her fair shoulders could be seen in that delicate opaque yellow of the Mexican girl.

She looked like a statue of youth in alabaster.

Her magnificent black hair was wound with a tortoise-shell comb in which was shot the dull gleam of gold.

A long serape was wound about her body from the waist down, and she sat astride of a mettlesome little jennet, and looked up at the big Ranger horse, as if frightened at its bulk.

"Thunder! What a pretty girl!" thought Barbel.

The long silken lashes which fringed the girl's deep purple-black eyes, were cast down under his admiring glance, so that he had no manner of knowing what the girl might have thought.

"Well, pretty one," cried Alaric, "where are you going so early in the morning?"

The girl shot one glance at Barbel.

"Where is your home?"

"There, sir."

A tiny white finger indicated a low, hotel-like structure, in the distance.

Although he had never seen it before, Barbel knew that the place was one more or less notorious in Alaska, as a dance-house, kept by a Mexican thug, named Jaime Disidero.

"Goodness!" snapped Alaric, "are you one of the dancing-girls from that awful den?"

The girl gave a fleeting alluring glance at the young man.

"Oh, no," she cried, "I am Juanita Disidero, and Don Jaime is my father—I dance some times, but not with those I do not wish to dance with."

The black eyes told Barbel plainly that in case he wished to ask for a dance there would not be a refusal.

Barbel, was young; a pretty girl out in the Alaskan wilds, whose eyes told him such eloquent messages, was a rarity.

And it was no wonder that Barbel forgot his mission of death and dire peril, and lent himself to the pleasant emotions of questioning a remarkably pretty girl, standing on a trail, within a stone's throw of a den where he well knew his life was not worth a silver dime.

"You are allowed to go out of the stockade as much as you wish?"

"Not as much as I wish; but now and then."

"How did you get out today?"

"I ride out sometimes to get the air."

"Alone?"

"Save when I meet a Señor like yourself."

"Ah."

"Yes."

"Who comes to your father's stockade to dance?"

"Friends of Señor Hank Wayland."

This answer brought Barbel's wits together with a jolt.

This den was, then, the place where the outlaw band spent their off moments, when they were not doing the blood-thirsty bidding of Hank Wayland.

It was imperative for Barbel to get within the dread portals of this den, if he wished to get the evidence necessary to convict the entire Wayland gang, he argued.

It seemed the greatest lot of good luck for him to meet this girl, who evidently liked a quiet flirtation, and if this lead was properly worked he might be able to get within the stockade.

"For me to try to go there and gain admittance would be impossible. These resorts are all maintained by a certain tried and known to be true clique. These only gain admittance to the dens, where dancing, faro, illicit whiskey, that had been smuggled over from Canada, cigars, and thousand and one odds and ends of articles that never bore Internal Revenue inspection are to be purchased.

"This girl may be one of the women inmates of these places, who dance with visitors, for a fee paid to their captors, and who are not allowed to go out from the places lest they escape to friends again, or she may be as she says, the daughter of old Disidero, the thug runner of the resort," thought Barbel. "Anyway it will pay me to try and get entrance to the den through this girl."

He looked at the girl again.

"And there's certain a promising lure in those great black eyes," he continued. "It's worth a trial."

"What is your name my pretty maid?" Barbel asked the girl.

"Juanita Disidero," cried the girl, giving Barbel a slow alluring glance of inspection.

"Ah."

"Yes."

"You live in the stockade, where those men can be seen around the front of the building?"

"Yes, Señor."

"You speak English well."

"My mother was an American."

"You live in the stockade, alone?"

"All alone, save for my father."

"You are often in the stockade?"

"Oh, very seldom, and then only when my father does not know. You see we live in that detached house behind the stockade. Father doesn't like me to go into the stockade buildings, for he says the men are rough there and are not fit associates for me."

"I fancy he is right."

Juanita shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not know, but anyway, it is only when I steal away do I have any pleasure, and sir, I can not steal away often."

There were tears in the girl's eyes as she spoké.

Barbel felt intense sympathy for her.

"You poor, lonesome little thing," he cried, "if I could I would come over and play with you."

The girl looked overjoyed. Evidently she looked upon Barbel as a welcome addition to her dolls.

"You might call some night—tonight, maybe, when father is in the stockade, busy taking in money for the privilege of dancing with one of the girls there."

"That would be a good idea."

"But you must be a very brave man to call on me."

"Why?"

"Oh, father or some of the Wayland gang would kill you if they found you with me."

"If they don't find me?"

"Then you will not get killed."



The girl showed her even white teeth in a smile.

"But are you brave enough to call?"

"Try me?" cried Barbel with a twist of the shoulders indicative of his pluck.

Juanita jumped from her jennet.

She drew near to Barbel.

"I do not think you are coward."

"My friends say that I am not."

"Then I will call upon you now, to call upon me to-night."

The reiteration of the word "call" got somehow into Barbel's head.

He threw his usual caution to the winds.

"I will call tonight if I come back a corpse," he cried.

"But you don't know how to reach me?" continued Juanita, with her quiet, careful, yet alluring smile.

"That is so."

"I wonder if I should tell you?"

Even as she spoke Barbel knew that the girl would tell him.

In fact she did so a moment later.

"There is a way to get into my house, when I am alone, but it is a secret way, and I dare not think you will brave the dangers within it?" the girl continued.

Barbel smiled.

"Why, girl, I would dare a lot of things to see you again."

Now, really, this was a very foolish thing for a young Ranger to say to a girl on a public Alaskan trail, whom he had not seen in his life until about half an hour before his speech was made.

