

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

TORNADO BESS, THE KIDNAPPER

"YOU WILL NEVER SEE THIS CHILD AGAIN!" SCREAMED TORNADO BESS, AS SHE DASHED AWAY ON HER GREAT WHITE STEED.



WILDFIRE,

THE BOSS OF THE ROAD

OR

THE WOLVES OF SATAN'S GAP

BY FRANK DUMONT

WILD FIRE

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TORNADO BESS, THE KIDNAPER,

or

The Outlaws of Rabbit Island

By Colonel Spencer Dair.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

DAVID DRYDEN—King of the Outlaws and Road Agents at Virginia City, Montana, in the good old flush days when the City of Golden Dreams knew Alder Gulch and the outlaws, desperadoes, gamblers and honest men that thronged to one of the richest placer mines in the world. Dryden masqueraded as Daniel Craig—an honest man, and shielded himself further by another name famous in outlaw annals, but was merely a knight of the road and his end points a moral and adorns a tale.

BANNACK BILL—A sure-shot gun-man, who kept a gambling den, dance-hall and saloon in Virginia City, Montana, and acted as the secret agent of David Dryden, the king of the outlaws.

JOSH GRIFFITH—An outlaw and trusted member for a time of David Dryden's band. He passed out after an attempt to save his chief, who had suspected him of treachery.

TORNADO BESS—A beautiful young woman in the days that she was unfortunate enough to meet David Dryden, the outlaw, becoming later an old hag who inhabited Rabbit Island as the consort of Dryden, the outlaw. She assisted in his abduction of the two children of his sister, whom he afterward murdered in an effort to gain wealth they would have inherited.

JACK HILTON—A young man, who began life in error but retrieved himself and fought a bitter and long campaign with his tempter David Dryden, the outlaw. His search for his missing bride was a long one and was prosecuted by him with consummate art.

ETHEL ERRINGTON—This beautiful girl was snatched from the side of the man she loved by a ruse planned by David Dryden, the outlaw, who later lured the remarkable girl in his power in an effort to make her wed him. Her struggle to rejoin Jack Hilton, the man of her choice, proved to be a series of thrilling events which almost ended in her total destruction.

CRAZY TIM—Although of beclouded mind, this doughty personage managed to assist greatly in the fight that Jack Hilton waged against the outlaw David Dryden. He showed that sometimes when wit is out, one can do better work than when it is in.

FRANK SEWELL—A miner and prominent member of the Vigilantes of Virginia City, Montana.

TIBERIUS—A Great Dane dog, who knew a good deal more than most men about outlaw hunting.

CHAPTER I.

ROBBED IN THE DEN OF OUTLAWS, GAMBLERS AND DESPERADOES.—A DUEL FOR GOLD.—THE POISONED FLOWERS FOR A BRIDE.—VIRGINIA CITY, MONTANA, IN FLUSH DAYS.

Midnight bells were ringing in the straggling town of Virginia City, Montana.

It was the high-water-mark day of the City of Golden Dreams!

Alder Gulch, with its millions of gold-dust, had

brought a flood of miners, outlaws, gamblers, and desperadoes to rule supreme in a lawless city, built in a sprawling way about the wonderful placer mines that had called it into being.

Midnight!

And the city still a hot-bed of lights, revelry, and the unguarded hours of the motley horde that streamed down this street or that; while the open windows and doorways of houses poured forth floods of light showing that entertainment awaited every pleasure seeker that cared to enter.

It was flush times in the city; flush times in Montana.

Had one peeped into one of the more brilliantly lighted houses one could have seen groups of red shirted, wide-brim-hatted miners gathered about green-baize covered tables, while the quick, strident rattle of ivory chips, the soft ring of coins, spelled the story of a gambling den.

And for that matter every other house in this part of Virginia City, was a gambling-dive, or a saloon, into whose coffers flowed the gold-dust of the miner to be grasped by hands that knew not what it was to delve and toil and wrest the precious metal from the grim earth.

Outcasts of society were these lily fingered robbers of hard-working miners. They were quick with the deadly six-shooter; scientific in their grasp upon the handle of a Bowie-knife, and pistol and knife was the social arbiter of the day and also settled all business disputes. The man who "got to his gun" first or "drew his knife" quickest lived longest; he made the laws of the city, and dictated its creed of manners and morals.

There were many such men, with here and there a tender-foot, in the gambling-hell this night. The building which held up the flag of Dame Fortune, was constructed of rough logs. A table took up all the center of a room on the first floor, around which were grouped players and spectators. A rough board counter or bar ran across one end of the room, where stood a seething crowd, boisterous in the drinking of many vile liquors handed to them by coyote-like men behind the uncouth bar. Revolvers peeped from between bottles of liquor ready for the bar-tender's hand should a "fuss" arise needing their use; revolvers and liquor were equally deadly. Each could kill quickly!

Men with long-barreled six-shooters sticking down from broad belts were busy as bees about the various gambling tables and where the game ran high the crowd was thickest.

There was a crowd about a central table and it was evident that here was running the big game of the high games of the night!

Several men stood by the side of the dealer of this high game, eagerly scanning the turn of the cards and the heaps of coin, chips or gold-dust that lay thickly about the faro "lay out." The strains of a violin and a rickety harp came faintly from a room on the upper floor, along with the shuffling of many feet as if their owners were enjoying the dancing in the dance hall annex to the gambling room, where tawdry women danced with men who paid large prices for the privilege of dancing with the outcasts of civilization.

But the gamblers paid no heed to the sounds of merriment and of the dance that raged about them. The confused burr from the tongues of the gamblers seemed to strike silence at the other sounds in the place. There was a hum about the table that not only seemed to drown out the other sounds but also appeared to almost drown out the voice of the faro-dealer. There was a fierce note in the air about the table; the notes that strike the chord of Greed! And the light of several kerosene oil lamps served to bring out to view the wolfish-glare of cupidity on the faces of the crowd about the high game table.

Almost in the central seat at the table was the intent face and form of a young man, who was narrowly watching the dealer.

Creeped close to the watcher was a person whose evil face seemed to glow with satisfaction. There was a secret joy upon the face that made it aflame with pleasure, and the man's cold, pale gray eyes were fixed upon the pallid face of his companion, who was trying with little success, to make his feelings less apparent. There was a mocking sneer about the mouth of the owner of the cold, pale gray eyes.

"King wins! Queen loses!" droned the voice of the dealer as he made a turn of the cards, following it with a steady motion of his right arm as he pulled toward him the losing bets, and with his left hand paid off the winning wagers.

A groan burst from the lips of the young man while a fiendish smile flickered over the face of the person at his side.

"Better luck, old chap, next turn of the cards," the lips of the man who had smiled muttered to his companion. "You can't lose always, my boy—don't get discouraged."

The younger man did not reply, but like a machine laid a quantity of gold coin upon the ace.

"God forgive and aid me!" he murmured. "It's the last of my ill-gotten gains—it's my last bet! What shall I do if I lose?"

The youth stared at the dealer as if he were a tiger cat about to be robbed of its prey!

The gambler's fingers trembled as he touched his dealing-box of solid silver, set in rare jewels that sparkled and shone in the pale light.

There was only one more turn of the cards in the box left and on this single turn the youth had staked his last dollar!

The white fingers of the dealer, with their array of diamond rings rested upon the jeweled faro-dealing box. He made the shift of the cards.

"Ten wins, ace loses!" the dealer sang in his slow, purring voice.

He stretched forth his hand to rake in the losing bets. His hand clutched the money of the unfortunate youth, who had played the "ace to win"—*and it had lost, so the gambler cried!*

But quick as the lightning's flash the youth leaped forward and with one hand seized the gambler, and with his disengaged hand grasped the cards that had just been withdrawn apparently from the dealing-box.

"Stop!" he cried, in tones that thrilled all around the board. "Don't you dare to place your hands on that cash. If you do you're a dead man!"

The faro-dealer's face turned a deep red. Then he grew white with rage that followed the surprise of his attack.

"What do you mean?" the gambler howled, as he tried to shake off the iron grasp of the young man.

"You cowardly cheat!" cried the young man. "I mean that you have cheated, and if you dare lay a finger upon one penny that I placed on the ace to win, I'll kill you!"

The faro-dealer's face was livid with rage. He struggled to free himself from the grasp of the young man.

"Let go!" he hoarsely shrieked.

"Return the money you have robbed me of! You have cheated me! I can prove that you have, you cur!" cried the gambler's assailant.

"Then prove it, you lying hound!" bawled the gambler beside himself with rage. "If you don't I'll kill you as you stand there!"

"I will prove that you are a swindler," replied the youth. "Here's the card you dealt from the box. See, the King wins—but, close to the card—*stuck to it with wax*—is the Ace! *The Ace is the winning card!* I demand my money, and I further demand all the money I have lost tonight. I've been cheated out of it all!"

A cry of rage and surprise broke from the miners around the table!

They saw that they, too, must have been fleeced in a like manner.

The youth had exposed the swindling gambler and the miscreant's life was run, every man in the ranks of the red-shirted group knew full well.

The detected card-shark knew this as well as any man in the room.

He made one desperate bid for his life. With a quick motion the villain's hand slid into the breast of his coat, and a revolver flashed in his grasp as he withdrew it.

There was a puff and a sharp explosion as the weapon cracked close to the youth's temple. Only a severed lock of hair fell to the floor, cut by the swift passage of the gambler's bullet through the locks of his youth's assailant.

Before the gambler could again press his finger upon the trigger of his weapon the youth had seized a pistol from the belt of the nearest miner and the next moment the cold muzzle of the weapon was pressed close to the villain's temple—so close that the polished tube seemed to be imbedded in the gambler's forehead.

There was a baleful light in the ruffian's eyes.

His pistol dropped from his nerveless grasp and fell with a rattle on the floor. The gambler saw the look of determination upon the features of his victim, and the flashing eyes of the youth told the gambler that his swindler's life was hanging that moment by a slender thread.

"Give me back my money," said the youth with clenched teeth. "I have been robbed—and, alas, I, too, am a robber! I robbed my benefactor to risk this cash there upon your gambling table, and you, in turn, have robbed me! You have robbed me by cheating. Return my money, or, as there is high Heaven above us, you are a dead man!"

The gambler instinctively slid his hand into his money drawer and placed without a word, several small canvas bags of gold-dust before the youth who now held the swindler at his mercy.

The young man seized upon the precious dust with a cry of joy. He placed the bag in his pocket, but never once removed his pistol from the gambler's forehead, or ceasing to note the swindler's slightest motion.

But during all of this startling scene, the man who stood beside the brave youth when the trouble broke forth, and had sat near and advised him during the faro-game, and had at the first hostile movement slunk away, leaving his companion to any fate that might overtake him, was viewing the episode from a distant part of the room.

"Jack Hilton's life isn't worth a straw," the deserter muttered to himself. "The gambler will rid me of him. Jack Hilton's life is at the hazard of an outlaw who is a dead shot! After all, I win! I have made a thief and a gambler of that callow youth there, and now my vengeance is complete!"

The evil-faced man ground his teeth in rage a few moments later when he witnessed Jack Hilton's rapid

action, which terminated in the young man's holding the gambler at his mercy.

"Curse him!" murmured the on-looker, "he will baffle me yet. No! He can not escape me. Bannack Bill, the sure-shot gun-man will fix him before he leaves this place. And yet—stay—if Jack Hilton recovers the money he has lost my plans are ruined! It must not be!"

The scoundrel drew away, and then to his rage and chagrin he saw the gambler return the gold-dust to Jack, and saw the youth stow the precious metal in his pockets. An oath broke from the thin lips of the watcher and he nervously toyed with a concealed weapon.

* * * * *

And now take a step back into the past; the buried past of the men who have just figured in this tremendous scene in which the gamut of hope, fear, revenge, and sudden and violent death has been struck.

Do you wonder why this person, pretending to be on friendly terms with Jack Hilton, is trying to cause his destruction?

Why does the man with the cold gray eyes, bewail the triumph of Jack Hilton over the wiles of a cheating gambler, now quailing before the young man's revolver?

The man with the thin lips and cold gray eyes is David Dryden. His business trenches upon the swindler's methods for he calls himself a speculator, but men who know him well hint darkly that he is a speculator in bogus mines and worthless mining stocks.

Dryden in youth lived in Chicago, and so did Jack Hilton, sunny, rough and ready, good-tempered true-as-steel Jack Hilton. In this Jack differed from his schoolmate, who from boyhood was sneaking, furtive, a mole of an evil boy, a few years older than Jack, and since boyhood the temperament of the two had not changed. Jack was still sunny, and easily led, while Dryden with a career of vice and villainy, had stamped his features still deeper with the sneaking, furtive looks of his boyhood.

And at school these two boys had known beautiful Ethel Errington!

With advancing years Jack Hilton became the successful suitor, and David Dryden became Jack's unsuccessful rival.

From that moment Dryden became the bitter and sworn enemy of Hilton.

Dryden swore that Hilton's life would sooner or later pay the penalty for the crushed hopes of the rival, and then Dryden disappeared, and the day for the wedding of Jack and Ethel dawned, and the young couple awaited with longing anxiety the supreme moment when they were to be man and wife.

Just before the wedding ceremony a beautiful bouquet of flowers were sent to Ethel. She inhaled their fragrance.

Then she fell to the floor insensible and to all appearances dead!

Restoratives proved futile and the ceremony of the wedding was turned into those of a funeral.

The flowers had been saturated with a subtle poison, whose very odor alone could cause death. The drug was of unknown origin. It baffled the skill of wise physician and equally wise chemist. Experiments showed that one whiff of the poison was enough to cause death.

The perpetrator of this dastardly crime upon the beautiful girl could not be unearthed.

All that could be determined was that a tall stranger had handed the bouquet to a servant who answered the ring at the door of the Errington mansion on the day of fair Ethel's projected wedding, and had asked that she be given the testimonial to her happiness. This action had been taken and the terrible tragedy followed. This was all that shed the slightest clue to the mystery! And it was not of much avail to the police and the detectives. For no trace of the stranger could be found.

The body was placed in the family vault for the features still retained the rosy complexion of youth and health.

But a second shock awaited Ethel's grief-wracked family.

For the next morning after the interment it was discovered that the body had been stolen from the vault.

And not the faintest trace could be found that in any way showed even a slight clue to the dastardly perpetrator of this second crime; detectives far and wide worked for many months but only to report that they had been completely baffled in their search for the ghoul who had robbed the grave of its lovely inmate!

CHAPTER II.

BACK FROM THE GRAVE.—THE TREACHERY OF A FRIEND DETECTED.—ETHEL ERRINGTON'S PERIL.—A VILLAIN'S REVENGE.

Jack Hilton's grief was indescribable. For weeks he raved like a man bereft of his senses after the awful passing from him of the girl who was to have been his dearly-loved bride.

In the year that dragged by while detectives tried to unearth the facts beneath the baffling mystery—the double mystery—Jack seemed to change and not for the better!

He grew morbid, and then reckless. Finally his friends, seeing that if he remained in Chicago he would end in a mad-house, made him seek change of scene.

And so at length the grief-stricken, reckless youth, drifted to Virginia City, Montana, there trying to drown in excitements about a gold-created city, the memories of his dead past!

One evening Jack met his old enemy, and once school-friend David Dryden in the streets of the scattered town.

Astonishment was followed by explanations and Dryden, a wily villain always, told a plausible story about his disappearance from Chicago, and then expressed great sorrow for his former rival, over the passing of Ethel Errington, and with the easy going nature of Jack, David Dryden did not find it a hard matter to make a friend of his once rival in love.

Step by step Dryden lured his friend Jack to the gaming-tables, and finally induced his victim to appropriate funds confided to his care by his employer in the city, for Jack had secured a lucrative position soon after he arrived at Virginia City.

Jack, fascinated by the lure of the gambling mania, listened to the snake hissing at his side, and he took funds from his employer's safe.

In the meantime, Dryden arranged matters with Bannack Bill, the proprietor of one of the largest gambling-dens in the town, to fleece Jack; and the villain saw with joy Jack lose every dollar of the stolen

money, which he was fleeced of by a crooked faro-dealer, at Bannack Bill's order.

It had been Dryden's intent to denounce Jack the moment the money he had filched was lost and thus disgrace him forever with the brand of a detected thief; but the unexpected turn of affairs on the part of Jack, had dashed the scoundrel's plans to nothingness.

It was with a feeling that was akin to murder that Dryden watched Jack pocket the gold he had wrested at the point of his pistol from the cheating faro-dealer, and he was about to signal to Bannack to destroy Jack before he left the room with the gold-dust in his pocket, when over the room there rang a woman's scream.

The scream electrified the assembled group in the room as if a bolt had descended from above and danced through the place.

"Save me! Save me!" the piteous voice of the woman wailed aloud in accents of horror.

The cry of distress caused each man to pause and for a moment the quarrel of Jack and the detected cheat of a gambler was forgotten.