But Barbel was salving his conscience by telling his inner mentor, which seemed to cry "beware," that he was only anxious to call on the girl to get facts upon which to warrant a wholesale raid of the Wayland gang.

Juanita gave Barbel a flaming smile.

"If you dare," she whispered, "do you see that house over there—the one detached from the others?"

Barbel looked.

The house was a low, hut-like sort of affair, isolated from the other buildings but near them.

He nodded.

"There is where my old nurse lives. She is an Eskimo, and I often pass my evenings with her," the girl whispered, "so if you come tonight there at the door of that house, and have the courage to enter it, you may find me awaiting you, with my nurse to be our chaperone."

"Will the door be open?"

"Yes, partly."

"How?"

"It will appear to be locked. The house will be so curtained that no ray of light will come from it, but there will be warmth, light and a right hearty welcome within to he who has the courage to press the door with his shoulder and walk in when the door at his steady pressure opens to the master's hand."

The girl looked again at Barbel with her wonderful dark eyes.

An answering spark sprung from his steely blue ones.

"Juanita," he cried, "I will be there."

"At midnight?"

"At midnight!"

Juanita gracefully re-mounted her steed.

But before she did so she leaned over toward Barbel, a pretty, bit of perfumed, alluring femininity, and whispered:

"Remember the secret passage at midnight," said Juanita.

"But you have not told me of any secret passage."

"I know that."

"Why did you not?"

"I wanted to see if your courage would allow you to pass the door."

"It does."

The girl laughed.

"So I see."

"Well, tell me about the secret passage."

"There is not much to tell you."

"Tell me that much, then?"

"Well, after you press open the door, you will see a path."

"A path?"

"Yes."

"To where does it lead?"

"To me."

"But where will you be?"

"At the end of the path."

"Is the path a long one?"

"Not very—it leads to a short secret passage, into which you must go."

"How far does the passage go?"

Juanita, with a flash of teeth, a smile of allurements, and a quick wave of her pretty arm, was gone like a flash.

"Try and see!" the girl shouted back.

At first Barbel was about to start after the fleeing girl.

His big horse would have been at her side in six jumps.

But he saw that some of the men at the hotel run by the girl's father were hastily mounting their horses and having no wish to get into a running fight with the spawn of the breed of men that frequented Jaime Disidero's place, noted as a lawless spot all through Alaska, Barbel turned his horse's head back toward the hamlet of Fort Hope, and soon was speeding along far from the stockade.

"At midnight? Well that girl is worth a trip through many dangers to most men; and to me more than others for in her I feel sure can be found the missing facts that I need to convict Hank Wayland and his gang of outlaws—"

But down deep in his heart, Barbel knew that it was a feeling of curiosity that tempted him to try the secret path.

A thrill passed through the Ranger as he darted onward.

"I wonder if that girl is *the lure of the outlaws*," he gasped.

Was she?

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE SECRET PASSAGE.

Alaric Barbel was promptly on hand at the midnight hour to keep his tryst with beautiful Juanita Disidero.

The pale, inconstant moon was seen riding in the sky, and apparently sneering at the young man.

In fact no one could blame the moon for its sneer.

"I guess Old Mistah Moon, you know a thing or so and to see me here, following after that girl, not only is a cause for your sneer, but also for your laughter."

Which showed that Barbel was not so sure that his dare-devil plan to accept the invitation of the girl was the best thing for him to do or not under the circumstances.

"Anyway it's too late for me to retreat," Barbel muttered. "I have thought that this was a good plan to follow Juanita, but now I am not so sure."

Barbel looked at his watch.

It was a few moments before midnight.

The howl of a vagrant coyote came faintly to his ears; the twitter of the insect life in an Alaskan summer night sounded faintly; a screech-owl hooted from a near by fringe of timber land.

Before him dark, grim, menacing, lay the tiny hut where Juanita had made her tryst.

An appalling feeling of desolation clutched at Barbel's heart.

"Why am I so fearful?" he thought. "Is this a lure?"

A headstrong young man must have his way.

Barbel, determined to see Juanita again, rushed forward and with his strong resolute shoulder swung back the door to the hut.

The door opened inward.

The faint light from the moon showed Barbel that ahead of him there stretched a narrow way.

It was about two feet wide.

Rough boards on each side, hewed out of the tree without much pretense, made up the walls of the passage.

"The secret way," thought Barbel, "the secret passage that Juanita told me of."

Along this pathway the intrepid Ranger crept.

His hand clutched his revolver.

"But where is the pathway that I was told I would find—am I mixed; was the pathway to come first, the secret passage afterward; blessed if I can remember?" Barbel paused.

He seemed to hear something in the dim, moon-lighted depths about him.

He could hear a soft breathing.

"Juanita!" Barbel called. "Juanita!"

Save for the soft breathing there was no answer.

Barbel crept down a pathway.

He saw it when he passed a turn in the boarded secret way; it was plain, seemingly marked by many feet.

"This is it," thought Barbel, as he darted down the train.

A door stood barring the way at a point not fifteen feet further on where the wooden sides along which he was speeding came together.

"Is this the door?"

Barbel so spoke.

As he stood pondering just what course to pursue he heard a low voice.

"Hist!" the voice said.

Barbel looked up to where the sound was echoing. At a half open, window-like trap-door set in the side of the structure before him, Barbel caught a fleeting glance of the beautiful Mexican girl he was seeking.

With a low cry of admiration Barbel pushed the door underneath the trap-like window, and boldly entered.

The door behind him closed with a vicious snap.

There was a fierce snarl, a deep growl, and a husky choking cry that fell upon the young man's affrighted ears.

*A bulk dashed at him from which came wild yells of ferocious rage. The yells rang upon his ears.*

*He was weighted down by some terrible monster that gripped him in its claws and whose deadly teeth began tearing at his throat.*

## CHAPTER XIII.

## ANNE TOWNSEND'S FLIGHT.

Anne Townsend, when she retired to her room after agreeing to pretend that she was nursing her friend Kitty Cary the following day, to give the handsome young Ranger opportunity to hurry away and try to deceive Hank Wayland, the outlaw, fell into a deep sleep.

It seemed to her hours and hours later when she awoke.

And she felt herself to be in a curtain of terrible darkness.

"Is it not morning?" the girl thought. "Goodness! How my head aches."

She strove to rise, but her feet seemed not to be able to perform their wonted functions.

Anne sank back in her bed in wondering haste.

"Where am I?" she asked herself, with a bitter feeling of despair at her heart. "Am I in my room at Mother Halliday's?"

Again Anne strove to rise.

But she was weighted down by some inner note that seemed to make it impossible for her to make her brains thrill her muscles into life enough necessary to organize the impulse that would lead to movement.

"Am I paralyzed?" Anne cried.

A rumbling echo of her words seemed to be flung back at her in every direction.

"This is not Mother Halliday's?" cried Anne, again, "where oh where am I?"

In answer to the echoing words she had just uttered there arose about her the dry mockery of a laugh.

"What is that?" Anne whispered, now seated upright on her couch.

Again came the sobbing note of the mystic laughter.

"Who are you?" cried Anne.

Out of the darkness a voice spoke.

"It is one you do not know."

"Fiend of this world or fiend of the other world; which art thou?" Anne shouted.

The mocking laughter continued and then there shot before her vision the dull gleam of a yellowish light.

The light came from a candle which a hand, that cast a fantastic shadow on the wall, had lighted.

Anne saw a shadow dance on the wall, and then come whirling to her side. She cowered down upon the bed, frightened, yet anxious to know what the advancing shadow would disclose.

Anne screamed in dire terror when she saw standing over her in near proximity, a tall man bearing a lighted candle in his hand.

"Who are you?" the girl cried in her terror.

"Alava Ricardo, chief aide to Hank Wayland. I guess you know me. You saw me on the *Frontier Belle*."

Then Anne remembered.

She sat up straight her eyes gleaming and fear no longer clutching her with its fatal fingers.

"How did I come here?" Anne asked.

"I brought you here—assisted by others."

"Where am I?"

"In the bottom of an abandoned part of Tom Townsend's coal mine."

"What?"

"Even so."

"Did you carry me from my room?"

"Assisted by others of our companions I did."

"How did you do this—was I asleep?"

"Under the effects of chloroform."

"You drugged me before you dared to move me from my room in the boarding house to this spot?"

"We did. You were asleep when we softly opened the window in your room, crept in, and placed over your sleeping face, a cloth saturated in the insensibility giving drug."

"Then you brought me here?"

"Yes."

"You said I was in a part of Tom Townsend's mine?"

"You are."

"What part?"

"In an abandoned part."

"Underground?"

"It is three thousand feet from here to the top of the ground, whence we carried you."

"You mean that you carried me down to the bottom of an abandoned shaft two thousand feet deep?"

"I said three thousand."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"Did you carry me down here?"

"We lowered you down the shaft, fast asleep under the drug's influences."

"Is the shaft above us now—I can see no light?"

"It is not above us."

"Why is it not?"

"Because it is far from where we are."

"How far?"

"Easily a thousand feet more."

"I am then in a tunnel that leads far from the shaft?"

"You are. And here no shrieks or groans will bring you aid."

Anne moaned softly in her fright.

"No one can stay the fate that is hurrying you to the dark coast where Death reigns."

Anne decided to make one great plea for life.

"Man, why do you murder a defenceless girl? I

have done you no wrong? Why do you wish for my innocent blood?" she cried.

"I do not wish to kill you. You are nothing to me. You are not in my way alive, and will not be the more in my way dead, but I am doing just what I am told to do."

"Were you told to bring me here to die?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By my leader."

"By the outlaw chief, Hank Wayland?"

"Yes."

"But why should Hank Wayland want to kill me?"

"He has nothing against you, but you must die that he may live better than he has been living."

"What do you mean?"

"Hank Wayland will be paid the price he has exacted from one who wishes to encompass your death, after you are murdered."

"That is, there is blood-money ready when my soul shall have left this frail tenement?"

"There is."

"Is it much?"

"I don't know, but I am told that all who aid in encompassing your death will be rewarded."

"Who told you?"

"Hank Wayland."

Determined to try in some way to avoid being the victim of the devilish plot which had enfolded her, Anne continued her questioning. She knew that sooner or later her suspicions would be made a certainty at least so far as discovering who really had plotted her murder; for she knew that it was not Wayland who wished her ill, but felt in her bones that her uncle, Tom Townsend, was at the bottom of the entire attack.

"Now then," added Anne, "you know as well as I do that Hank Wayland is not at the bottom of this attempt to kill me. Who is it that has engineered this vile plan?"

Ricardo felt that there was absolutely no hope of Anne's escape; why not then assist her last moments by answering all the questions she might ask?

"I don't know that anyone is behind this save Hank," Ricardo answered. "But if I was guessing I should say that Tom Townsend had hired Hank to kill you."

Anne nodded.

Her suspicions were well founded she saw.

The outlaw facing her had the same opinion as she.

"Look here," the girl cried. "Why not make some money for yourself out of this?"

The bandit looked at Anne irresolutely.