Following the scream an oath burst from the lips of David Dryden, and then a woman darted into the room as if flying from the onslaught of some unseen enemy.

The girl came from the upstairs room in which the dance was still in progress.

The girl, for she was scarcely more than nineteen years of age, reached the center of the room with a grand rush of speed, and the stalwart miners fell back to give her a free space, and to ascertain the cause of her terror.

Her golden hair streamed out behind as it swept aside its slight fastening and the girl's pale but beautiful face, was turned toward the group as if mutely imploring their aid.

In a moment her eyes rested upon Jack Hilton and a thrilling cry broke from her lips as she staggered toward him and fell at his feet.

"Jack! Jack!" she gasped.

"Ethel! My darling! Can the grave yield up its dead?" cried the young man as he tenderly raised the girl from the rough floor. "Am I awake or am I dreaming?"

"I'll wake you from your dream!" yelled David Dryden, dashing forward, and his hand sought a murderous looking knife that flashed instantly into view.

Jack supported the fainting girl in his arms while he turned to face his newly found enemy.

"David Dryden," cried Jack. "What is the meaning of this treachery?"

"It means that once again you have crossed my path," howled Dryden. "Once again your presence threatens to dash my hopes to the earth! But we meet under different circumstances this time. You are in the lawless regions of Montana, and I am both powerful and influential here! We are sworn enemies, you fool, and you are in my power! Look your last upon the girl you now hold in your arms. You are doomed!"

The villain almost yelled every word, and as he concluded the last words of his wild speech, he brandished his weapon in a threatening manner.

But another character came then upon the scene.

It was the person in pursuit of the girl. With an oath upon his coarse lips this person bounded into the

room in time to obtain a glance at the tableau afforded by the strange group.

He saw Ethel in the arms of a strange young man, and witnessed David Dryden's hostile attitude.

"What's the matter, Captain?" the stranger cried as he drew near.

"Confound you!" hissed Dryden as he turned savagely to the new comer. "Why did you allow her to escape from that room? Curses upon you and the old hag! What good are you to me? See what you have done!" The ruffian pointed to the young couple and added:

"Out with your weapon! He must not leave this place alive!"

"Stop! Advance another step at your peril! This girl is under my protection, and I'll defend her with my life. Men—one word with you," and Jack turned to the group of miners as he spoke. "I am single-handed and encumbered with this fainting girl. These two ruffians are armed and ready to take my life. All I ask is fair play—one at a time. Fair play is all I ask—am I to have it?"

"Yes!" roared a dozen voices and full as many ominous clickings of fire arms echoed the shout.

For a moment David Dryden quailed and his brutal follower slunk behind him.

The detected gambler-cheat sought a secure place behind the faro-table and toyed with a hidden pistol.

The three ruffians knew the spirit of the rough miners, and they knew full well that the red-shirted group bore them no love.

The young man had exposed the gambler's trick and that also appealed to the miners, and did much toward turning the group in his favor and his appeal for fair play had caused a further feeling to predominate in favor of Jack; miners love fair play. David Dryden, and his outlaw and renegade gang was greatly feared although universally hated by the miners. No positive proof could be laid at his door regarding numerous stage-coach robberies; but it was almost a certainty that David Dryden was the recognized head of a desperate band of outlaws, who infested the regions and who were known to have a hang-out in the mountains and also at Rabbit Island, in the Alder River, that ran near the city. At Rabbit Island a woman, known as Tornado Bess, held full sway. She was the hag, that had been spoken of in his hurry by Dryden, several men in the crowd knew Dryden was at the head of the mountain resort gang!

That Dryden had a lawless crew of bandits at his back was not to be doubted, and even in the very group in the room now surrounding Jack, were some of the ruffian followers of Dryden's bandit band, ready to do his bidding, many of the honest miners knew; but they feared not the outlaws.

But the outlaws were awaiting the signal for a general conflict and were ready to obey their leader's orders.

But the majority in the room, fortunately, were hard fisted miners, bent upon seeing fair play, and to allow no harm done to the fair girl who had sought protection in their midst.

As the cry of the miners fell upon the ears of the outlaw Dryden—for such he really was—he saw that the time had arrived for a desperate and rapid conflict.

"Now's the time!" yelled Dryden. "Down with him, and death to all who oppose us!"

His revolver cracked spitefully and a bullet winged its way close to the young man's head.

A scream broke from Ethel's lips!

Following the shot came an angry shout from the assembled group. Instantly as if by magic, every lamp was extinguished, and the room was plunged in total darkness.

Then followed a rapid discharge of weapons and the sound of falling tables, chairs, and the crash of bottles!

"This way—this way," whispered Ethel, seizing Jack's hand. "Come in this direction!"

Carefully avoiding the mass of struggling men, she quickly led the way toward the door through which she had first entered leading upstairs, as she could not escape by the outlaws that barred progress to the street. By the momentary glare of discharged fire-arms she saw the door, and a second later had opened it and thus the young couple escaped from the room.

Behind them the yells of the combatants arose like the howling of a tempest, and the pistol-shots followed in quick succession as both friend and foe struggled in the dark.

Ethel hastily ascended a rickety flight of steps, followed by Jack. They had scarcely reached the landing above when the motley crowd that had been engaged in dancing rushed forth pell-mell, to ascertain the cause of the row.

In a few moments a flood of light came from the re-lighted lamps, revealing a scene of wild confusion. Men grappling in deadly combat lay on the floor, and the sulphurous smoke of revolvers filled the room and hung like a pall from the low ceiling.

David Dryden stood at the door leading to the street. He grasped a brace of six-shooters, and it was evident he had hastily taken possession of the exit in order to intercept the fugitive and her champion.

A yell of rage issued from his purple lips as the light revealed the mass in the room and failed to disclose the forms of Jack Hilton and his beautiful companion.

"A thousand curses upon you, Josh Griffith; they're gone! They have escaped," and the outlaw howled like a mad-man, and shrieked imprecations in his fury.

The conflict ceased as the desperado yelled the concluding words.

The burly ruffian addressed as Josh Griffith darted toward Dryden.

"You say they have escaped? Which way did they go? Did you pass them?" he cried, breathlessly.

"No," replied Dryden, "they did not pass out through this door."

"Then they are still in the house. They are caged!" shouted Griffith, and he darted toward the low doorway, followed by Dryden.

In a moment, a half dozen well-armed men had formed a barrier between the outlaws and the door, to prevent the angry crowd of miners from following the two outlaws. Their threatening aspect and ugly revolvers held the miners in check.

In the meantime the girl had reached the upper part of the rough wooden building and darted into the upper floor, over the gambling room, and the very spot that Griffith and Dryden had hurried for, when they saw that Ethel had escaped.

"Quick!" cried the girl to Jack, "follow me into this room. It's our only chance. From this window we may be able to make our escape. We certainly cannot do so from the lower part of this house."

Ethel seized Jack's hand and drew him into the room, just as the heavy footfalls of the two pursuers, Dryden and Griffith, the outlaws, sounded upon the steps and their harsh voices arose in exultation.

Ethel closed the door and eagerly glanced about for the heavy wooden bar by which it was secured and the dim light of a kerosene lamp disclosed the bar lying upon the floor and a second later the noble girl had thrust it into the sockets and barred the entrance.

Not a moment too soon, was the action accomplished, however! For a hand, just as Ethel shot the bar into place, tried the door, and then shook it violently.

Then came a blow upon the panels, and David Dryden's voice bade the occupants open the door at once. "Open, or I will break it in!" he bawled.

Jack fired at the center of the door.

A deep groan told that the bullet had found a lodging-place among the outlaws now engaged in battering down the frail barrier!

Ethel sprang toward the window and glanced into the open space in the rear of the building.

She started back with a scream of surprise.

She started again—there were the forms of men moving hither and thither in the gloom, showing that they were on the alert and ready to cut off escape in that direction.

"Lost! Lost!" Ethel moaned, and she turned her white features toward her companion. "We will die together!"

Again the outlaws thundered at the door and the frail barrier was rapidly giving way to the force behind it.

"Jack! One word. Believe me true to you. I am free from guilt—I am just as innocent as the day when I placed my hand within yours and promised to become your wife."

"I believe you, my darling."

Jack pressed his lips to the trembling ones of the girl and then started nervously backward as, with a loud crash, the door fell in, and the villainous outlaws with leveled weapons poured into the small apartment.

Ethel rushed forward and her white arms encircled her lover's neck and her slender figure endeavored to shield his form from the deadly firearms.

"Down with him, if he moves hand or foot! Be quick about it, for the Vigilantes have been roused! Seize the girl and shoot down that whelp if he resists!"

Dryden spoke fiercely, and pistol in hand, he strode before the young couple.

Before he could make a hostile movement, a desperado near the window raised a cry of warning and raised his hand at the same moment.

"Captain! The house is surrounded! We know whom they are after! Let us be quick and get out of this or we will be all bagged!"

"They're after me and Tornado Bess," cried Dryden with a sneer, "but they will wait a mighty long time for us. We will never fall into their clutches. But not a moment can we spare. Cage that girl! Down with the young bantam!"

A half dozen of the outlaws darted forward, but before Jack could offer much resistance, he was thrown violently to the floor and was bound hand and foot.

"Remove the girl," commanded Dryden. "You know the secret exit. Quick, or the cursed Vigilantes

will give us trouble! Remember, your lives will answer for the girl's safety. She must come to no harm!"

Screaming and pleading, Ethel was borne from the room. She was hurried down stairs by the rascals delegated for that purpose by the arch scoundrel of a leader.

"What's to be done with the young fellow?" panted Josh Griffith, pointing to the prostrate form of Jack Hilton.

In answer David Dryden seized a kerosene lamp and dashed the fluid upon the young man, completely saturating his clothing, and the floor upon which he was lying bound.

The villain sprinkled the fluid in such a manner that the entire body of Jack was drenched with the inflammable liquid.

"What's that for?" demanded Griffith.

A grim smile played upon the evil countenance of Dryden as he flung away the empty lamp and produced from a capacious pocket a dark-lantern, and turned its rays upon the bound form of his victim.

"Listen to the dogs!" he cried. "Hear them howl!"

The cries of the crowd surrounding the building came like the roar of angry waves upon a rock-bound coast.

"I'll treat them to a sight!" Dryden hissed. He ignited a piece of paper as he drew some combustible matter from a closet. He cast the flaming paper among the light rubbish, and tongues of flames leaped upward.

"Jack is pretty well soaked in oil, and so is the floor. Don't you see through it?" he yelled to his confederates. "He'll make a nice bon-fire! No power on earth can save him! See, the flames reach the oil, and death claims him—Ha! Ha! Ha!"

David Dryden and the outlaws rushed forth from the burning room and closed the door upon their helpless victim!

CHAPTER III.

IN THE POWER OF THE OUTLAW.—MONTANA DAVE, THE PED TEKOR OF THE ROAD.—THE WOLVES OF SATAN'S GAP.—A ROBBER CHIEF.

A deep and wide gully ran beside the roadway, and over this gully the houses of that part of Virginia City had been erected, thus forming the main street of the mining town.

The gully answered the purpose of a cellar to each building and also a convenient hiding-place for those seeking safety in rapid flight.

The outlaws in charge of Ethel proceeded downstairs and passed into a room in the rear of the gambling-place. In the center of this room they raised a trap-door, disclosing the gloomy depths of the gully. They descended into the depths by means of a rough flight of steps.

The tumult outside was increasing every moment, and a volume of smoke came pouring down from the room over-head.

"Right! The Captain has fired the old shanty. Wait a moment. He may want to use this passage also."

The black-whiskered desperado paused upon the steps, holding the trap-door open.

A moment later and the hurried tramp of feet came from the adjoining room, and David Dryden, followed by his villainous crew, came bounding into the room.

Each outlaw descended through the trap, leaving one of their number to close it after all had safely reached the bottom of the gully.

Volumes of smoke rolled down into the room from above, and a crackling sound told that the flames were devouring the dry combustibles and rapidly spreading.

David Dryden led the way under the buildings. He was followed by his men. They followed the zig-zag course of the gully until they emerged from beneath a rickety old wooden shanty and came into an open space.

Several horses stood in a clump of trees not a dozen rods away and an outlaw held them ready for immediate use.

Scarcely had the foremost ruffian appeared in the open space when a bullet whizzed past his head and a chorus of shouts broke upon the night air; a score of men came dashing toward the retreating rascals.

"The Vigilantes!" roared Dryden. "Each man strike out for himself and make for the headquarters."

The desperado seized Ethel in his brawny arms as if she had been a mere infant and sprung toward the horses, followed by several of his companions. A moment later he was in the saddle, and reaching down he seized the girl and placed her upon the pommel before him. Then he sunk the spurs into the flanks of the steed he bestrode and the animal sprung forward like an arrow from a bow.

A rapid discharge of pistols awoke the slumbering echoes and cut the air close to the escaping bandits.

David Dryden's mounted confederates dashed after their leader while the remainder of his followers sought flight among the huge boulders and thick bushes skirting the hillside.

The sounds of pursuit grew fainter as the outlaw and his cavalcade plunged into the wild passes and canyons of the vicinity.

"Now, my pretty one," Dryden whispered to the trembling girl, "you are again in my keeping and I'll warrant you will not again escape. This has been a sad night's work for you. You have hastened your lover's death. He is bound and helpless in yonder burning building and no power can save him from the flames. You will forget him and remember hereafter that you are mine and mine alone."

Dryden turned in his saddle and uttered a fiendish laugh as he beheld the dull glare in the sky—reflecting the flames of the distant burning building.

A low groan of anguish issued from the lips of the fair captive and her head sunk upon her bosom and tears pattered down upon her cheeks.

"Why do you persecute me?" she moaned. "I have never harmed you, and yet you have kept me in captivity, and compelled me to remain in this wild country—far from home and kindred."

The outlaw laughed—a cruel and mocking laugh that caused the girl to shrink away from him.

"Why do I persecute you! That question is easily answered. You mistake my love for persecution. Once you refused the attentions and accepted the love of one whom you will never see again. When one plan fails I generally try another. You remember the manner in which I cheated Jack Hilton of his bride? I stole your inanimate form from the vault and bore you to the Far West—not without trouble and care, however. Once here you were in the paradise of the fearless and the free. Surrounded by a devoted band of

followers I rule supreme. Your home is among the brave and reckless spirits, and you will never again behold the cities of the East. If you remain here for years you will see the same bleak mountains and dismal ravines, for they are my home and yours. Mine you will be, though I patiently wait years for your free consent. Kindness has failed to gain your heart but force will eventually win it. You begged hard to accompany me to Virginia City, and I fool that I was, granted your request, although I placed you in the care of one of my trusted followers. You managed to elude him and discover that Jack Hilton still lived and was so near to you. But that discovery has proved fatal to him. He is beyond the aid of human power, and you have caused the tumult that ensued. The Vigilantes are on my track and I will be compelled to remain in the mountains. Once in the impenetrable chain of hills, I defy an army to dislodge me, or trail me to my secret rendezvous."

David Dryden's voice grew harsher as he proceeded, and when he spoke of the Vigilantes he fairly hissed the words, and maliciously spurred the horse forward while a muffled oath lingered upon his tongue.

Ethel failed to suppress the sobs that arose to her lips. She had again met the man she loved devotedly and had been rudely torn from his side, while he was doomed to a horrible death mid the flames.

The wretch who had wrought all this misery sat close beside her, and she was a helpless captive in his hands.

In her hour of sorrow her lips moved in prayer, and even as she rode among that outlaw band her supplications arose to the Allseeing Ruler and implored His aid.

Perhaps Jack was saved from his perilous position, and the flames had been robbed of their victim. She still hoped against hope. After the long separation she had met the one who was her husband in the sight of Heaven, and yet she was forced away by the man she loathed and feared.

No wonder the poor girl's tears fell thick and fast, and she drew away from the ruffian as if his very touch was far more poisonous than the adder's. Perhaps an opportunity would present itself whereby she could escape and successfully elude the outlaw. Buoyed up by this thought she partially checked her tears and again murmured a prayer.

Dryden's followers rode at a respectful distance, and in the dim light the cavalcade resembled grim phantoms mounted upon spectre steeds.

Upon either side the tall jagged rocks towered like the walls of an ancient fortress.

Now and then the horsemen crossed swift but narrow streams that swept across the roadway.

It was evident that the outlaws had selected this intricate road through the ravines in order to mislead any parties following in pursuit, and also to select good points in case of close quarters, whereby the pursuing party could be held in check and destroyed.

It was easily to be seen that David Dryden expected no pursuit, for he allowed the horse to pick his way over the rough road in the defile. His confederates grasped their weapons and rode behind their chief, ready to turn and face any pursuing party. Not a word came from the mounted bandits. They rode in silence but on the alert, while mile after mile was rapidly traversed, and the gloomy shadows deepened in the ravines. Again and again Dryden endeavored to converse with his captive, but she refused to reply or

even to glance toward the brutal creature who held her in his power.