Money for himself? Yes, he sadly needed money. He didn't know, what his friends all knew, that if he had a million of money in his hands today, in as short space of time as he possibly could accomplish the deed in, he would be penniless; money went through his hands like water through a sieve.

Anne had appealed to Ricardo's only weak spot.

"I don't know how to answer you," the outlaw said.

"There's good money in the plan."

"I won't tell you until I hear the plan, just what I may or may not do."

"I have one thousand dollars in cash where I can get it for you quickly."

"That isn't much money."

"Isn't it; it's better than nothing."

Ricardo nodded.

"Well, this money is all yours if you will go to the top of this shaft tell Hank Wayland and Tom Townsend that I am dead, and then, some night soon, sneak me out of here where I can get my own money from Tom and then I will give you ten thousand dollars in cash."

"I see the thousand all right, because you can raise that, but why should old Tom Townsend, who is a notorious old skin-flint of a miser, give you money—what claim had you on him that would make him give you this cash?"

Anne rapidly explained.

"It's pretty risky business this, doing what you ask," cried the outlaw. "Hank Wayland would kill me as would an Indian—and that's as quick as he could get his gun going—if he knew about it."

"But will you aid me?"

"I don't know."

"When will you be able to make up your mind?"

"I can't tell that, either."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I'll tell you, girl, you get me \$500 now, and that will show me you are in earnest."

"Yes."

"Now my orders were to kill you, but there wasn't any orders as to how, when or where?"

"Horrors!"

"For that \$500 I'll agree to see that you get a light here, so it will not be so horribly dark, and I will feed you and keep you alive for a few days."

"Then, what?"

"Oh, I'll make up my mind."

"That is in a few days you will decide whether to murder me or to accept my proposition."

"Yes."

"Now won't the outlaws come down here and k-i-l-l me when they learn where I am?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because no one knows where you are."

"Were you alone in bringing me here?"

"Yes. I carried you over my shoulder as I would a sack of wheat."

"Then I am entirely at your mercy?"

The outlaw nodded.

"It's up to me whether I kill you or whether I don't. You keep your money until tomorrow morning. I will make up my mind what to do. I am going now, but in an hour I will return with food and light. That will make you comfortable for the night and today—after that we will see!"

The bandit left the tunnel as he spoke. His footsteps could be heard echoing back from the distance as he hurried along the difficult way.

Torn by her fears, frightened, pale, disheveled, and angry all at once, Anne sat in the intense darkness, wondering what her fate would be.

"Am I to be murdered," she thought. "Is my life to be ended here by this villain outlaw? Will he shoot me, or will he leave me here to starve to death?"

Thud!

Whack!

Thud!

From a spot behind her there came these sounds.

Anne's heart seemed to stop beating with dread.

She clutched her throat to stifle the awful shriek

that seemed to be tearing her apart in her effort to scream!

"What is that?" in stifled tones of fear asked the beleaguered girl.

There was a white mist stealing up from the dark shadow behind her. To her eyes it appeared to change to a royal purple, while a hissing as if made by angry serpents, came dully to her ears.

With a dancing, weaving light, the mist seemed to be hurrying forward to grasp the terror-stricken girl.

Anne fainted!

## CHAPTER XVI.

"LURED BY OUTLAWS."

*"Trapped! Tricked! Lured By Outlaws, to this den to be killed by this horrible unseen thing."*

This thought flashed like the glint of light on a dagger directly into Alaric Barbel's mind, when he was borne backward by the monster, that had gripped him.

"Infernal idiot, I am getting my just dues for my foolishness. Juanita Disidero was the lure set for me by the bandits! In some way the Wayland gang has penetrated my disguises. They sent that pretty girl to fool me—she did all right."

Sharp pains began to shoot through Barbel's arm.

It came from a fang pressed deep into his arm by the tearing shape that was trying to drag him backward.

In the first surprise that overwhelmed him, Barbel made no more resistance than a boy to the infernal onslaught of the shape that bore down upon him.

But when his mind cleared with the knowledge that he was trapped and now had to fight for his life Barbel began to take action.

Awful darkness enshrouded the battle field.

The air was foul with the fetid odor that emanated from the animal.

"Ha!" cried Barbel. "I recognize that smell. I am fighting with a fierce Arctic fox!"

In its wild state the Arctic fox is dreaded by all trappers. Great numbers are to be found the year around in Alaska, all along the Alaskan peninsula, and even far out on the fearful Arctic Ocean, among its islands of eternal snow, this horrid animal is found, cunning in an almost human way, crafty, treacherous, and when hungry positively dangerous.

"This fox has been shut up here for days with no food, or water," Barbel reasoned, "it would attack a giant in its present mood of frightful hunger and thirst. Unless I can kill this beast I am a dead man!"

While lithe and strong, the fox was somewhat weakened by its long fast, and although its teeth bit deeply and Barbel's body was soon torn and bleeding from many wounds, yet he managed to keep the animal from tearing his throat open as it was endeavoring to do.

But the hindermost claws of the fighting beast made long furrows in the Ranger's clothes, and cut his flesh until he seemed to be a mass of gory wounds.

Around and around the man and beast whirled.

The beast fought, now and then giving a fierce yelp, like a maddened animal.

The man fought silently with clenched teeth, as a white man usually does; and the battle in the somberness of the den, where light only faintly penetrated, was a magnificent effort for man and beast.

Who would win?

This was a mooted question for several moments.

By all the laws of a midnight attack, in a dark spot, unfamiliar, and taken off his guard, Barbel should have been killed in the first rush of the Arctic fox.

But sometimes usual laws do not indicate what really has happened.

In this case in ten minutes after the battle, Barbel had fought the beast off, and was feeling for his revolver.

"Hurrah!" he just muttered, knowing that he needed all his breath to again meet the animal which in a lucky burst of strength he had thrown backward from him, and which he knew would attack him immediately.

With almost a human snarl of rage the animal jumped upon Barbel.

It bit him deeply upon his left arm just below the shoulder.

Barbel did not try to fling the animal away from him. He gritted his teeth as the pain of the bite smote along his nerves.

Barbel's right hand, holding his revolver swung around.

The weapon's muzzle was buried in the deep fur that shielded the fox's back.

Barbel pulled the trigger!

The revolver gave a muffled roar.

The fox straightened backward as if pulled tense by an invisible cord.

It gave a stifled howl.

It rolled backward, and fell to the ground quite dead. Barbel's shot had penetrated its wildly-beating heart. The Ranger staggered back along the secret passage-way.

His clothes were torn to ribbons.

Blood was streaming from numberless wounds.

But he was alive, and ready to fight further for his life, although in his heart there was a warring battle going on, between hatred for the lure Juanita had spread for him, which had communicated to the girl, and disgust at himself for falling into the net, which a child in his circumstances should have avoided.

"Oh, if I had that girl here before me——"

This thought darted through the mind of Barbel.

As the Ranger staggered along he finally reached the door above which the trap-like window had framed the beautiful face and form of the Mexican girl.

The trap-door was open Barbel saw.

Two figures, dimly seen in the half light that was made by a shaded candle within the trap-door window, riveted the gaze of Barbel.

"There is Juanita!" he cried to himself.

In spite of his wounds, Barbel stole near the window. Yes, one of the figures was that of Juanita Disidero. And standing near her, holding her hand was the figure of a man.

Barbel gave a low exclamation.

The figure holding the girl's hand was that of Alava Ricardo, without doubt, save Hank Wayland himself,

the most dangerous man in all the outlaw band which Hank Wayland controlled.

"Fly with me, Juanita," Barbel heard the outlaw urging.

"But my father?"

"He will forgive us, when Father Coyne at Norton Sound, the Catholic mission leader, will have married us."

"How you urge me? I can almost deny you nothing? But the money? Ah! How can we live when we start way off for Norton Sound?"

"Poof!" cried Ricardo, "I get the money tomorrow."

"Where? Who gives the money to you, my Alava?"

"From the girl, Anne Townsend."

"Ah! How?"

With swift words, so anxious to get Juanita to agree to elope with him that he threw discretion to the winds, and compromised himself in a thousand ways by his incriminating story, Ricardo told the girl of the plot to kill Anne, his bearing her away to the abandoned coal mine shaft, and then told of Anne's offer to give him money to spare her life.

The beautiful eyes of Juanita were wide with speculation!

It in no way dismayed her to think that the man who wished to marry her was first taking a bribe to kill a defenceless girl, and then taking a second bribe from the girl to spare her life, and thus betraying his first employers!

Murder meant nothing to Juanita.

She was a Mexican girl brought up in the center of a nest of criminals all her young life; it was natural to her to plot, and connive to do deeds of blood.

"If you can get the money——?"

Juanita asked these words in a questioning manner.

"If I can get—why, girl, the money is mine whenever I wish to go down the abandoned mine, and tell Anne Townsend that I can and will accept the cash."

"But the young fellow that you fear—that Mounted Ranger?"

"No danger from him. He hasn't shown up in these parts and if we hurry and take the cash from that girl we can get out ahead of his arrival. What do we care what becomes of the band when we are out of it?"

"But you'd better get the cash from that girl, and then kill her! Dead girls can't talk," speculated Juanita. "After you had made her free she might repent her bargain. Let her out, get her money, then kill her, eh, my Alava?"

When these words were spoken strength seemed to flash back into the frame of Barbel.

He had drawn himself up and was seated in the window, now, so that he could hear every word that was spoken!

He crawled along on his hands and knees because he did not want any whisper to escape him.

"What a splendid wife, you will make!" Barbel heard Ricardo say to Juanita, as he crawled down to the floor as if attempting to get into some tiny crevice in his effort at concealment.

"Ah! Alava, what a husband you will make!" cried the Mexican girl.

Then she screamed in terror.

From almost underneath her feet a form darted.

A great fist shot out!

## CHAPTER XVII.

TOLD IN THE PAPERS.

It struck the outlaw down as if death had come in the lightning's vivid flash.

The bandit was knocked insensible by a finely directed blow of Barbel's fist.

Had Barbel thought longer he would have shot the ruffian; as it was he simply knocked him out with the same straight armed jab on the point of his chin with which a trained pugilist "puts out" an antagonist in the ring.

Juanita, not anxious to make much noise, gave a subdued scream expecting a stab from a knife to be her portion.

She saw the man she had lured, as she thought to his death standing before her.

Barbel caught the girl by her arm. She whimpered and tried feebly to escape.

"Tell me," hissed Barbel, "why did you try to trap me?"

"I was told to do so."

"By whom?"

"My father."

"Why did your father tell you to lure me to my death?"

"He was paid for it by Tom Townsend."

"What?"

"That is the truth."

So Tom Townsend, the wily miser, of all in the country had at a glance penetrated his disguise.

Wily Tom, however, had said nothing directly of his discovery. Perhaps he wished to quietly remove Barbel, without hue or cry in his usual stealthy way.

All this flashed into the Ranger's mind.

He smiled after all. He was alive, and then in mere wanton sport, Barbel leaned over the beautiful Mexican girl.