"You won't talk to me?" he said gruffly. "Perhaps I can induce you to talk by mentioning Jack Hilton's name."

A slight shudder swept through the little form and a moan issued from her lips; Dryden saw the advantage he had gained. "I thought that would cause you to utter a word or two," he said; "but you might as well cease to think of him. He is dead—dead to you, and the sooner you realize the fact that you are to be mine—the better for you."

"Yours?" she gasped. "Sooner would I die the most horrible and lingering death that human agency can suggest! Yours? Never! when I see that all hope is gone I will kill myself at your feet, but while I live and breathe you can never claim me. You can never break my resolution; I will die still gasping the words *I hate you*—murderer of the one I love even beyond the grave."

Her voice thrilled the outlaw and its tones rung in his ears. He listened attentively, and when she had concluded he bit his lips to suppress the rage that surged upward from his heart and he even clenched his hand to strike the beautiful girl that had denounced and defied him, but he wisely checked himself.

"You will change your opinion before long. You will sue for a kind word and beg for a smile. I'll break your proud spirit. You forget that we are far from the haunts of civilization," rejoined Dryden. "We are in the wild regions where might makes right. I rule these regions and the name of Wild-Fire is dreaded even by brave men, and shall I allow a weak girl to openly defy me and dictate to me? No! Enough of this foolish talk. Willing or unwilling you are mine. Threats, tears and supplications will not avail you. My word is law, both with my lawless followers and with you."

Dryden grasped the reins of his steed and again urged the beast forward.

"Coward! do your worst! I still breathe words of defiance!" said Ethel.

Placed in such a position and having no hope of mercy from the villain, her proud and brave spirit had asserted itself and the young girl fully determined upon desperate measures and to protect herself.

The very name of "Wild-Fire" had always sent a thrill of terror through Montana territory. He was the most crafty and daring of all road-agents—the most reckless of all outlaws, and his exploits sent dismay into every part of the great silver and gold country.

Wild-Fire had skillfully concealed his identity under a most repulsive mask. His followers were masked in the same manner.

Various rewards had been offered but no amount of money had yet put the Vigilantes on the track of this outlaw of the road. The treasure-boxes of the coaches continued to pour out their valuable contents into the treasury of the bold robber, and the mining-camps paid the tribute exacted by the fearless ruffian. But who was he? No one had ever caught a glimpse of his face. Surrounded by his bold riders and followers he moved a living mystery—a man without a face—a man without a name.

Yet Ethel had discovered the identity of the robber chief. David Dryden had in his anger revealed the secret to her! The man whom she had rejected was the man feared in the silver and gold regions—hunted by the Vigilantes with a price upon his head!

The group of horsemen plunged into a deeper ravine and had just emerged upon a level plateau when a voice came from the gloom beyond.

"Who goes there?" was the challenge.

"The Wolves of Satan's Gap," responded David Dryden.

CHAPTER IV.

IN DANGER OF FLAMING DEATH.—A WOULD-BE ASSASSIN.—
THE GALLANT DEED OF CRAZY TIM.—A WRONG THAT
NEEDED RIGHTING.

Clouds of smoke rolled through the little room where Jack Hilton lay helpless on the floor, bound hand and foot in the center of the fiery circle. Tongues of flame leaped wildly toward him, fed by the oil upon the floor, and each second drawing nearer to the doomed man.

It was a most appalling moment, for his life trembled in the balance. Breathing became difficult, and each effort to inhale the air choked him with the dark smoke that rolled over and enveloped him like a thick pall. Another effort to gain but a mouthful of air and Jack gave himself up for lost.

A sheet of flame darted over him and part of his clothing was seized upon by the fiery monster.

At that very instant the window was shattered and hurled into the room and a form leaped into the smoke and flame.

The person crept rapidly to the prostrate form upon the floor, and seizing the young man bore him to the open window. Not a moment too soon was this accomplished, for the flames darted after both rescued and rescuer as if angry in thus being robbed of their prey. They roared through the apartment and came like a legion of demons toward the window. Several quick slashes with a keen knife severed the ropes binding Jack and he stood forth, untrammelled.

"Quick! Lose not a moment! Out of that window or we are both lost!" shouted the rescuer.

Jack darted through the window, and his quick eye discovered the manner in which his rescuer had reached it.

A tree grew close to the building, and one of its branches almost touched the window-sill.

Jack sprang outward, and grasping the limb, swung himself out toward the trunk.

The next moment the person who had saved him from the flames leaped out upon the stout limb, and, hand-over-hand, made his way toward the tree-trunk. Hardly had he sprung out from the window when the forked flames darted as in a vain attempt to seize a victim. Baffled and cheated, they hissed and roared like fiery serpents, while a shout arose from the group below as the young man and his rescuer reached the ground in safety.

The wooden building offered but a slight resistance to the flames, and but little effort was made to save it.

The most intense excitement reigned, and men rushed hither and thither, seeking a solution to the cause of the conflagration.

Jack had barely touched the ground when a figure stepped hurriedly toward him.

For a moment only did an object glisten in the person's hand; then followed a sharp, quick report and a bullet grazed Hilton's forehead.

The would-be assassin did not wait to ascertain the result of the shot, but turned quickly and fled into the

dark shadows of a by-street and was lost to view before any one could start in pursuit.

The person was Josh Griffith, and ten minutes afterward he was speeding away to the outlaw leader's stronghold to acquaint him with the result of the burning house and its intended victim.

"The captain's plan was a failure," chuckled the rascal as he sped along, "but my pistol finished him, and I'll claim a reward for that."

Jack turned to thank his deliverer and at the same time to discover who it was that had risked his life in order to rescue him from the death which the scoundrel, David Dryden, had doomed him to.

A strange face met his gaze. A mass of shaggy gray whiskers almost covered the stranger's features, and a flowing mass of hair fell down upon the red shirt which he wore.

A broad slouched hat partly imprisoned the hair and added to the person's wild appearance. Small piercing black eyes, restless as the sea, peeped from beneath the shaggy eyebrows. A broad leather belt encircled his waist and held his slender, but rusted dagger.

A pair of well-worn top boots encased his feet. The toes were protruding from the torn boots that matched the tattered pair of pantaloons worn by the odd-looking creature. Even the red shirt was patched and torn, and barely covered the body of the strange individual.

As Jack turned to gaze upon his deliverer, the odd personage removed his hat and bowed low to the young man, uttering a wild laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! The fire didn't burn you! No, sir, the flames didn't scorch you! I wouldn't let them! No, sir!"

Another peal of wild laughter burst from his lips and he continued—"I knew you were there, and the fire was creeping towards you, so I imagined myself a squirrel and I flew up the tree and pulled you out, didn't I?"

"You have saved my life," replied Hilton. "How can I ever repay you, my brave fellow?"

Hilton extended his hand and the strange person eagerly seized it and wrung it cordially.

"You are the first one who has talked so kindly to me, and the first to shake hands with Crazy Tim. I'll not forget it—not forget it." And the half-witted creature repeated the sentence over and over again.

"Hurrah for Crazy Tim!" cried a miner. And the crowd burst forth into a deafening cheer.

"Young fellow, we're mighty glad you got out of that scrape so easy, for you were in a tight fix and no mistake. Crazy Tim has saved your life, and hereafter any man who makes fun of the idiot or plays any tricks on him is a cur, and I for one, will give him a lead pill out of my shooter. Darn me, if I don't!"

The tall miner who had stepped forth and delivered the above speech, was greeted by a loud shout and cries of approval.

In the meantime the flames had spread with wonderful rapidity, and the gambling den and dance-house were a seething mass of flames, threatening to destroy the adjoining buildings.

The unfortunate creatures who had fallen in the bloody battle in the gambling room were probably still in the burning building. Dead or dying, they were left to their fate, for the flames drove back all who ventured within a dozen yards of the building fronting upon the street.

"Look here, Mister," said the miner who had champ-

ioned the idiot. "My name's Frank Sewell and I always help the weak side. Come, tell me how it was you were left in that room up there."

"I can relate all in a very few words," replied Hilton. "I have been the victim of a wily scoundrel. Scarcely a year ago, through his devilish ingenuity, I lost one who was to have been my wife. The loss of the one I loved so well drove me into reckless deeds, and seeking a chance to obliterate scenes that were heavy with sorrow to me, I came to the silver regions and obtained a good position. I met that fiend, David Dryden, here in these very streets, and I listened to his smooth tongue and forgot the past. Little by little he lured me to the gambling den and brought me to the verge of ruin—almost made me a thief. To-night I discovered that the woman I love is still living, still true to me and she is in that villain's power. Almost as soon as we met, I was overpowered by the outlaw and his followers and bound hand and foot. He prepared a horrible death for me, but thanks to my friends here, I have been snatched from the very jaws of death."

"You relate a very strange story," said Sewell. "You say that the girl is living and that you saw her to-night?"

"Yes, but he has stolen her again! She lives and is still loyal to me and that is sufficient! I will track him to the end of the world, if it is necessary. The world is not wide enough to hide him from me while Ethel Errington is captive in that outlaw's hands!"

"His name! Who is the villain that stole the girl—repeat his name again!"

"David Dryden!"

A quick low cry escaped from the lips of the idiot, as David Dryden's name was mentioned. Jack turned quickly to ascertain the cause of the demented creature's astonishment, but the face of the maniac betrayed no emotion. It retained the same meaningless expression, the same vacant stare. If the features had momentarily shown a surprise occasioned by the mere mention of the outlaw's name, they again became fixed on vacancy when the young man and the bystanders quickly turned.

"David Dryden!" repeated Sewell. "The name is a strange one to me. I never heard it before."

"That is strange, for the man I alluded to almost dwells in this town. It was he that lured me into Bannack Bill's den, and it was he that attacked me when the trembling girl flew into my arms for safety. It was he that abandoned me to the flames. He moves and dwells among you and yet you do not know him."

Jack looked suspiciously at the tall miner. Sewell gave a low whistle and the light of the burning house casting a ruddy glare upon his features, revealed a look of surprise upon them.

"I see—I see!" he exclaimed. "I know the man now, but not by that name. Here among us he is known as Daniel Craig. So the fellow has another alias, has he? He is a strange bird. Sometimes he is in town for a week at a time, and then again he is absent for a long spell. I have noticed that a big robbery always takes place either before or after he has lounged around a locality. He is looked upon as the pink of honesty by many, but I'll stake my life he is in league with that imp of the devil, Wild-Fire, the rascal who proclaims himself the King of the Road Agents and Outlaws. Many a treasure-box has fallen into the hands of that daring scoundrel, and I shouldn't wonder if Mister Daniel Craig has got a

share of it too. So David Dryden, alias Craig, is your man, eh?"

"Yes, he has again stolen the young woman from me and holds her in captivity."

Again the low cry—a muffled moan issued from the fool's lips and he laid his hand upon the hilt of a rusted dagger.

"No matter what they call him," Crazy Tim murmured, apparently to himself, "I'll find him yet. Her blood is upon this blade and cries aloud for vengeance. Tiberius will know him if my eyes fail to recognize his features; he'll know him—he'll know him—for he has got more sense than Crazy Tim. Call him by whatever name you will, he will yet fall into my hands and Tiberius will tell me if *he is the man!*" Jack gazed upon the idiot as he uttered his threat, and drew nearer to the poor fellow.

"Have you, too, a wrong that needs righting?" he asked.

"I have a wrong that nothing but blood—his blood—can wipe out! Not until his blood covers this rusted blade and hides *her* blood from my gaze can *my* wrong be effaced. But where is Tiberius?"

The idiot placed a curious bone whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast upon it. A moment later and the deep bay of a dog resounded from the outskirts of the crowd, and a huge Great Dane bounded into the circle, to crouch at the maniac's feet and lick his hand. The great beast glared upon the assembled group as if his strange master was in peril. A low growl came from its blood red throat, and it displayed its gleaming fangs in a ferocious manner.

"No, no, he isn't here!" said the idiot soothingly, as he patted the dog's head. "But we'll find him yet. Patience! Patience! We'll find him yet!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WOLVES OF SATAN'S GAP SHOW THEIR FANGS.—OUTLAW AT WORK.—JOSH GRIFFITH TELLS HIS STORY.

Surrounded by inaccessible rocks and masses of boulders was an open space deep in the very heart of the wild range of one of the spurs of the Rocky Mountains where the outlaw band had selected their rendezvous and permanent abode.

Scarcely a quarter of a mile away to the north was the stage-coach road leading to Virginia City.

It wound along the base of the mountain and then through a gloomy canyon. Half way through this canyon was a wide, deep fissure. It was a vast cleft in the rocky upheaval of the earth. A rude but strong bridge of logs and trees formed a bridge across this chasm and over this structure the coach was compelled to pass in its journey to and from the mining towns.

Black masses of rock towered high above the road, completely shutting out the rays of sunlight. A more desolate spot could scarcely be found as no sign of life relieved the awful gloom and oppressive silence. Not a shrub or blade of grass made its appearance in the dismal precincts of Satan's Gap.

It was rightly named, for if the prince of darkness ever frequented a spot, it surely must have been this awful region named after him.

The open space referred to was on the summit of the rock, overlooking Satan's Gap and hewn out of the rocky mass by the hand of nature. It resembled a giant citadel or fortress perched upon the peak of a

mountain. From these fantastic battlements could be seen the gloomy gap far below, and a good view of the road was obtained in like manner.

The cunning mind that selected the spot knew full well that a handful of armed men could hold an army at bay from this citadel.

It was into this open space that David Dryden had ridden when the outlaw sentry challenged him. In a harsh voice the ruffian gave the pass-word.

"The Wolves of Satan's Gap."

The faint moonbeams revealed the form of the sentry as he came forward to hold the bridle while his chief dismounted.

David assisted Ethel from the saddle and led the way toward a dark cavity in the side of the rocky wall. A man came forth from the aperture, bearing a blazing torch, and led the way into the dark depths of a rock-bound cavity followed by Dryden and his captive. The remainder of the bandits dismounted and a few seconds later both men and horses had disappeared within hidden openings and a silence reigned in the space. There were no signs of life anywhere except in a figure hidden by a boulder who guarded the only entrance and who stood as if carved from the rock itself.

David passed through the first vaulted passage until he reached a large chamber. The guide fixed a torch in the side of the apartment, and cast a few sticks upon the remains of a fire. In one corner of this chamber was a couch composed of furs and robes. Ethel walked to this, casting herself upon it, and hid her face with her hands.

Dryden did not notice his captive, but drew near to the fire and flung his hat into a corner.

"Back again!" he murmured, "and a tough night's work it has been too. I came near losing the girl and had a scrimmage with the miners. I had to burn down Bannack Bill's shanty in order to destroy a dangerous rival. Get me a glass of brandy. I'm tired and thirsty."

The bandit who had preceded the outlaws into the cabin advanced to a little cupboard constructed in the side of a rocky wall and, after he had opened it, produced a bottle and a few glasses. Dryden poured out a portion of the liquor and drank it.

"You say that you've had trouble to-night, Captain"

"Yes, lots of it!" responded the villain. "But thank fortune, it's over now and the girl is still in my hands."

Dryden then gave his listener a graphic account of the night's adventure, and the manner in which he had disposed of his rival. He had barely concluded when a slight commotion in the narrow passage was borne to his ears and the next moment, the well-known form of Josh Griffith entered the chamber. This outlaw was breathless. He sank down upon a keg before the fire and rested a few moments before he spoke.

"What's the matter?" demanded Dryden.

"Matter enough, Captain. The young feller that you tied up and left in the room to be burnt up, escaped the flames."

Dryden hurled the glass to the rocky floor, and an oath burst from his lips as the shattered vessel rattled upon the hard surface.

"You lie!" he fairly shrieked as he leaped to his feet, trembling with rage.

A glad cry escaped from the lips of the girl lying

upon the couch, as she heard the tidings of her lover's escape from the dreadful fate to which he had been doomed, and she clasped her hands in silent prayer.

"You lie!" roared Dryden. "No human being could possibly escape from that fire, for I did not leave until I saw the flames leap upon him, fed by the oil which I threw upon him and upon the floor."

"Nevertheless, I say that he has escaped!" reasserted Griffith, calmly. "I have just come from 'he burning house, and saw him rescued."

"By whom?" thundered the bandit.

"By a crazy person—that wild-looking creature they call Crazy Tim."

"Curse him! Who is he?"

"I don't know. I have seen him of late loitering around the town, but I can't place his features, nor do I recollect ever having seen him before."

Dryden paced the chamber like a wild beast in its cage. He roundly cursed the idiot that had foiled him of the satisfaction of knowing that Jack Hilton was a shapeless and charred mass in the ruins of the building.

A grim smile played upon Griffith's lips as he beheld his chief's rage. He remained silently regarding the bandit as he paced to and fro, and finally exclaimed:

"What would you give if you knew he was dead?"

"I'm in no humor for joking!"

"I'm not joking. I'm asking you a fair and square question: what would you give if you knew he was positively dead?"