He assisted her to her feet.

One arm stole around her waist.

He pressed his lips to hers in a vigorous smack.

"You little devil," Barbel shouted, "now run away to your doll-rags. You see, after all, I did have the courage to call on you!"

Juanita Disidero sank down by the side of her insensible lover, with a terrified gasp of amazement.

Then she burst into a tinkle of laughter.

Barbel leaped from the trap-door like window to the ground.

He vanished into the soft moonlight.

He vaulted on his horse.

"Now to save Anne Townsend!" he cried.

He put spurs to his horse.

The animal with flying hoofs darted forward.

Barbel looked back to the silent house.

In the window stood Juanita, the lure of her eyes seemed to be again upon Barbel.

The girl was waving her arm in farewell.

"The beautiful vixen," laughed Barbel to himself, "no more *bandit lures* can turn me loose with an Arctic fox; once is enough for me, my fair Mexican girl. Never again!"

The fine horse bestrode by the young Ranger made a desperate leap as its rider spoke.

"What's that?"

When within a few hundred feet of the hamlet of Fort Hope, Barbel pulled his horse to a quick stop, for lying along side of the road were two queer piles of soiled clothing—no, why, what were they?

Barbel jumped from his horse.

He gave a shout of alarm.

"Dead men!"

Barbel spoke these words solemnly.

It was not an unusual thing for death to stalk in ghastly mien through the Alaskan dreariness.

But the quick eye of Barbel noted that the position of the two bodies indicated a duel.

"A shooting fight! These two men had a grudge to shoot out—well, both were killed, eh?"

Barbel started forward to see who the two men were.

"Tom Townsend, by all that's wonderful!" cried the Ranger as he turned the two bodies over, for each lay on its face—"and Hank Wayland!" Barbel cried a second later as the white face of the second man slowly rolled into view. "Both dead! Why, how?"

Barbel pieced out the story quickly.

Hank Wayland grasped a revolver.

Barbel raised the limp hand.

A single shot had been exploded in the cylinder of the weapon.

Barbel's glance at the head of Tom Townsend told where Hank Wayland's bullet had gone.

"Wayland shot Tom, in a quarrel—I suspect that I planted the seeds of suspicion in the mind of Hank when as Kitty Cary I aroused his deadly fear of being 'double-crossed' by a confederate. Well! But while I can see that Hank shot Tom of course as the result of a fierce quarrel, I do not see that there is anything that indicates how Hank died."

Barbel searched about the body of Tom; but his revolver was found to be still in the holster belted about his waist.

Not a shot had been fired from it.

"How did Hank die? What caused his death? There is a mystery here?" thought Barbel.

His shrewd eyes studied everything.

The relative position of the bodies; the fact that Wayland had one exploded shot in his drawn weapon, while Tom had no exploded shot in his, and had not even drawn the weapon from its holster in his belt, told Barbel that without question Tom had been killed by Wayland before they had quarrelled long, and before Tom had a chance to get his weapon ready.

"Either Wayland killed Tom, when Tom was an unresisting victim or he beat Tom to his gun," argued Barbel, "and I guess anyway that Tom was too much of a coward to put up much of a fight. Hum!"

Barbel searched Tom's pockets next.

He hated to do it because there was something grewsome in the action.

"Papers!" cried Barbel, when he came across a packet neatly sewed in the lining of Tom's vest.

Barbel ripped open the vest with his keen Bowie

knife, and soon was deeply engrossed in reading the papers.

"Wow!" Tom breathed at length. "What do you think of that?"

He looked at the two bodies of the plotters, lying white, still and now not able even to plot for their own resurrections, and shook his head in wonder.

Barbel continued reading the papers.

"Here is a letter from an Indian, named Ghost-Dancer to Tom," whispered Barbel. "This Indian lives at Fort Kalla. It details how he put on board the infernal machine, which would blow up the *Frontier Belle* and further he compliments Tom on the ingenuity he has shown in making the infernal machine which he states, he has buried in the coal of the fur-packet. Oh, you richly deserved your fate. You villain!"

Barbel shook his face at the dead form of the old miser.

"Here also is a letter written from Chicago by Anne Townsend, saying she was about to start for Alaska, and would catch the *Frontier Belle* at Fort Kalla, on the very date that Ghost-Dancer says he put the infernal Machine on the *Frontier Belle*. It is as I suspected. Tom Townsend tried to assassinate Anne Townsend by means of that infernal machine."

Barbel again shook his face at Tom, who now was, luckily for him, beyond all earthly vengeance.

"Here is a memorandum of an agreement between Tom and Hank Wayland, the outlaw, to kill Anne for a cash consideration; sum not specified; but as I see twenty-five thousand dollars spoken of further along this mass of figures, I fancy that was the price agreed upon by the two thugs, for the murder of Anne."

Barbel speculated in silence beside the bodies for a short space.

"If I don't find a bullet wound directly through the back of Hank Wayland where he has been assassinated from ambush by one of his men, I will be greatly surprised," summed up Barbel. "I am going to turn this man Wayland over and see."

The heavy bulk of the dead outlaw, now inert and limp, was no easy thing to roll over; but after a brief struggle Barbel, little as he was, managed to accomplish the work.

A deep stain of blood, in the back in a line with the bandit's heart showed where a rifle bullet had struck and taken away the scoundrel's life.

"Ah."

There was a world of meaning in Barbel's tone.

"Quite as I thought. Tom was killed by Hank, in one of those street brawls, when the arbitration of the revolver, is called upon to settle Alaskan misunderstandings. Hank shot down Tom in cold blood, before Tom could even try to grasp his weapon. Then, some concealed assassin, over there behind that tree, only a couple of hundred feet away, near the trail, took a bushwhacker's chance at Hank, and sent a bullet into his back, which passed through the outlaw's heart."

Having pieced out the story of the crime and the manner in which it was committed, Barbel, wondered at the reason behind the killing of Tom.

"Revenge?"

"I don't know!"

"Robbery. Let me see what is on the bodies, now?"

Thus Barbel reviewed the situation.

When he searched Hank, not a cent was found in his clothes; even a very valuable diamond the outlaw usually wore on his finger, was missing; save for the papers, which were sewed in the miser's vest, where a man in search of cash might overlook them in his hurry, nothing came from the body of Tom Townsend.

"Robbery!"

"That was behind the shooting of Hank Wayland," was the final and now obvious conclusion reached by Barbel. "Some one—it will never be known whom—saw Tom and Hank quarrelling. They saw Hank kill Tom. They then shot Hank from ambush, knowing that after he had killed the rich owner of the best coal mine in Alaska, that there would be the sure fleeing of Hank from the peninsula. Then the assassin looted both bodies and in haste overlooked the papers I found upon Tom."

Barbel mused over the strange fate that had taken the two men he was so anxious to arrest beyond his feeble scope.

"They are facing a higher Judge than a United States one," thought Barbel, "and well—I can never sell Kitty Cary and Anne Townsend to that dive-keeper 'Dance-House Tim.'"

After a few seconds, Barbel broke into a hearty laugh.

"Thank goodness I never, never will have to be Kitty Cary again. There's nothin' in being a girl; take it from me."

Determined to notify some one would look after the bodies of the two men and who would see that at least they were decently buried in unmarked graves, Barbel hurried forward to Fort Hope.

He had not forgotten all this time the plight of Anne Townsend, but he had seen that he must take up each thread of the work of unearthing the outlaw band and the rescue of Anne as the hand of fate allowed him to do.

"The death of Hank is probably well known among the outlaws," cried Barbel, "and with his death the band will disintegrate as does the snow particles beneath the rays of the sun. The Hank Wayland band is broken up, I may rest assured. With the death of Tom, Anne inherits his fortune, for he has no other heir, and I must rescue her at all costs."

But he didn't say anything about that little lapse in the matter of Juanita Disidero, being a mere man, and liable to forgetfulness, when this trick of the memory made it most convenient.

Barbel continued his journey, and after he had sent back some men to look after the bodies of the miser, and outlaw, Barbel hurried to the shaft, at the bottom of which lay the tunnel, where he knew from the conversation between Alava Ricardo and Juanita Disidero, was immured sweet Anne Townsend.

Nearing the shaft Barbel saw a sight that made his blood turn to water.

Disappearing down the hole in the earth, down to where Anne Townsend was confined, now almost a hopeless prisoner, Barbel saw vanishing the form of Alava Ricardo, the outlaw, whom he had last hurled

prostrate in the den to which he had been lured by Juanita Disidero.

"He goes to murder Anne!" cried Barbel.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A DESPERATE RIDE.

Barbel gave a shout of anger and despair when he reached the shaft.

There had been steep and trembling ladders, old and rickety along the sides of the shaft, Barbel felt sure, up to a few moments before his arrival, for one of the ladders lay on the ground by the side of the shaft, broken into mere kindling wood.

The big bucket, by which in the time the shaft was in active use, and before its abandonment, coal had been hauled, was missing now.

But the rope, a cable that Barbel saw was sufficient to bear a great weight was trembling in the shaft, and as the windlass over which the cable twined was all paid out, and only the end of the rope showed above the surface, Barbel knew that Ricardo had torn the ladders to bits so that he could not be followed and had rushed down into the mine in the bucket.

"How can I follow him?" cried Barbel in agony. "I must find a way to get to the bottom of that mine or Anne will be murdered by that thug."

The thought came to his mind that in going down the shaft to kill Anne—for he knew that after the blow he had given him, Ricardo would never rest until he had avenged himself upon him, by killing Anne—Ricardo must have known some way in which to leave the depths after his horrible crime had been committed.

"I suppose he will swarm up that cable—or does he know of some concealed entrance to the mine other than we know of?" speculated Barbel.

Then a sudden thought came to him.

"If that outlaw can swarm up the cable, why can not I slide down it?"

This idea ran through Barbel's head.

He knew that the danger to him was great for he knew nothing of the depth of the shaft, its dippings, its angles, where it lead, or how it reached the tunnel below, while Ricardo knew absolutely all these facts from frequent visits to Anne.

But Barbel didn't hesitate a moment.

He grasped the rope in his hands. It was twisted into a cable, half of rope and half of wire, and was just about of bigness enough for Barbel to grasp.

Barbel twined his legs about the cable.

He firmly grasped it with his hands leaving his horse to look out for himself as best he might.

Barbel started out at lightning speed down the cable, which he clung to for dear life.

"*The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride!*" the brave young man cried as he went hurrying down the dark, mystic, deep shaft, to the depths below in his attempt to stop the murderer of Anne Townsend from reaching his prey.

The cable tore Barbel's hands as he spun downward. His clothing was almost set afire by his speed.

But he soon learned that a pressure with his legs about the cable would reduce his speed, but he fell, it seemed to him right down into the bottomless pit, with the speed of the wild whirlwind, across a desert with nothing to check its flight.

Never before had he imagined that he could have clung to such a precarious hold as he was doing now.

But Barbel in the rush of darkness that went speeding by him was sure that if he held on that he would win in this dreadful, this desperate ride.

Barbel was right.