"Ask me for anything within the bounds of reason; but look you, Josh Griffith, I'm in no mood for pleasantries, and beware how you trifle with me!"

Dryden again resumed his measured tread upon the rocky floor.

"Would you give a thousand dollars?"

The outlaw stopped suddenly and faced Griffith.

"Yes—a thousand dollars—gladly!"

"Then hand over the spondulix for I've fixed your man."

"What do you mean?"

"He had barely reached the ground when I darted forward with my pistol and let him have it point blank."

"With what result?" cried Dryden, eagerly.

"He dropped dead at my feet."

Ethel uttered a piercing scream, and sunk insensible upon the couch.

"You are positive that you saw him fall dead?"

"Yes, I'll swear to it!" replied Griffith. "I knew you would feel pleased to know he was destroyed, so I took big chances by darting into the crowd and giving him the bullet, point blank."

Griffith's eyes gleamed savagely, as he spoke and he noted with satisfaction the pleased look that swept over Dryden's face.

"I had to run for it, Captain. The Vigilantes were at my heels, and gave me a lively chase."

The lying villain gave a thrilling account of a hair-breadth escape in order to convince the bandit chief of the magnitude of the daring deed he had accomplished.

"You are sure that Jack Hilton is dead?" Dryden demanded.

"Yes; I saw him fall."

"Very well; the amount will be yours. Now for the cursed meddling fool who interposed in Hilton's behalf; do you think you would know him again?"

Strange that I have never met him during my frequent visits to Virginia City."

"I'd know him captain, for he's the craziest looking specimen you ever saw," and Griffith described the idiot minutely to his chief.

Dryden listened attentively and appeared much annoyed. Ethel revived and overheard the description given of her lover's rescuer, and blessed him.

Dryden walked to the cupboard and poured out another deep potion of the fiery liquid and imbibed it.

"Look you! This fool idiot, or whatever you call him, must be destroyed. He may be in our way some future time."

Little did the road agent dream what important part the fool would play in the drama about to be enacted, and that he would meet the maniac at a critical point of the drama in question!

Dryden murmured a few words to himself and again seated himself before the fire.

The outlaw who had entered the cavern in advance of the bandit leader remained a silent spectator and listener of the interview between Dryden and Josh Griffith.

He finally stepped forward and laid his hand upon the road-agent's shoulder.

"Captain! Do you forget that to-night the Virginia City coach passes through the gap with a valuable treasure-box and an armed escort?"

"Confound it! I had almost forgotten it. My mind was fixed upon the events of this night's adventure. Quick! Pass the word to the boys. Expect a stubborn resistance, for the treasure is a rich one and the armed escort are on the *qui vive* for the road-agents. They'll have to be mighty cute to evade Wild-Fire—"

"Or the Wolves of Satan's Gap," added Josh Griffith, dramatically, and he bounded out of the chamber into a low and narrow passage close at hand.

"Here, you Hank! Keep your eyes on the beauty yonder. Don't allow her to leave this place under any pretext. Now for business!"

Dryden passed within a few feet of the couch and glanced at the captive, but she turned her face from him. The bandit uttered a light laugh and passed out from the chamber.

Hank sat before the fire and watched the reclining form upon the couch.

Ethel tried in vain to suppress the tears that welled up into her eyes. One moment her heart had rejoiced to hear of her lover's safety. The next minute she had been plunged into abject sorrow by Griffith's words.

Outside of the road-agent's haunt the night was intensely dark, and the moon occasionally struggled to peep through the dark clouds that swept over her face.

Crouched among the giant boulders upon either side of the gap were motionless figures eagerly listening to the advancing vehicle.

"Sh! The coach is coming. Be on the alert! Remember the signal—'Wolves show you fangs!'" said a voice in hushed whispers.

Nearer drew the coach. The horses' hoofs sounded close at hand, and a dark mass moved toward the bridge over the chasm. The next moment the horses were upon the bridge, and the lumbering vehicle rolled upon the structure. A moment later and the coach was in Satan's Gap.

The moon struggled through the clouds for an in-

stant only, but in that brief interval it revealed the armed escort upon the coach and gun-barrels protruding through the windows. Then dark forms issued rapidly from the boulders and leaped out into the roadway. The moon shone brighter, and revealed the figures distinctly. Each form had the hideous head and features of a wolf, and a brace of revolvers was grasped by each mysterious being.

CHAPTER VI.

WILD FIRE'S GANG.—THE TREASURED CHEST.—DIETRICH SCHUTTLEHEIMER GETS A SURPRISE.—BANDIT HANK'S BOARDER.

Although the armed escort upon and within the stage coach had been upon the alert and prepared to meet resistance in that dreaded locality, yet so sudden had been the attack, and aided by the intense gloom, that the weird-looking figures in the roadway had covered the armed men with their weapons. One look at the forms whose heads were incased in the masks formed of wolf-heads, and the driver reined in the horses with a cry of surprise.

"Wild-Fire's gang!" he gasped.

"Down with your weapons! The first among you that raises but a finger dies!" shouted a loud voice from beneath the repulsive mask. "You see we have the drop on you. Every man of you is covered by a brace of revolvers, and the persons inside of the coach are treated in the same way."

The road-agents words were true in every respect, for each hideously-masked outlaw had singled out his man, and the polished tubes of the weapons were leveled direct at the person selected.

Even as the advanced figure concluded, a dozen of the same masked figures arose upon either side of the coach, apparently from the very earth itself, and the muzzles of their weapons actually peeped ominously into the windows of the coach. Silently and swiftly the road-agents had sprung upon their prey, and without the slightest resistance the coach and its armed passengers were at the mercy of the bold outlaws. It was evident that the controlling spirit of the robber league laid his plans skillfully, and his followers executed them with the precision of clockwork. The stage-coaches were never stopped in the same spot, therefore it was impossible to know when and where to look for the attack. The escort knew that Satan's Gap was the dangerous ravine, but as it was fully a quarter of a mile long it required constant vigilance until the dread regions were passed in safety.

The passengers had but time to observe the wolf-heads masking the features of the attacking party when the leader again spoke.

"Down with the treasure-chest and be lively with it! Cover every man, boys! Keep your fingers upon the triggers! Upon the least sign of treachery shoot and don't miss your man! Come, pay toll to the King of the Road-Agents and outlaws. Wild-Fire never asks but once for the toll."

A moment later and the iron-bound chest was produced and handed down. Two masked figures seized it and laid it upon the ground. A third advanced with a heavy ax and struck the chest several blows, shattering the lock.

"Light! Examine the contents!" ordered the foremost figure.

A dark-lantern flashed its rays upon the box while

an outlaw threw open the lid and exposed the contents of the chest to the surrounding group.

It was filled with small sacks of gold-dust and bars of metal.

"All right! No cheat about that! Drive on. Remember you're not out of danger until you have left Satan's Gap far behind you! From every boulder a pair of eyes is watching every movement. Good-night, and remember your bloodless meeting with the Wolves of Satan's Gap."

The masked figure laughed gleefully and motioned the driver onward. The coach rolled along through the gap, relieved of its treasure box. The wheels rumbled over the rough road and the coach was soon swallowed up in the gloom and the noise of the vehicle died away in the distance.

At the very first appearance of the wolf-masks and the shout of their leader, a portly figure had dropped to the ground from the rear part of the coach and now lay concealed behind a huge rock. This personage watched the group of bandits and to his consternation he saw one burly ruffian approach the very spot where he lay concealed.

Before the hidden watcher could crawl away in the darkness the advancing outlaw cast the rays of a lantern upon the boulder, and exposed the person hidden behind the rock.

"Hello! Here's somebody that wants to interview the Wolves!" exclaimed the bandit. Each masked figure drew a weapon, and the click, click of the triggers warned the discovered intruder that his hour was at hand.

"Oh, gentlemen—don't shoot! I vas fallen off dot coaches, unt I didn't know how to climbed on again."

The portly figure emerged from the shadow of the boulder, and came into full view of the outlaws. He started back as if in terror, and uttered a cry of alarm as he saw the hideous head and features of the wolf surmounting the shoulders of each armed person that surrounded him.

"Och! Himmel! Vot is dot? Oh, vot kind of peeples is dot? Mans mit wolf's heads on dem bodies. Och, dem vill eat me like a cat vill dere mouses!" and the German trembled and drew away from the road-agents.

"Who are you?" thundered the foremost outlaw, his eyes gleaming through the aperture and resembling the orbs of the savage animal whose head covered his face—a strange light of ferocity probably occasioned by the rays of the dark lantern, which flashed its light full upon the mask.

"Who I vos?" repeated the stout German. "I vos Dietrich Shuttleheimer. Who vos you, anyhow?"

"Silence! Do you know you are standing upon the brink of eternity?"

The fat German started backward, as if he had been standing upon dangerous ground, and exclaimed:

"Himmel, I didn't shoost know dat I vos standing on dot brink!"

"What are you doing here? Were you left by accident, or did you leave the coach intentionally?" fiercely asked the leader of the masks.

"No, sir! Der coach left me."

A low laugh came from the assembled group, and as they gazed upon the features of the frightened Dutchman they could discover no signs of the real emotion that was at that moment uppermost in the stout German's mind. He appeared terror-stricken, and trembling in every limb he sunk upon his knees, and his

teeth chattered. The cause of his terror was the heavy revolver that was suddenly presented to his head by the chief of the Wolves.

"Down on your knees! In five seconds you're a dead man!" said the outlaw.

"Oh, Mister Wolf!" groaned the kneeling figure. "I don'd got any grudges against you. I don'd care if you vas robbed the stage coaches fifty times a day; vot is dot my business?—nottings, I wish I vas a robber. By Himmel, I vould rob pennies von a dead man's eyes. I vas yust so big a t'ief like all you gentlemans."

The bandits laughed, and the German, seeing the advantage thus gained, quickly followed it up.

"Yust give me a chance to rob somebodies, unt you vill see dot I can be yust so big a rascal like any von vot you are."

"Arise!" commanded the outlaw leader. "Now blindfold him and lead him into the prison-vault."

A bandit stepped forward and placed a bandage over Dietrich's eyes while another bound the German's hands behind him with a stout piece of twine.

"Say, hold on! I can't vas see nottings!" protested Dietrich in a tone of perfect simplicity.

"That's all right! lead on!"

The masked figures moved onward to the rock-bound citadel. Two of the outlaws carried the chest while two more led the blindfolded Dutchman onward.

Dietrich kept up a continual flow of funny remarks while his guides led him over the rocky pathway, causing him to stumble and swear in German as he proceeded toward the bandit's retreat. Even as he fell and pretended to hurt himself, the crafty German managed to move the bandage in such a manner that he could obtain an occasional glimpse of his surroundings.

The outlaws entered the gloomy passage leading into the cavern retreat and Dietrich found himself in the chamber where Ethel still reclined upon the couch. Something like a thrill of pleasure swept through the German's form and he started visibly. Only for an instant, however, for the next moment he was calm and indifferent to the surroundings. Hank still lounged before the fire and looked up in surprise as the two wolf-masks led the captured Dutchman into the room.

The two masked outlaws retired and a few moments later David Dryden entered the apartment. Divested of his wolf-mask, the arch scoundrel entered the chamber and a grim smile played upon his features as his eyes rested upon the blindfolded Dutchman standing like a statue in the center of the vaulted chamber.

The bandit chief walked toward a small deal table and placed his two revolvers upon it and unloosened his leather belt.

"Hank you will have a new boarder," said Dryden. "When I return you can put him into that small chamber at the right, and be sure that he is secured. I'm afraid I've got an elephant on my hands."

"Py Himmel! I vish I could get dis rag off von mein eyes so dot I could see dot elephant on your hands—ha! ha! ha! Dot's funny! A elephant on his hands!"

Dietrich laughed heartily as he pictured the outlaw with an elephant on his hands. Dryden walked slowly out of the chamber and Hank, the guard, seated himself in such a manner that he could observe the Dutchman.

"Say, Hank, I vant to talk some tings mit you!"

Hank started in surprise as he heard the Dutchman call him by name.

"How did you know my name was Hank?" demanded the seated outlaw.

"Oh, Mister Wild-Fire told me dot Hank would loog oud for me und Hank vould loog oud for Miss Ethel, too!" answered Dietrich.

Ethel looked up in surprise as she heard her name mentioned. She saw nothing in the red features and yellow hair of the Teuton to make her recall any previous meeting. Even as she looked toward the Dutchman she saw him walk toward the table.

"Now, loog here, Hank. I vish dot my hands was loose. I got a leedle bottle of vhiskey in my pogget, und I bet dot you neffer drank sometings like dot. Hank, you lige goot vhiskey! I can told dat by your nose, Hank!"

Hank arose from his seat and approached the Dutchman. The excellence of the whiskey had excited his curiosity and before Dietrich had spoken a dozen words the outlaw had released his hands, and the whiskey flask was eagerly seized.

Hank quickly sampled the contents of the flask and while he was thus engaged, Dietrich walked toward the table. He made but one movement and that one movement was as rapid as a lightning flash.

In that one movement he had seized both revolvers and they were concealed in his pockets. When Hank lowered the flask, the Dutchman was standing immovable as a statue and at a respectful distance from the table. The movement had escaped the outlaw's notice, but Ethel had observed the act. Why did the prisoner seize upon the weapons of the bandit chief? Was he a friend or was he merely concealing the weapons for his personal advantage? Yet he had mentioned her name. How had he ascertained it?

Ethel pondered these questions over and over as she gazed upon the blindfolded figure.

Hank had barely time to return the flask to the German's waist-coat pocket when the heavy foot-fall of the outlaw chief resounded in the passage and Dryden strode into the room. Would he discover the loss of his weapons?

CHAPTER VII.

THE TORCH OF DEATH.—THE TABLES ARE TURNED.—ABANDONED TO A TERRIBLE FATE.—THE OUTLAW ROAD-AGENT'S ORDERS.

Hank did not have time to again bind the hands of the Dutchman. And that individual placed his hands behind him in such a manner that only a close observer would have noticed that the hands were untied and at liberty.

The outlaw entered the chamber and Ethel gave vent to a sigh of relief as she saw him pass by the table, never even once glancing toward it.

Hank had resumed his place before the fire, and he bit into a huge piece of tobacco in order to conceal the fumes of the liquor.

The occupants of the cavern were in exactly the same positions they had occupied when Dryden made his exit from the room.

The bandit paused a few moments near the fire, then approached Ethel. The young girl could see that the liquor had flushed the features of the robber, and she nerved herself for the scene she knew was about to follow.

"I was called away from your side upon urgent business," said he, "but now the matter has been at-

tended to and I am again at liberty to devote my attentions to you, Miss Errington."

"You can spare yourself that trouble!" replied, Ethel, haughtily.

"Ah, don't be so sarcastic! You forget where you are. You really forget you're not in your own home, but in mine. But it will be yours also, for as my wife, you will have to share my castle."

Dryden drew still nearer to his beautiful captive, and essayed speaking in soft tones.

"You will learn to like me. I don't ask you to love me, because I know you have plighted your love to Jack Hilton; but he is dead. You must banish him from your thoughts and devote them to me."

A bitter smile hovered upon the girl's lips as she listened to the outlaw's words.

"I glory in the love I bear Jack Hilton, and my heart returns as true to it as the needle does to the pole. Never mention your name in the same breath with his, for his name is sacred to my ears, while yours awakens only feelings of loathing!"

"Heaven bless her!" murmured the Dutchman in a whisper.

Ethel's reply stung the outlaw to the quick, and his face plainly showed the rage that now swept through every fibre of his frame. His voice became husky and he advanced toward the girl in a blustering manner.

"Enough of your insolence!" he cried. "I will stand no more of it! Guard your tongue well and carefully avoid insults in your replies. I am in no mood to even listen to your sarcasm. I have wasted too much valuable time in trying to reconcile you. I have tried fair means, but hereafter I will use force, if it is necessary!"

"Coward! You threaten a woman, who can offer but slight resistance to your brutal language and strength. I have remained a prisoner in your hands for weary, weary months, but you will never subdue my spirit and gain my consent to link my fate with yours!"

Ethel had risen from the couch and stood with features pale as the driven snow before the outlaw, and the desperado quailed before her piercing eyes and the imperious motion of her hand.

For a moment he stood regarding the beautiful face of his prisoner; the next moment he had stepped forward quickly and seized her hand. In his anger he took the delicate hand and closed his fingers like a vice upon it. Ethel uttered a little cry of pain and sought in vain to release the grasp.

That little cry had reached the ears of an anxious listener. The moment that she had uttered the moan, the Dutchman tore away the bandage from his eyes and like the leap of a panther he was upon the outlaw and with one effort he flung the bandit headlong upon the rocky floor.

Hank leaped to his feet and Dryden arose from the pavement with a bleeding gash upon his forehead.

With a roar like that uttered by an infuriated bull, the outlaw flung toward the Dutchman, but as he reached forth his hands to seize the offender, he was again sent down to the floor by a well-directed blow from the Dutchman's fist.

Dryden was upon his feet again in an instant and his hands sought his belt for his weapons. He remembered having laid them upon the table. He dashed toward that and an oath broke from his lips.

The pistols were gone!

"Death and Fury!" he roared. "Where are my pistols?"

"Here!" shouted the Dutchman, and as he spoke he drew the brace of revolvers and levelled them full at the bandit's head.

Dryden was rooted to the spot with surprise; he could not articulate a single word. Ethel uttered a glad cry and sprang toward the German, as if her safety lay in that direction.

"Keep close beside me, miss," said the German in tones that thrilled her and almost forced another cry from her lips.

"Shoot! Hank! Shoot! Why do you stand there like a mummy!" cried Dryden.

"Silence!" hissed Dietrich. "Don't talk above a whisper, or I'll let daylight into your skull! Move hand or foot, either of you, and you're both dead men!"

It was strange that the Dutchman had abandoned his dialect and had spoken in a changed tone of voice, but the two ruffians did not notice it. Their attention was riveted upon the deadly weapons which held them rooted to the spot and in watching the fingers that rested upon the trigger.

It was a thrilling scene.

A strange light suddenly shone in the outlaw's eyes. Something had sent a glint of hope, even as he stood before the weapon.

Even while Dryden stood apparently at Dietrich's mercy, several forms were quietly stealing into the room.

Several of Dryden's ruffians appeared in the narrow passage directly behind the Dutchman. It was their coming which had sent the gleam of pleasure into Dryden's eyes. Quietly and quickly the bandits stole behind Dietrich to suddenly spring upon him, to pinion his arms and press them backward. A yell of triumph broke from the bandit chief.

"The tables are turned!" said he, as he bent over the prostrate figure and removed the weapons from Dietrich's hand. "You won't have any further use for these, my fine fellow! I'll treat you to a death whereby you won't suffer very long at the climax, but you'll suffer a thousand deaths before you are put out of your misery!"

A second later and Dietrich's hands were secured. Dryden turned to Hank.

"I'll settle with you for your carelessness!" growled he. "I'll teach you to keep your eyes open in the future."

"But, Captain——"

"Not a word! It was your duty to see that the prisoner was secured and you have neglected that duty. As for you, miss," and Dryden turned to Ethel, "you are not yet out of my hands! Your champion is in good keeping, and you will not be troubled with his attentions hereafter."

Ethel attempted to reach the German and tried to thank him for his efforts in her behalf, but Dryden anticipated the movement and prevented the meeting.

The German glanced toward the young girl and their eyes met. That one glance told more than words. It revealed volumes. But before she could find the real solution to the mystery, the Dutchman was forced out of the room by the outlaws, and Ethel, weeping, sought her couch of furs. Hank kept a strict watch over the poor victim.

Dryden's ruffians led their prisoner into a winding passage that opened into several smaller chambers.

The group finally entered a low vaulted room and the light of the torch, borne by the outlaw in advance, revealed the dreary looking place to the men and their prisoner.

Overhead the huge rock layers were interlocked in such a manner that one held the other in position.

Water trickled down from the dome of this cavern and the sides of the room were covered with a greenish slime.

In entering the place, the outlaws had opened the doors formed of heavy timbers apparently the only entrance to the vault-like apartment.

"This is the place," said Dryden. "This abandoned chamber will suit my purpose very well. The shock *will bring down the boulders and they will form a tombstone for him.*"

The outlaws looked askance and the bandit leader continued:

"I see you don't quite see through my plans. But you will presently. My vengeance will be quick and terrible. This meddling fool has pried into our secrets, discovered our retreat and actually sought to again steal that girl from my keeping. Roll out a keg of powder from our magazine! Lively there! And I'll treat you to a sight worth seeing!"

A nimble desperado darted away in quest of the explosive.

If the German was appalled at the fate in store for him, his face did not betray his feeling. He stood calmly regarding the outlaw chieftain with a sneer upon his florid features.

"This fellow sought our retreat with a purpose in view! What that purpose was is of no consequence, for in ten minutes he will be launched into Eternity!" announced Dryden.

The ruffian who had made his exit to obtain the powder now returned with a keg of the explosive and placed it upon the floor.

"What next, captain?"

Dryden approached the doomed man, and in hissing tones he said:

"Do you not tremble? Do you not fear to meet death in the shape it is now prepared for you?"

The German bent a penetrating glance upon the ruffian, and then contemptuously turned his head away without deigning a reply.

The outlaw's orders were quick and to the point, as he saw the prisoner turn away. He had hoped to see the doomed man sink upon his knees and beg for his life. But in this he was disappointed.

Dryden withdrew the plug from one end of the keg and scattered a heap of powder upon the rocky floor. He then poured out several handfuls of the black compound and laid a train toward the door. He arranged this train so that it led toward the heavy door and passed beneath it. It was arranged so that it could be fired after the door was closed, and the inflammable mixture would flash along toward the bulk in the keg. He next placed the keg in the center of the chamber, and several bandits forced the prisoner over the powder barrel, and by means of an iron ring fixed in the floor, Dietrich was secured in such a manner that he was fastened upon the keg and unable to move hand or foot.

"Now then! All leave this chamber. Now, my fine

spy, say your prayers, if you know any. A speedy trip to the unknown land awaits you."

The outlaw chief and his bandits passed out of the room and closed the heavy door, leaving the helpless man bound upon the powder-keg.

Dryden seized the torch, and stooping down applied it to the powder-train. A flash ensued and the train leaped forward like a fiery serpent.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOST LOVED ONE.—A WISE DOG.—THE BANDIT SENTRY'S DEATH.—CRAZY TIM'S DISCOVERY.

It will be remembered that Jack Hilton stood before the burning building intently gazing upon the demented creature known as Crazy Tim, and the idiot was speaking to the huge Great Dane as if the brute understood every word uttered by its master.

Not long did the maniac remain with his dumb companion, but he again came toward Jack in a mysterious manner.

"You have lost one whom you loved? One for whom you would bear sorrow—one for whom you would lay down life itself? Ah! I know what it is to lose a treasure like that," said Crazy Tim in a tone of deep sadness, and he hastily brushed aside tears that dimmed his eyes. "But you can find her. Search! search! It is your only hope," and the idiot's voice suddenly arose.

"Why do you stand here while the lamb is in the fold of the wolf? Why do you stand here while she may be shrieking for help? Go! search Satan's Gap! It is there all evil spirits hold forth, and it is an evil spirit that has stolen your treasure. Follow upon the track and search Satan's Gap although you have to pull down every boulder in the accursed spot. She is there! She is there, and the fiend will not release her."

A light suddenly broke in upon the young man. Sewell, the miner, had mentioned Dryden or Craig's name in such a manner as to connect it with the bandits that infested the dreaded locality known as Satan's Gap. If David Dryden, alias, was in league with the "Wolves" then it was very evident that he had borne away his prisoner to that rendezvous.

The idiot was right; that was the spot where he might hope to find his lost one. But, how was he to enter that den? How could he hope to penetrate its mysteries and discover if Ethel was really an inmate of the robber's head-quarters? Jack mentally asked himself these questions while the words of the idiot still rung in his ears. He knew that the coach would leave Virginia City, shortly after midnight with an armed escort, for it bore away a valuable treasure-box. The coach would be compelled to pass through Satan's Gap.

Perhaps he could journey as far as the outlaw and road-agent's haunts and there leave the coach and pursue his search?

In two hours the coach would leave and Jack resolved to carry out the plan he had hastily formed.

But he wisely concluded to reveal that plan to none save the idiot. He would first of all return to his employer and restore the gold-dust that he had obtained from the safe, and then pursue his intentions so hastily formed.

Jack called the idiot to his side, and thanking Sewell for his proffered assistance, he led the maniac away

from the scene. The ragged creature followed him quickly, while the huge Great Dane trotted at his heels.

When a short distance from the assemblage gathered about the ruins of the building, Jack paused and spoke to his strange companion.

"Tim, the advice you gave me is good, and I have resolved to follow it. I am going to Satan's Gap!"

"You will find her there. But you will also find the Wolves hungry and bloodthirsty. The way is filled with danger, but she whom you love is there. Go! go! Crazy Tim is your friend and advises you to go."

The idiot extended his hand and Jack grasped it and wrung it cordially. The next moment the fool had whistled to the Great Dane and both dog and master suddenly disappeared in the gloom. Then Jack started toward the building where his employer's office was located and easily gained admission. A huge safe stood in one corner of the room, and having the combination Jack easily opened it and replaced the gold-dust which he had purloined but a few hours before at the instigation of David Dryden. Having accomplished this he relocked the safe, extinguished the lamp which he had used, and fastened the outer door.

He wended his way toward a wooden building where he lodged, and once there he changed the damp and stained garments that he wore.

He had almost an hour and a half to spare before the coach would leave town, so he began preparations for the trip.

A large chest stood in one corner of the room, and from this box he produced a quantity of garments and selected some clothing. He stood before the small mirror with several brushes and tablets of paint, and at the expiration of an hour a transformation of the features had taken place whereby his most intimate friend would have failed to recognize him.

In the meantime, the idiot had stumbled along in the darkness, followed by his huge dog. About a mile from the town he bent his footsteps into a by-path among the rocks, and finally paused before a curious-looking structure built among the stones. It was composed of several old packing cases, which he had probably obtained from the town. The cases were placed in such a manner that they afforded sufficient shelter to the demented being that lived and slept beneath them.

Several old battered tin cans formed his kitchen utensils, and from a secluded corner he produced a tin lamp, and soon illumined his strange abode with its feeble rays. A heap of leaves formed the couch for the idiot and his dog, and a few crackers and bones gave evidence of a recent meal. The dog entered the "apartment" and sought the furthest corner.

"Tiberius! you will have to occupy the parlor all to yourself to-night, for I'm going out. There's business on hand. I want you to sleep with one eye open, do you hear? If I'm not home in two or three hours, I want you to come and look for me, *same as you always do.*"

The idiot spoke in a low, soothing tone, and the brute listened as if he understood the import of the maniac's instructions.

The idiot extinguished the lamp, and again speaking a few words of caution to the dog, he strode away at a rapid gait toward the distant haunt of the Wolves of Satan's Gap.

Like a ghostly visitor from the other world the idiot flitted along, talking incessantly to himself, but in a hushed voice.

Mile after mile he traversed, until the dark precincts of the Gap hove in sight.

The moonbeams now and then sent slanting rays of silvery light across the path; but Tim seemed anxious to avoid it. He crept along in the gloom like an evil spirit, shunning the bright spots and selecting the dark. Finally his steps became slower, and he glided forward very cautiously. Suddenly he sunk to the earth, and crept on his hands and knees and peered over a large boulder that arose in his path. He gathered himself as if for a sudden leap. A slight pause and he darted forward, and the next moment he had borne a human figure down upon the rocky surface of the earth. His long fingers encircled the throat of the person he had overpowered, and his knees were planted upon the prostrate man's chest. It was the bandit sentry.

"Not a word, you whelp!" hissed the idiot, as his grasp tightened about the bandit's throat.

The desperado made several efforts to shake off his antagonist and call for help, but the idiot choked the cry in its very utterance.

"I'm a fool," said he, "but I know how to go to work when I have an object in view. Don't move, or I'll choke you dead."

There was no need of thus warning the prostrate sentry, for his struggles had ceased, and he lay perfectly motionless.

The maniac had strangled him! The strange being arose, and for a moment he stood gazing at the form lying motionless at his feet.

"He's dead," he chuckled; "I couldn't help it. He was in the way, and he'd kill me if he could. Ah! that's the way it is in this world; we're all taking chances. It's by mere chance that we succeed. Now—what next?" said he, musingly.

He again began creeping forward and crossed the open space leading to the series of hidden caverns in the mountain of rock. He flitted from boulder to boulder, searching for a favorable ingress. He had approached the Gap by a different route, and therefore a much more difficult one than that traversed by the stage line. When Crazy Tim reached the summit of the outlaws' citadel, the stage-coach robbery had transpired fully an hour previous. The idiot continued his careful scrutiny of the surroundings. Everything was as silent as the grave; not a sound broke the quiet, save the distant hoot of an owl or the plaintive cry of a night bird.

Not a ray of light came from the Heavens upon the section of the Gap where the idiot was pursuing his investigations. He had reached a point of massive rocks overlooking the center of the Gap, when his attention was attracted by the low hum of human voices and a feeble ray of light that suddenly gleamed through the crevices in the layers of rock. He drew nearer, and sought a spot where he could obtain a view of the interior of the place reflecting the light.

To his astonishment he beheld a low cavern and a half dozen human beings flitting to and fro within it. An outlaw bearing a torch revealed the interior of the chamber to the hidden watcher. The sight that caused a slight exclamation to fall from the idiot's lips was the bound figure of the German in the act of being

placed over the powder-keg and fastened to the iron ring in the rocky floor.

The idiot saw the powder train upon the cavern's foundation, and a hoarse cry of fury escaped from him. He understood the situation at a glance. Scarcely had he noted the scene below when the outlaws strode out of the rocky chamber and closed the heavy door.

The idiot tore at the yielding rocks with desperation. He flung his tattered jacket into a pool of water near by and seized the wet garment in a frenzied manner. A cry of horror broke from his lips, for a flash appeared under the door. The bandit had fired the powder train!

CHAPTER IX.

TIBERIUS TO THE RESCUE.—DAVID DRYDEN IS BAFFLED.—DIETRICH'S NARROW ESCAPE.—A FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

Crazy Tim made a superhuman effort and dislodged several slabs of stone in such a manner that it made an opening large enough to admit his body.

The next moment he had leaped through this aperture and was standing upon the cavern's floor. Not an instant too soon, for the fiery trail of powder was sputtering and flashing along the damp floor toward the bound man on the keg.

The idiot sprang forward midway between the victim and the door and dashed his wet jacket upon the powder train and flung himself upon it, crushing, smothering and scattering the trail that was leading the fiery serpent to a final explosion.

The flashing explosive hissed and struggled beneath the wet garment, but it failed to pass the barrier thus interposed.

The person bound to the keg was saved. A moment later Crazy Tim was darting toward the German, and with his curious dagger he severed the ropes and drew Dietrich away from the keg.

"Now up through that hole you see there! Quick! quick! or you'll go through the roof helped along by the powder!" cried the idiot, wildly, as he pushed the German toward the hole in the side of the chamber. The German did not await a second bidding, but darted toward the exit made by the idiot.

Outside of the heavy door, but at a safe distance, stood David Dryden and his ruffians awaiting the explosion.

The outlaw stood at a respectable distance, with a grim smile upon his face.

Several seconds elapsed and a look of uneasiness stole upon the bandit's features.

Had the plan failed? Was the powder not fired properly?

"No," said the ruffian, in reply to his mental inquiries, for had he not fired the powder train himself and seen the flash?

Something was surely wrong. After a few moments of impatience, Dryden darted toward the door. Calling for the bandit bearing the torch, he flung open the heavy doors and held the torch in such a manner as to reveal the chamber.

A horrible oath flew from his lips. The cavern contained nothing but the keg and pieces of severed rope. The doomed man was gone! The powder trail was scattered, half consumed! Another exclamation of rage and blasphemy issued from the villain's lips as he discovered the hole in the wall of the cavern whereby his victim and his rescuer had escaped. David Dryden foamed like a madman.

"After them! By all means, capture the Dutchman! But use every exertion to catch the person who entered this cavern! He possesses our secrets and it is safe to say that he knows our hidden retreat. Go! Go! Why do you stand here listening and yawning like idiots?"

With a hoarse cry, David Dryden clambered up the rocks and passed out through the passage made by the maniac, followed by his confederate.

The bandit chief gained the open air and his eyes scanned the surroundings for some traces of the fugitives.

In the meantime, Crazy Tim and his companion were soon without the cavern.

Both paused for a single minute to determine the next move.

"Which way now?" cried Tim. "Will you fly or will you assist the woman whom he holds in his talons as the hawk holds the little, helpless bird?"

"I will not leave this place until I have made a final effort to rescue her!" said Dietrich firmly.

The dialect was certainly far from German or broken English, but the maniac did not seem to notice the tone of voice or the accent.

"Then follow me!" said he. "I'll show you the entrance, and while we are busy at the other end of their den, we'll force an entrance into this part of it."

The strange creature, perfectly rational in his advice and plans, darted forward, closely followed by the stout German. A short run brought them to a low round opening in the face of the towering rocks, and into this particular aperture the idiot ran, followed by Dietrich. Both rushed onward quickly but silently. A dozen yards brought them into the low, vaulted passage and then by a series of chambers, the Dutchman led the way toward the room where Ethel remained closely watched by the outlaw known as Hank.

It will be remembered that Dietrich, although apparently blindfolded, had observed the passages and gained a knowledge of the chambers.

In a few moments he searched the rocky apartment. Hank still sat before the fire, and the effects of the liquor were causing the outlaw to nod and partially fall asleep.