His feet struck the bottom of the shaft with a thud. He fell headlong, but quickly regained his senses.

A light was swaying ahead in a tunnel.

He dashed toward it at his top speed.

He carried his revolver now.

What was this?

He saw Anne kneeling down trying to escape the knife that Ricardo was holding over her head, and which he was about to plunge into her white throat.

Barbel raised his weapon.

Its flash and roar lit up the scene, and seemed to deafen all in the narrow tunnel.

There was a choking cry and the outlaw fell forward dead.

With a shriek of wild delight Anne rushed to Alaric Barbel's arms.

"Break away there," cried a strange voice at this interesting moment.

The couple whirled about.

A great hole seemed to have appeared in the tunnel. In it, holding a search-light, was a bearded miner.

"Say," he shouted, "what's the trouble? I seem to have countermined you from my tunnel. I'm Bashard, who owns the next mine to this one. Did you hear my pneumatic drill a hiss'n' and did you see my electric light break through crevices in the rock?"

"That was the ghost of the mine!" cried Anne. "And a welcome one to see," she added.

Barbel told the story of his wild ride, of the uprooting and destruction of the Hank Wayland outlaw band to the bearded miner.

Then both men shook hands and laughed.

THE END.

The next issue will be "American Indian Weekly" No. 13—entitled *STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE*, or *THE BANDITS OF GREAT BEAR LAKE*, by Col. Spencer Dair.



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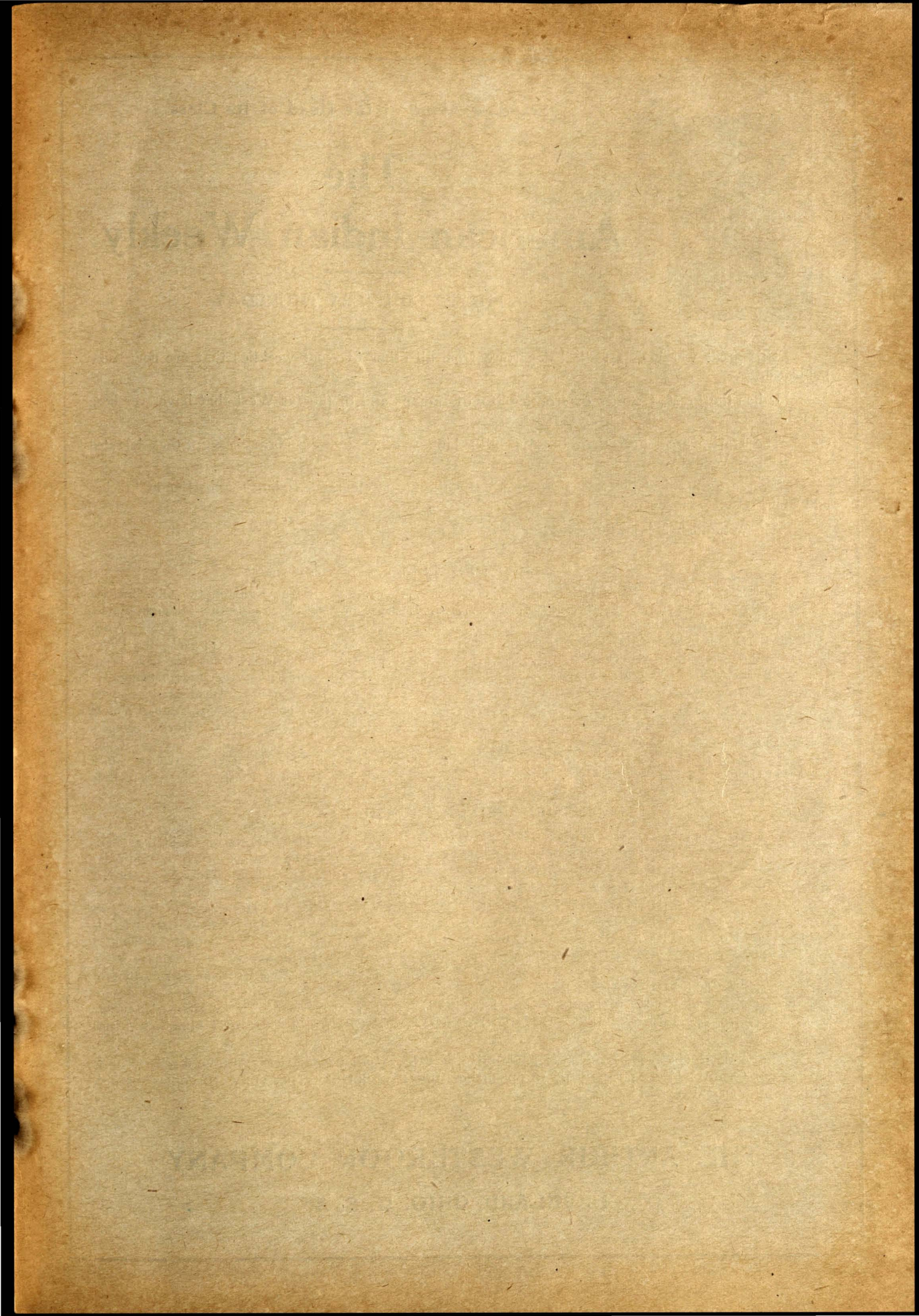
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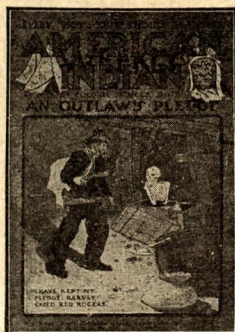
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