With one quick bound Dietrich was at Hank's side, and one well-dealt blow sent the bandit sprawling from his seat.

Hank's head came in violent contact with the hard floor, and his senses were completely knocked out of his head. He lay passive and motionless, while the German sprang quickly toward Ethel.

The girl uttered a glad cry of surprise as her eyes rested upon her deliverer.

She had witnessed the scene where her champion had been led away to certain death and his sudden appearance and escape from the murderous crew who had dragged him from the cavern was something beyond her comprehension. She uttered a glad cry that suddenly seemed to come from her very heart and she looked at the German with eyes still dimmed with tears.

Why did she find her heart attracted toward this person? Why did her heart throb so wildly when her eyes looked into his? She could not find an answer to these queries, although she had sought one over and over again, since the ruffian crew had led her champion away to the death threatened by the bandit leader of the league.

Again the glad cry issued from her lips. Dietrich sprang toward her and seized her hands.

"Trust me! Come with me! I am sent here by Jack Hilton!" said the German in quick sentences. And then he gently but hurriedly led her from the cavern, while the idiot ran on in advance.

From the distant part of the chambers adjoining came the wild shouts of the outlaws whom Dryden had delegated as pursuers. A hurried tramping of feet came from the various passages close at hand.

"Quick! Don't lose a moment, or escape is impossible!" cried the idiot. "Hark! They're on our track!"

Dietrich knew by the sound of many voices that the bandits had reached the chamber from which he had just escaped and they had discovered the absence of Ethel and had also found the prostrate form of the sentry. The German hastened onward and sought to speak an encouraging word to the trembling girl at his side.

"Courage!" he whispered. "A few moments longer and we are out of these vaults!"

"Now, then! One more dash and we are safe!" cried the maniac.

But following the expression came a hoarse cry of mingled rage and surprise from his lips, and without another word, he climbed the side of the passage like a huge ape and disappeared in the gloom.

Dietrich started back nervously and drew the girl towards him.

He saw the cause of the maniac's strange action and a groan of despair arose to his lips.

Standing directly in the narrow entrance and barring all further passage was the leader of the outlaws, David Dryden, and behind him, with weapons ready for immediate use, were fully twenty of his ruffianly followers.

Close behind them came the tramp of the remainder of the pursuers. They were hemmed in upon all sides! Before they could recover from their surprise, the outlaw leader's hoarse voice rang through the arched passage:

"So you're not satisfied with escape and safety for yourself, eh? You must take my promised wife with you! Your race is run and you have fallen out of the frying pan into the fire."

Even as the bandit concluded, a swarm of scowling ruffians was at the German's back, and encumbered with the frightened girl he was overpowered and again a helpless victim in the hands of his merciless foe.

But where was the idiot? Crouching between the jagged rocks and viewing the scene from his elevated position.

His restless eyes wandered until they rested upon Dryden's features. A muttered exclamation fell from his lips, but he stifled the words and clenched his hands wildly.

"It is he!" he murmured. "But Tiberius will tell me if I am right or wrong!"

He watched the outlaw group bearing away their prisoners until the torches faded away in the gloom of the passage. He then descended and made his way toward the exit. He peered out into the night and paused.

"It won't do to leave him! I must follow a different plan! The odds are too much for us! I have got to rack my brains—brains! Have I got any? They all say I am a fool. I am crazy Tim. I don't know any-

thing. I'll show 'em some day whether or not I'm as big a fool as they think I am! Oh! If this should be the man! If this should be the one I am tracking! But Tiberius will be sure of it! He's got more sense than I have. I haven't got any at all. I'm crazy! I'm a fool! He! He! He!"

The idiot suddenly checked his outburst of laughter.

"Somebody might hear me," he muttered, "and then I'd be prevented from helping my friends."

He passed out into the gloom of night and made his way toward the portion of the rocky wall where first he had seen a ray of light through the rifts in the rocks.

He determined to seek an entrance to the cavern from that point.

The moon occasionally shown through the mass of clouds, but the shadow of the towering rocks prevented a safe passage toward the abandoned cave where the German had so narrowly escaped a fearful death.

The idiot reached the spot where he had thrust aside the rocks, and was in the act of passing inward when he was seized by a pair of hands and borne backward upon the ground and the cold muzzle of a pistol was presented to his temple.

Quick as a flash the maniac thrust aside the weapon and seized the hand that held it.

Next he uttered a peculiar cry or whistle that rang out upon the still night air and awoke the echoes far and near.

A dark form came bounding through the gloom.

There was a sudden rush, a spring accompanied by a growl, and the outlaw that held the idiot was torn from the outstretched form and the fangs of a huge beast were fixed at his throat.

It was the idiot's dog, the huge Great Dane, and he tore at the throat of the fallen outlaw like a famished tiger rending its prey.

CHAPTER X.

CRAZY TIM'S TRICK.—A MASTERLY DISGUISE.—THE WOLVES OF THE GAP ARE TRICKED.—A DESPERATE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

When the would-be assassin sprang forward to attack the idiot, he had thrown aside the wolf-head which he wore and thus, unencumbered by the mask, he nimbly leaped upon the person who was about to enter.

The huge Great Dane now stood above the piercing mass of humanity and at a low call from its master, came forward leaving the mangled outlaw reluctantly.

"Let him alone," said the idiot in a low tone. "He can't do any more mischief. Come, let's get him out of the way."

Crazy Tim raised the body and bearing it towards the verge of the cliff, he removed the peculiar coat worn by the dead man and then pushed the corpse from the awful heights. Both dog and man listened from the brink of the cliff as the corpse shot downward into the intense gloom below.

The weird figure of the idiot leaned over the towering rocks awaiting some sound from the gloom beneath.

A dull crash came from the black gulf. A grim smile played upon Crazy Tim's features as he heard the sound.

Then the slayer withdrew from the verge of the cliff and placed the dead man's coat upon himself.

Several rods away from the spot, where the encounter had taken place, Tim found the revolver and further on the curious mask worn by the bandit.

It was the head and features of a gray wolf or rather the skin of that animal mounted upon a frame-work of cloth and pasteboard. It covered the face, and the loose skin falling over the head and neck completely masked the person who wore it. Two eye-holes enabled the person to see distinctly and also to breathe with ease.

The idiot placed the mask upon his face and then spoke a few words to his dog.

"Tiberius, you must get out of this place, but I want you to prowl around in the neighborhood. You know what I am saying, don't you? Now go, and mind you keep your ears open in case I call you again."

The intelligent animal seemed to understand, for uttering a low whine, he disappeared in the shadows.

"There's no use talking. That dog's the wisest animal on the face of the earth. He understands Crazy Tim and obeys his wishes. Poor Tiberius! If anything should happen to me, what would he do?"

A form suddenly emerged from the rocky wall opposite and approached the idiot.

"Millington, is that you?"

For a moment Crazy Tim hesitated about making a reply.

"Yes. What's the matter?" he demanded.

The mask he wore muffled his voice and the approaching bandit apparently did not discover the trick. So far Crazy Tim was safe in the character he had assumed. A moment later the newcomer was close at hand and he halted.

"What are you doing with your mask on?" asked the bandit, presently.

"Oh, I kept it on just for deviltry. I'm on post to-night and I found it easier to wear it than to carry it or take it to the cavern."

The idiot spoke at random, but strange to say the explanation was perfectly satisfactory to the bandit, who did not dream of the daring cheat thus perpetrated upon him.

"What's the Captain going to do with the Dutchman?" Tim inquired.

"Oh, he'll give us a treat, no doubt. The Captain is a great hand to originate sensational things to please the boys. But Millington, between us, I think the Captain's a little gone in his upper story. He's fooling valuable time away on that girl he's got in the cavern. You know our business motto is 'Make hay while the sun shines.' We made a big haul to-night, but the chances are we won't make another in a hurry. Now, you see, while the Captain's brain is full of love and beauty, he can't plan as he'd ought to. A man in this business wants a clear head and no anchors around his neck. The robbery to-night will raise a breeze in Virginia City, and you bet, the next treasure box that leaves the town won't fall into our clutches as easy as this one did. If Captain Wild-Fire wasn't getting love-sick and soft-headed, he'd be in Virginia City to-night and get the 'points' for the next move."

Crazy Tim listened attentively to the bandit's revelations, and now and then grunted an approval.

"What do you think of it?" said the outlaw.

"Same as you do!" replied Tim.

"I tell you what it is, Millington, while Wild-Fire attended to business he was truly the best of them all. Not a single treasure-box escaped the Wolves of the

Gap. But see! this is the first one in two weeks when we might have several more. He's kept this girl a captive in these regions just long enough to lose his brain. I tell you he's losing ground with us, and you needn't be surprised if we oust him out of the league and put some one in his place who will work better for the interest of the Wolves."

Here was an open rebellion in Wild-Fire's camp, and that fearless ruffian was even now in danger of being deposed or destroyed by the lawless men he ruled and who he had ruled like a tyrant. While he led them on to spoils they submitted gracefully, but now that his love-making interfered with the "business" of the league, he was in danger of being exterminated by his "Wolves."

Crazy Tim coincided with everything said by the bandit and appeared to join heartily in the mutiny.

Thanks to the mask that the idiot had placed over his head and features, he escaped detection in voice and appearance.

"Keep mum about what I've told you Millington," warned the bandit. "We want to know who to be sure of before we make a move—savez?"

"Correct!" replied Tim. "But am I to be relieved to-night?"

"Yes, I'm out here for that purpose. I thought you knew that. You're getting absent-minded, ain't you?"

"Yes. It's lonesome out here, and I'm apt to get absent-minded," confessed the maniac in a rational manner, and perfectly at home with his unsuspecting listener.

"Don't stay out here too long," said the outlaw; "take off that mask when you go in. Keep mum about the racket we're fixing up for Wild-Fire."

Without another word the bandit sentry strode along toward the point he was to occupy during the remainder of the night.

Tim watched the retreating figure and carefully noted the spot where it had halted, and then walked slowly toward the outlaw's retreat.

"So, Mister Wild-Fire, you're losing ground, eh?" muttered the idiot, as he moved toward the secret entrance. "That's good news; the Vigilantes will have easy work if that's the case."

Tim found the low opening from which the bandit had just issued, and the next moment he had passed into the tunnel-like entrance.

A faint ray of light appeared in the distance, and Tim knew that within a few minutes he would again be in the presence of some member or members of the fraternity of desperadoes. If he removed the mask he would surely be discovered, and if he retained it he would excite suspicion.

While thus hesitating he chanced to glance to the left of the passage, and in a species of alcove he saw the hideous masks of the outlaw brotherhood deposited upon the rocky shelves. Scarcely knowing why he seized one of the masks and quickly bore it away toward the open space outside the cavern.

Carefully he crept along and deposited the fantastic mask behind a large rock, and quickly returned and again went forward through the passage.

The low hum of voices came from the vaulted chamber directly in advance, and Tim knew a crisis was at hand. A few steps further on and he saw the boisterous group that had first attracted his attention. They were seated around a small table engaged in

throwing dice for sums of money that lay scattered upon the rough table. Several bottles served to show the real cause of their hilarity.

They were divested of their masks and their features were plainly visible as they sat beneath a swinging lamp. Even as Tim discovered the group several of the assemblage looked up and espied the masked figure.

"Hello! Here's Millington!" said one of the players. "Come, pard; you're just in time. Only five dollars ante and three fives to beat."

It was an unexpected invitation, and Tim scarcely knew what to say.

"Wait till I take off my mask," said he, turning to depart.

"No matter about that; come on, we're waiting for you," said the desperado at the table. "Put up your shekels and take hold of the box!"

Unconsciously Tim slipped his hand into the coat pocket of the garment he wore, and which he had removed from the dead bandit, and his fingers came in contact with a small sack which he rightly assumed contained gold-dust. He approached the table and laid the little bag upon it, and seized the dice-box. He rattled the dice in their leather sheath and rolled them out upon the table.

"Three sixes!" roared the bandit. "There's luck for you. Scoop it in, pard!"

Tim gathered in the amount upon the table, and the ante again was advanced for another trial.

"He wears the mask for luck!" roared the desperado at the head of the table, and after quaffing from the bottle, he seized the dice-box and again invoked the fickle goddess.

"That's so. If he wins this time he'll have to take it off," cried another.

"Good! good!" yelled the group, ready for any suggestion.

A new danger had suddenly arisen. Of course there were ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that Tim would not win, *but if he did* he would be compelled to remove the mask, and then—what?

A desperate struggle for life and liberty. It would never do to refuse unmasking, and the strange creature seemed to realize his peril, for his hand trembled as he placed the amount of money upon the table.

The outlaws began to play. One after another cast the dice upon the boards, and boisterous laughter followed the small counts, while cheering expressions greeted the more fortunate members of the group.

"Now then, Millington! Grab the box and let's see what kind of luck you'll have this time. Here's my regards," and the outlaw again emptied the bottle of a copious draught.

Tim took the dice-box in his trembling hand and hesitated a moment. The highest count was sixteen. Upon the casting of the dice his very existence hung. His life was at stake!

If he could but manage to throw the accursed pieces of bone in such a manner as to register a low count he would be safe.

A quick short movement of the three dice and he cast them upon the table.

"Hell and furies! Three sixes again!" roared the group as they bent forward to ascertain the result.

Before Tim could stir hand or foot a hurried footstep sounded in an adjoining passage and a hoarse cry arose as if from many persons in quick pursuit.

The next moment the figure of Dietrich, the German, bounded into the room.

Tim seized a bottle from the table and hurled it at the swinging lamp, smashing it, and plunging the chamber in darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

"BIND HIM HAND AND FOOT!"—THE GERMAN'S PERIL.—
THE DISCOVERY IN THE CHEST.—THE OUTLAW'S
HIDEOUS CRIME.

David Dryden and his followers entered the cavern with the German in their midst. The outlaw chief was in high glee and a demoniacal expression rested upon his evil countenance as he reached the central chamber.

"Bind him hand and foot. Do not leave the slightest chance open for escape. Where's Hank?"

"Laid up. He's got a tough blow on the top of his head. He hasn't come to yet," responded a bandit.

Dryden's rage was something terrible to behold. He cursed the assembled group for their lack of vigilance. He knew that some one had aided the prisoner's escape and thus prevented the consummation of his well-laid plan. The manner in which he had bound the German to the powder-keg and laid the train could not possibly fail to accomplish his purpose unless aided by a traitor among the men he commanded, or by some outside friend. Who was it? Who was the person that had foiled him? Dryden found no satisfactory reply to these questions.

He contented himself by ordering the German bound in such a manner that he could not move.

Then the outlaw looked scornfully at the helpless man and spurned him with his foot.

"You dog! I'll teach you a lesson that you'll remember until you're launched out of this world. Rest easy until morning, and then you'll take a walk out of this sphere, mighty lively."

Dryden saw that Ethel was again placed in her apartment and posted several of his confederates to guard the passages leading into that particular cavern. He attended to the details in person and then returned to the chamber where the German lay upon the rocky floor.

Dryden had resolved to force a confession from the lips of his captive and thus discover who it was that had aided him to escape from the abandoned vault. First he drew a brace of pistols and then summoned several of his followers. He approached Dietrich and in a harsh tone of voice addressed him.

"You've had an accomplice to aid you to escape. No living man could possibly escape from that cavern bound as you were to that keg by the iron ring and the powder train actually fired. Now I have made up my mind to know who it was that aided you. Don't try to evade the question for I'll have an answer if I have to put you to the torture and rack every bone and muscle in your body."

The German made no reply; in fact he did not raise his eyes to see who it was that addressed him.

"Did you hear me speak?" thundered the outlaw chief.

"Vas you talking mit me?" asked Dietrich calmly as he met the gaze of the ruffian.

"Yes; who was your accomplice? Give me his name."

"Vot is dot—accomplices?"

"Confound your stupidity!" cried the impatient villain. "Who helped you?"

"I always hellup mineself!"

"Your fool's reply will not avail you. I know that some one cut the ropes and helped you through the hole made in the side of the cave. *Who was it?*"

"I don't vas know. I didn't see nobodies."

"Here! Several of you take down those ropes and string him up by the thumbs. I'll bet that will soon bring him to his senses," cried Dryden.

Two outlaws unfastened ropes that were attached to the roof of the cavern, and allowed them to fall to the floor in such a manner that by seizing one end of the rope the other end could be drawn upward, thereby elevating whatever might be attached to the other strand. A moment later and Dietrich's hands were released, and in turn they were fastened to this rope.

At a signal from the outlaw chief the German was hauled upward until his feet were a few yards from the rocky floor.

"Now my fine fellow, if you don't unloosen your tongue I'll put weights to your feet, and you'll be mighty glad to confess before many of them are attached, I can tell you."

"All right; let me down; I will tell you all about it," said Dietrich.

The German was lowered to the floor.

"Who was it?" demanded Dryden, impatiently.

"*Dot feller vot you call Hank!*"

"Hank a traitor!" shouted the bandit leader. "I thought so. He dies!"

By this falsehood Dietrich imperiled the life of a human being; but was not his own at stake? And was not the entire league his enemies? He had escaped the dreadful torture that Dryden would surely inflict upon him, and also concealed the fact that Crazy Tim was at that moment in the vicinity of the robbers' cavern.

"Release him from the rope," said Dryden "and mind you put Hank into a safe place. You know the fate of a traitor?"

"Death!" yelled the villainous crew.

"Yes, and a speedy one," added Dryden. "I am convinced that Hank is a traitor and connived at his escape, for I left him bound securely, and when I returned my pistols were gone and the Dutchman's hands were free; and now his confession settles all doubts that were in my mind. Hank dies."

Again was the German secured, but the bandits were listening so eagerly to Dryden's words that they accomplished their work in a bungling manner, and Dietrich placed his hands in such a manner that one of them was almost free from the thongs.

In more respects than one Dryden's plan of putting the German to a torture test had proved, so far, highly beneficial to the Teuton.

In the excitement, the imperfect tying was not noticed, and Dietrich groaned as if the thongs were cutting into his wrists. The outlaws cast him upon the floor in a rough manner.

"Lay there a few hours," growled Dryden. "And picture to yourself the most horrible death you can imagine, and that will be your death, for I will rack my brain to find a most novel and hideous one for you!"

"Much obliged mit you," answered the German. "Don't you hurry about dot!"

"Enjoy yourself if you can," growled Dryden savagely, "for I can assure you that you'll face death in a most terrible form!"

"All righd! Death ain'd afraid of me!" responded Dietrich calmly.

"Watch him!" cried Dryden to his men. "Don't one of you leave this chamber for a moment. Your lives are responsible for his safe keeping!"

"All right, Captain!"

The outlaw chief strode out of the cavern and sought his own quarters. A comfortable couch stood in one corner of a small rock-bound chamber and a rough table and several boxes comprised the furniture. Stacks of fire-arms lay in all corners as if the outlaw had selected a chamber at once for his sleeping apartment and armory. A large chest occupied one corner of the room. A few shelves lined the rocky wall and upon the topmost was the mask worn by the outlaw chieftain.

A swinging lamp shed its fitful glare upon the surroundings and a beholder would have been transported to the rock-bound den of the buccaneers of old instead of to the modern retreat of the outlaw.

The reign of the nights of the road is short but terrible in its sway. Until the outraged community arises in its might and lynch law is meted out to the daring outlaws, they continue to spread terror and dismay and are never driven from their strongholds without a terrible conflict and loss of life.

Dryden sat down for a few moments, and after a short rest, he approached the chest, opened it and took from its depths a small package, and bringing it to the table he unloosed the bindings.

"It strikes me that I have a valuable document here," he smiled. "When my sway becomes shaky and these regions too hot for me, it will become me to seek other pastures. I have laid up a goodly sum and can live at the best places of other climes, in ease for the remainder of my life. With Ethel as my wife my existence will be blissful. This paper will bring me a small fortune. It is my uncle's will. He left the bulk of his property to my sister and in case of her death, not having children, the property was to be mine. My sister married. Ah, how near that came to the upsetting of my plans! If she had children it would surely dash my hopes to the ground. And she had children—too late did I see my error—she never should have been allowed to live to marry."

A fiendish expression came over the outlaw's writhing face as he spoke.

"But then I had no rear glances to aid my judgement," he added. "I studied everything carefully, and resolved that neither she, nor the two children she bore, a boy or girl, should inherit the money. Come what may the three must not stand in the way of my fortune; the cash I needed so badly. Then came more heavy losses at the gaming table, until I was reduced to beggary, and she thinking to reform me, denied the paltry dollars I begged for. What was to be done?"

In his retrospection Dryden arose and paced back and forth. Then he resumed his muttering confession.

"I was desperate. The children must be got out of the way first. I could look out for the boy—I stole him one dark night and sent him to my outlaw friends in the West. He went down to oblivion at their hands—but the girl? Try as I would I could not get a

chance to abduct her. I had intended to steal both the boy and the girl at once. But my plan miscarried. So I enlisted Tornado Bess, the old hag, that presides over that part of the Wolves who are stationed at Rabbit Island—they are the Outlaws of Rabbit Island—and there I send the injured of our gang of Wolves here, to be nursed back to health and usefulness (to me) again.”

Busy with his thoughts, Dryden paused and gazed thoughtfully about him.

“The old hag Tornado Bess, was a pretty girl then,” he murmured. “She’s nothing now but a wreck. But Bess Elmore was a pretty lass in those days and she loved me and for me consented to abduct the golden-haired child, the baby girl of my sister. I remember that scene well. Bess dashed up to my sister’s house on horseback and rushed off with the child—

“You will never see this child again,” screamed Tornado Bess, as she dashed away on her great white steed.

“And I hidden in the bushes saw it all—and that was the end of the child. She died in a month babbling for her mother—and then with the children out of the way, I made my great coup.”

The outlaw’s face grew white and grim, and he glanced uneasily about as if in fear.

“Inflamed by wine, I forced an entrance into my sister’s apartment, and seizing a dagger used as a letter opener, I dashed the knife blade into my only sister’s heart. She sank dead before me with a groan of agony. I took all of value that I could find rightly thinking that the crime would then be looked upon as the work of unknown burglars. I found the will, and then I made a dash for my liberty. Before I could reach the lawn a huge dog sprang at me, and a fearful encounter took place. Fortunately, I seized a huge stone and battered the brute’s head, until he released me and sunk apparently lifeless upon the ground. I secreted the will and the valuables, and then gave the alarm. Neighbors flocked to my assistance, and we searched far and wide for the supposed robber and assassin. I flew into fits of grief, and acted my part so well that I really excited sympathy. I was compelled to chain up the great dog as the creature made several attempts to leap upon me in its blind fury.

“As a matter, of course, the assassin was never discovered. The grief-stricken husband arrived after his wife had laid under the sod for several weeks, but in that space I had filed my claim to my uncle’s estate and then disappeared from the neighborhood. My sister’s husband was almost crazed by the occurrence, and he too, disappeared from the vicinity. Is it my fancy or is it real that I am being tracked by an avenging Nemesis? The spirit of my murdered sister, and the form of her husband with the curious dagger I killed my sister with in his hand, seem waiting the chance to deal out retributive justice to me. They seem to follow wherever I roam. Even here in the wilds, surrounded by my lawless crew, I start and shudder at every shadow that crosses my path, and I dread to be alone with my guilty conscience.”

As the blood stained ruffian concluded his review of his horrible past he drew the document from the package, and as he did so a photograph fell from it to the floor.

Dryden shuddered and drew back from it as if a deadly reptile had stung him. It was the picture of the sister he had murdered, and the features were turned toward

him, and a voice seemed to shriek in his ears: “*Murderer! Your hour is at hand!*”

CHAPTER XII.

THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE.—DIETRICH GETS HIS CHANCE.—
CRAZY TIM’S NEAT RUSE.—A NARROW SQUEAK.

David Dryden, the outlaw, started convulsively and turned as if the voice had issued from the lips of some one at his side.

It was only the voice of his conscience that thus terrified him, and as he realized that he was absolutely alone in a small cavern his fears passed away and his features wore a calm expression. Like men of his class, he was really a craven at heart. Yet this same outlaw plunged often into a conflict like a tiger, when surrounded by his league. He had performed prodigious deeds of valor before he had been selected ruler of the fighting band that infested Satan’s Gap, as well as of the other band of outlaws led by Tornado Bess at Rabbit Island.

Dryden had killed his man in many a bar-room encounter. He was a quick shot with the revolver and a most dangerous customer with the Bowie-knife.

His reckless courage and apparent bravery had won for him the position of chief and he did not lack bravery when his “Wolves” were near, and when a foe faced him.

Yet he trembled when alone—trembled when he thought of his guilt, and shrunk from its memories.

He stooped down and picked up the fallen portrait, and with unsteady fingers replaced it within the documents. He wondered how it found its way among the papers forming the package. He did not examine the remainder of the documents but again replaced them within the sheet. He almost felt sorry that he had brought them out from their resting place.

His mind next reverted to his prisoners. He would mete out a terrible fate to the German; and as for Ethel he would lose no time in making her his wife by any means which the situation would require, and thus settle the two questions uppermost in his mind.

“It was not wise for me to remain away from Virginia City tonight,” he muttered. “I should have mounted a fleet horse and have ridden into town. My absence, on a night like this, will connect me with the robbery, but what do I care? An Army couldn’t dislodge me from this stronghold, and as for the Vigilantes, I’ll teach them to give Wild-Fire a wide berth in the future.”

He flung himself upon the couch and tried in vain to close his eyes in sleep. He lay tossing until the gray dawn appeared in the Eastern skies and yet sleep had not visited his weary lids.

In the meantime, Dietrich lay upon the rocky floor, while several yards away, two armed bandits carefully watched the captive. Outside of the chamber was a wide passage, and in this open space a group of outlaws sat about a rough table engaged with the dice-box, and risking sums of gold-dust and money upon the result. Their boisterous laughter reached the ears of the two bandits guarding the prisoner, and their eyes often turned toward that direction as if they longed to join the merry group.

“By Jove! this is lonesome work,” said the stouter of the two, after a long silence.

“Yes, and all useless! The prisoner is tied so he can’t move hand or foot, and I don’t see why we should rob ourselves of a little sport. As if any one could reach him without attracting our attention! And who’s to do it, anyway?”

"That's so," replied the stout bandit. "I tell you what I'll do. Say we take turns in watching? You go and play for a short time. Then you return and let me go. In that way the night will pass pleasantly and perhaps, profitably."

"That's so!"

During all this time the German lay apparently asleep, and once during a lull in the conversation he snored like a diminutive saw-mill in full blast. The two bandits listened and the younger of the outlaws said in a hushed voice:

"Did you hear that?"

"Yes; he's sleeping," was the reply.

"Don't you think he is playing possum?"

"No; and if he was what difference does it make? He's tied up like a turkey for the oven. He's asleep, you can bet on it, pard!"

As if to add a convincing proof of the outlaw's assertion the German snored still louder and murmured in his sleep.

This seemed to remove all lingering doubts in the minds of the two and they felt sure the prisoner was in the land of dreams.

The youngest arose and passed out to the open space in the tunnel-like passage where his brother outlaws were engaged with the dice-box.

During the time that the remaining bandit mounted guard Dietrich kept him in full view through his partially closed eyes. When the noise of the fun outside caused his sentry to become restless and stroll to the opening in the tunnel, in the twinkling of an eye Dietrich had slipped his hands out of the thongs that bound them, but he lay still as death when the outlaw turned again to resume his vigil. When the outlaw again looked toward his gambling friends Dietrich was busy in unfastening the ropes about his feet.

It was about this time that Crazy Tim entered the space where the outlaws were playing and joined them.

The guard watching Dietrich finally placed himself upon a projecting rock, facing the captive. His head dropped lower and lower after a time, and with a few gentle snores he passed into oblivion.

Dietrich took his chance. He glided toward the sentry, seized a rifle that lay beside the sleeping bandit, raised it aloft and brought down the stock upon his head.

It was a terrific blow, and the dozing outlaw sunk without a groan to the rocky floor.

Dietrich then turned to flee!

In his bewilderment he darted into the passage leading toward the gambling outlaws and almost at the same moment several forms appeared from a distant opening and saw the escaping prisoner. One hurried glance and they understood the entire situation, and uttering shouts of rage, dashed in pursuit.

Before they could get near to Dietrich, however, the lamp in the cavern was dashed into fragments and an impenetrable gloom enveloped friend and foe.

Dietrich felt his hand grasped and a familiar voice rang in his ear:

"Follow me! Don't let go of my hand!"

The speaker was Crazy Tim and he led the way rapidly through the dark passage, while the shouts of the outlaws echoed through the arched chambers, as they stumbled about madly shouting for a light.

Crazy Tim and the German made good use of this respite and gained a long distance before a torch was procured and lighted.

Then came the howling bandits like a legion of fiends loosed from the infernal regions.

Several turns in the passage brought the fugitives to the exit, and a moment later they had reached the open air.

"This way—this way! I hid something here that will be useful to me now," cried Tim, as he dashed among the boulders. He ran along as if searching for a particular spot and finally stooped down and took out an object from the rocky mass. It was the wolf-mask that he had concealed there a few hours previous.

"Put this on! Quick!" he cried, in a subdued voice, as the shouts of the pursuers rung out on the night air.

He placed the mask upon the German's head, and then dashed into the jagged masses of rock rising like battlements and overlooking Satan's Gap!

The voices of the pursuers echoed from all quarters of the compass, and served to accelerate the movements of the two fugitives. Crazy Tim leaped from rock to rock, followed by his companion, until they had reached a precipitous portion of the Gap. The idiot suddenly paused.

"Look out for a sentry somewhere about this——"

"Halt! Who goes there?" said a voice proceeding from the gloom.

"The Wolves of Satan's Gap," replied the idiot, speaking in a muffled voice.

"What's the racket up there?" demanded the voice.

"One of our prisoners give us the slip. We're making for the point in the Gap where he'll be likely to try and get out. Watch this place! Come along, Millington!"

The idiot spoke hurriedly and dashed past the sentry, closely followed by the German.

A few moments later and Josh Griffith followed by several bandits, leaped toward the sentry, and Griffith exclaimed:

"Did two men pass you?"

"Yes! They gave me the pass-word!"

"Fool! You've been tricked! Those were the very two men that we're after!"

CHAPTER XIII.

DAVID DRYDEN MEETS WITH A FALL.—TAKEN.—THE VIGILANTES TAKE A SWIFT HAND.—UNMASKED.

The news of the coach robbery and the loss of the treasure-box, although guarded by an armed escort, created the wildest excitement in Virginia City. The escort was condemned, and various rumors circulated concerning the cowardly manner in which they had allowed the road-agents to surprise them and steal the treasures. Some even hinted that the escort was in league with the robbers.

A meeting of the few brave spirits who had formed themselves into a Vigilance Committee took place the very next day, and Sewell the miner guaranteed the aid of a dozen brave men to aid the Committee in purging the regions of the desperate gang that infested it.

"Furthermore," said Sewell, rising in his seat, "we'll have to strike at the head and front of this gang before we can rid the locality of them. I have my eye on the leader. This Wild-Fire is known to me—at least I suspect his identity."

"Who is it?" asked several.

"Daniel Craig! A man who comes and goes out of town with a scree on his head and yet we fail to recognize in him—the scourge of the regions—Wild-Fire!"

A low hum of surprise arose from the assemblage. The person known as Craig had ingratiated himself in the good graces of the leading men and they were slow to believe that he could be the desperado, Wild-Fire. Of course they knew that Craig was a reckless spirit—drank a little—gambled some, but they did not think he was the companion of road-agents, the very ruffian whom they had met often and whose exploits filled the country with terror.

The last rays of the setting sun were lingering upon the mountain-tops as David Dryden, knowing nothing of the meeting of the Vigilance Committee, in which it was claimed that he Daniel Craig, and the outlaw road-agent were one, rode into town unconcerned, smiling and greeting all whom he knew.

Although he presented smiling features to an observer, his heart rankled with bitter passion and low curses arose to his lips as he rode along. It seemed as if everything was going wrong, lately. Failure after failure stared him in the face when heretofore success smiled upon all his plans. As if to add to his anger he saw placards here and there offering large rewards for the capture of Wild-Fire. He remembered the day when such placards would have been torn down and the writers given a few hours to leave the town. Those were the halcyon days when he ruled supreme, when he had confederates in every nook and corner of the town. Recent arrivals and bitter feuds had removed these valuable auxiliaries, and by degrees Dryden saw his power waning fast, and his enemies growing stronger and bolder every day.

These thoughts were teeming in his brain as he rode along, little dreaming that a crisis was at hand.

A smile rested upon his lips as he saw the ruins of the fire and he reviewed the scene that had transpired upon the unsightly premises.

He soon drew rein before a drinking saloon close to the ruins, and the very first man he met was his boon companion, Bannack Bill.

At first Bannack Bill was disgruntled over the burning of his shanty by Dryden, but when Dryden shoved a roll of bills in his hand, he was placated and then the dive keeper told Dryden of the charges presented to the Vigilance Committee against him.

"Look out! You know what it means when the Vigilantes turn out," cried Bill. "There's a lynching party then, with you a dancin' on nothing!"

"Forewarned is forearmed," howled Dryden, beside himself with rage at the news. "Don't you worry—I'm over seven and can take care of myself!"

"That's right," admitted Bill. "You can do it if any one can—but say, Cap, what was the racket between you and the young feller you left to burn up in the shanty—

I tried ter git him before he got out after he unmasked our cheating faro lay-out—but I seen you could turn him off without my help?"

"Nothing! He was simply in my way. I had to be rid of him."

"You overlooked your bet then."

"Well, if my fire failed to accomplish anything, Josh Griffith shot the youth as he was leaving the shanty."

"Who did?"

"Josh Griffith."

"Josh Griffith is a lying blackguard if he says he shot Jack Hilton. The young fellow lives, for I saw him uninjured, long after Josh fired at him and then ran away like the big coward that he is."

Dryden leaped to his feet, fairly foaming with rage. He gnashed his teeth, and his fist came down upon the table, almost shattering the rickety affair.

A strange light blazed in his eyes, and a malignant scowl swept over his features.

"Not dead!" he fairly shrieked. "Griffith assured me that he saw him fall."

"'Tis false. I know that he lives."

A strange light suddenly broke in upon the outlaw. He had made a startling discovery, but did not reveal it to his companion. He started to the bar, trembling with passion, and had barely reached the counter when, from the side door and back window, a simultaneous rush took place, and before the astonished ruffian could turn to ascertain the cause of the commotion, fully a dozen pistols were leveled at his head, and determined men presented the weapons, ready to fire at the slightest movement upon the part of the bewildered outlaw.

"What's this?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Don't move hand or foot," said Frank Sewell, the miner, in a threatening voice, "or we'll riddle you with bullets."

Dryden's quick glance told him that he could expect nothing by talking to the determined men that hemmed him in. A circle of polished steel surrounded him and restless fingers toyed with the triggers.

"Put your hands behind you!" cried Sewell sternly.

Dryden obeyed, and in a few moments the outlaw was pinioned and his weapons removed from his belt.

"Now then, lead on!" said Sewell to a miner at his side, "and we'll follow with the prisoner."

Dryden gnashed his teeth in his impotent rage. Where were his followers? His friends? He thought of the day when his voice could summon a horde of desperadoes to his aid, but now he was a captive, in the hands of scarcely a dozen men. Truly, times had changed in Virginia City.

"How have the mighty fallen!" murmured the bandit as his captors led him away.

In a short time the news flew through the town. The desperate outlaw "Wild-Fire" had been captured.

The miners conducted the outlaw to a large wooden building and he was placed in a small compartment, with his arms pinioned. He knew that his life was hanging by a thread! Any moment he might be lynched!

A slight grating noise reached his ears, proceeding from the direction of the chimney-place, and even as he listened, a small stone, apparently dislodged, fell to the floor.

Some one was descending the chimney! The outlaw's heart gave a wild leap of joy as the hope of escape dawned upon him.

In a few seconds the feet of a man appeared in the opening, and then a form emerged from the chimney-place and placing a finger upon his lips to enjoin silence, the man approached the bandit.

"Hist, captain! not a word!"

"Who is it?" asked the road-agent, in a hushed whisper.

"Josh Griffith!"

Here was the man, whom Dryden had accused of rank treachery and of lying, trying to save his leader's life.

In a few seconds Griffith was by Dryden's side and his knife had severed his bonds. Not a moment too soon! For even as Griffith and Dryden disappeared from the top of the chimney the door below in the room was opened by Sewell with a rope in his hand. He led a party of miners who had come to hang the detected outlaw, Dryden!

The miners made a rush toward the front of the building when they saw that their prey had escaped just as a man sprang from the darkness and attempted to speed away on a waiting horse. A simultaneous discharge of firearms followed. In the smoke a second horseman darted away but the first man lay writhing in mortal agony on the ground. His shrieks were soon stilled as death overtook him.

"This is Josh Griffith," cried Sewell as he leaned over the prostrate and dead outlaw. "The other horseman was Dryden, our late prisoner. He has escaped!"

Meanwhile Dryden was fleeing with all speed toward the Gap with renewed courage in his heart, not caring that Griffith had laid down his life to save his chief. Dryden reached the outskirts of the retreat, and had not proceeded far when in the faint moonlight he came upon the prostrate body of a man lying directly in the path. Dryden reigned in his horse, placed a silver whistle to his lips and his peculiar signal echoed from crag to crag. Dark forms soon appeared and the bandit-leader was soon surrounded by his pet Wolves.

When they looked at the prostrate man, lying in the road his features were seen to be those of a comparative stranger to the bandits, although he wore on his head the wolf mask of the band.

"That's one of the fellers we are after," cried an outlaw who held a lantern. "He's the feller that helped that Dutchman to give us the slip."

It was Crazy Tim. And when an outlaw felt of his heart, it beat faintly and so he told his chief that the man they had found was still alive.

"By all means revive him," cried Dryden. "I'll put him to torture that will make an Indian turn green with envy."

The outlaw leader felt in rare good humor to think of the vengeance he would wreak upon the meddler. Several outlaws bore the insensible body of the idiot into the retreat, and spirits were forced into his throat; by degrees he revived and opened his eyes. An ugly wound upon his head bled profusely, and lent a terrible aspect to his wild features.

The eyes, however, beamed with a strange light, and the instant that they rested upon David Dryden, a cry something like the cry of a wild animal wounded to death, broke from Crazy Tim.

"I know you! I know you!" he shrieked. "Vengeance for my murdered wife—your sister!"

He sprang upon the outlaw, and his long talon-like fingers buried themselves in the bandit's throat. The idiot bore Dryden to the rocky floor and paralyzed every effort to escape that terrible grasp.

"Take him away! Take him away! Why do you stand there while he's tearing me with his dagger-like fingers?" cried Dryden, in tones of agony.

Several bandits finally by dint of blows compelled Tim to release the gasping outlaw.

"Villain! Murderer!" hissed Tim. "Do you remember the sister you slew? Do you remember the boy you foully abducted, and the daughter you had Tornado Bess steal to wreck its life—dog that you are? I am the husband of your sister, and am her avenger! I have searched far and wide for you in my crazed moments. And still even if I am your prisoner there is one who knows you and will yet avenge my darling wife. Crazy Tim is an idiot no longer. Thanks to my fall and the blow I received the clouds have been removed from my brain. The past is clear and fresh in my mind. I live now for vengeance!"

"Indeed!" said Dryden with a bitter sneer. "Live for vengeance, eh? Take him away, you fellows. I'll give him all the vengeance he wants!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FATE OF THE IDIOT.—DIETRICH SCORES A LONG POINT.

—ETHEL'S SURPRISE.—THE TURN OF THE TIDE

MARKS THE RETURN OF HAPPINESS.

Dietrich and Crazy Tim made splendid progress in their precipitate retreat from the outlaw den. It was pitch-darkness and the way over the rocks was very difficult. A false step might prove fatal and launch the fugitive into the black gulf below.

Suddenly the "idiot" uttered a quick, low cry and disappeared into a wide chasm that yawned at his very feet. Dietrich drew back horrified, and staggered forward in an opposite direction, scarcely knowing whither he proceeded. He was filled with dismay at the awful fate of his poor comrade and wandered aimlessly about until he found himself close to the spot where he had first escaped from the abandoned chamber, aided by Tim when the bandit had tried to murder the German by securing him to a powder keg. He saw the jagged opening in the black mass of rocks, and scarcely knowing what he was doing passed along down the rocky corridor where he found to his surprise, the beautiful form of Ethel, reclining upon a mass of robes. In a moment the German was at the girl's side, sinking behind the pile of furs to escape the notice of the bandit sentry who had just stepped out to the exit to note the return of several comrades.

Ethel betrayed no surprise and calmly awaited until the German spoke.

"Ethel!" said he in a low thrilling voice that sent the blood tingling through her veins. "Listen to me well before you reply. You are a captive in the hands of my bitterest foe. For almost a year you have remained passive in his hands while you knew that Jack Hilton sorrowed for you, mourned you as one dead. Could you love him and thus remain silently a prisoner?"

The beautiful girl turned her head slightly and in hushed tones she replied:

"I love Jack Hilton and will love him till the grave hides me from view. God alone knows how I have struggled to escape the persecutions of the man I detest, and how utterly helpless I am in his power, but my heart is still loyal to my first, my only love. I am still true to him, and dying, I will still whisper, I love him!"

Before she had spoken the last word she was suddenly clasped to the German's arms and his lips were pressed to hers.

"Look up, my darling! Is it possible you do not know me?"

She could barely suppress the glad cry that arose to her lips.

"Jack! My darling, Jack!" she gasped.

"Yes, here at your side! We will perish together but never part again."

It was indeed Jack Hilton who had artfully concealed his identity so long in the yellow haired wig and painted features of the German, Dietrich. Even his voice had been skillfully merged into the assumed character.

One long, lingering kiss, and Jack whispered cautiously: "Now remain here! Be not alarmed. I will be near you. Remember we leave this place together or it will be our tomb."

Avoiding the stupid sentry Jack then secreted himself in the abandoned room where he had so nearly been blown to atoms, awaiting the return of another night.

He did not know of the almost miraculous escape of

the poor idiot. When he had lurched forward and had fallen in the terrible canyon, he happened to strike in a huge crevice in the vast mountain, and then by a most providential occurrence fell into a species of "shoot" and he felt himself launched down this inclined passage until his rapid descent was brought to a sudden terminus by a most violent shock and then all was a blank. When he again recovered he found himself wedged in between masses of granite, and blood streaming down upon his face from the deep wounds upon his head.

The mask he wore probably saved his life and spared him further injuries. He crept slowly out of his prison and just as the sun had disappeared beyond the dark range of hills he again became unconscious from loss of blood, and fell among the boulders where he lay silent as death until the bandit chief discovered the prostrate body in his path and summoned the Wolves to his aid.

Tim was led into Dryden's private apartment and secured under the supervision of the outlaw chief. Dryden summoned several bandits into the chamber to keep watch over the prisoner while he sought his companions and unfolded his plan for another robbery of the stage-coach and the destruction of the escort, he having received a message from Bannack Bill that the out coach from Virginia City would contain an extraordinary treasure-box! It was also said that the coach was to be guarded by a Vigilance Committee corps of picked men who proposed thus to protect the treasure and possibly meet and exterminate the outlaw band at the same time.

The day came and slowly passed until night again descended upon the desolate region and enshrouded Satan's Gap with a mantle of gloom.

Dark figures moved to and fro upon the "corduroy" bridge spanning the black chasm in the center of the Gap. The Wolves were busy at work upon the structure. Sentries guarded the approach from both sides while the scoundrels toiled with saws and axes upon the timbers of the bridge.

Like demons from the infernal pit they crept along from place to place, progressing in their wicked work. The outlaw and his followers were cutting into the timbers of the bridge, so that a certain weight would break the supports and launch those upon the structure into the awful gulf that yawned beneath it. Once in this chasm the ghoulish-like creatures could descend to the bottom and at their leisure obtain the treasure and valuables.

It was gaining plunder and disposing of their enemies at one fell blow. The teeming brain of the bandit chief had planned the devilish work and his human wolves were rapidly executing it.

"Now then! Let them come," said Dryden, in a tone of triumph. "Let them come into Satan's Gap. It will be their grave. Let the Vigilantes help them if they can; I'll warrant that not one will return alive to Virginia City to tell the tale of the fate of his comrade. Now, Wolves, to your lair, and wait the coming of the enemy."

From the shadows of the towering rocks the masked figures flitted to and fro and sought the shelter of the battlements. From this point a good view of the Gap was obtained, and the log bridge appeared in the faint moonbeams that now and then intruded into the deep ravine.

Hark! A low warning whistle from the sentry down in the gulch! Then the noise of wheels and the clattering of hoofs. The coach was coming! Each masked figure leaned over the battlement of rock, and, weapon in hand, waited the startling dénouement. A moment later and the four horses attached to the lumbering stage coach dashed upon the log bridge, and the wheels of the vehicle rolled upon the structure. The bandits had but time to observe the armed men upon the coach and catch a glimpse of the polished steel of their weapons, when a most terrific crash rent the air. The bridge parted midway, and the heavy coach plunged downward, dragging the struggling horses into the terrible gulf! A despairing cry arose from the unfortunate men upon the coach as they were hurled into eternity.

About a mile in the rear of the vehicle rode an armed cavalcade of Vigilantes, gradually gaining upon the coach as it neared the precincts of the robber's citadel. Nearer and nearer to the Gap the ill-fated escort rode, until the gloomy towers and battlements of the weird place became outlined against the dull sky.

It was a ride into the jaws of death, for as the coach rolled upon the bridge that spanned the chasm, the timbers fell into the black pit, and the struggling mass of men and horses disappeared from view.

The bandits rushed from their hiding-places like hungry vultures and began the hurried descent into the ravine to plunder the dead and dying, and seize upon the treasure which they rightly surmised was in the iron-bound chest.

A loud shout of triumph broke from the masked scoundrels as they saw the success of the scheme.

Down, down into the gloom, into the very depths of the Gap swept the Wolves to feast upon the gold. Lurid torches lighted the way as the ruffians leaped from rock to rock in a desperate race to see who would be the first to plunder the bodies and secure the chest. Heedless of Dryden's voice they dashed down, and the outlaw's voice arose in a storm of curses. He had unflashed the Wolves, and the smell of blood had crazed them!

Among the giant fragments of rock lay the wreck of the coach and the lifeless steeds. Here and there lay what was once a human being, but the terrific fall had crushed it out of all semblance to the human form divine. The iron-bound chest lay broken into a thousand splinters, its gold and coin scattered upon the bodies of the unfortunate men sent to defend it.

Not one had survived that terrific launch into space!

In a very short time the human vampires were among the dead bodies and fought among themselves for the precious metal.

It was indeed a strange, wild picture—a picture resembling demons at work in the infernal regions—demons claiming the soul of dead humanity.

The baleful light of the torches cast a sickly glare upon the horrible scene and upon the hideously-masked figures that struggled and hovered over the dead.

Far above this awful picture loomed the broken bridge and the dark side of Satan's Gap.

David Dryden had been so busily engaged that the idiot had scarcely awakened a thought. The bandit leader gave himself up to the great scheme of destroying the escort and securing the treasure.

The wild yell of triumph that arose from the Wolves stationed near the Gap reached the ears of the men detailed as guards. They rushed eagerly to the outlet to witness the awful plunge of the coach and its victims, then joined in the general rush for spoils and Tim found himself alone.

The bandits had barely departed from the chamber when Jack Hilton suddenly appeared before the astonished captive.

"One good turn deserves another," said he, "and you don't know how happy I am to know you still live. Hold on a moment; I'll release you."

Jack tore at the knotted rope and succeeded in setting the hands of the prisoner at liberty, and then darted toward the chamber to release Ethel.

"One moment!" cried Tim. "There's something in that chest that I want. I've noticed the villain was careful to lock it."

Tim seized a heavy knife and forced the hasp of the lock and threw open the lid of the chest. A hasty search revealed the package of papers, and he had but time to place them in his pocket when the hurried tramp of feet echoed in the passage. A moment afterward and the burly form of David Dryden appeared in the opening, and a scream of rage arose to his lips. A heavy revolver appeared in his hand, and the villain raised it quickly and pulled the trigger.

A dull snap followed, and Dryden hurled the pistol from him with an oath, and drew a heavy double-edged Bowie-knife.

A strange occurrence, and one overlooked by the villain, had caused the outlaw chief to seek his caverns for safety.

While his murderous crew were down in the chasm, plundering the wreck, a terrific rattle of fire-arms suddenly broke upon the night air, and a shower of leaden missiles flew among the bandits. Fully one-third of their number fell upon the blood-stained bodies of their victims.

Before they could recover from their surprise a second murderous volley again swept them down like grain before the scythe.

"The Vigilantes!" roared the road-agent, and he dashed madly toward the summit of the cliff in a frantic

effort to reach the caverns in advance of the protectors of the coach, who alas had arrived too late to protect!

Shot after shot rung through the Gap, and one after the other of the "wolf-heads" fell among the boulders while seeking to escape the rifles of their pursuers.

Swift and certain had retribution fallen upon the desperadoes, and the Vigilantes were pouring into their citadel from all quarters. Dryden uttered a wild cry of defiance and darted into the tunnel leading into the cavern. He dashed along until he reached his private retreat. His intentions were to seize Ethel and bear her away by a secret outlet known only to himself.

When he reached his apartment he was confronted by the idiot, and the foes were now face to face.

Tim leaped upon the powerful villain and drew the curious dagger from his belt. Before Dryden could defend himself Tim had driven the blade of the rusty weapon into the bandit's bosom. It was the weapon that Dryden had murdered his sister, Tim's dead wife, with!

Dryden heard the footsteps of his pursuers close at hand, and with one tremendous effort, he hurled the idiot to the earth and sprung toward the opening to escape. A huge form bounded forward, and, leaping to the bandit's throat, bore him to the earth, and with its awful fangs lacerated the outlaw's flesh in a shocking manner.

It was Tiberius, the huge Great Dane! The beast mangled the shrieking bandit beyond recognition.

When the Vigilantes reached the scene David Dryden, the outlaw leader, was a shapeless mass upon the rocky floor, and the blood-stained brute was poised above him eagerly watching for a slight movement on the part of the outlaw in order to again spring upon him.

David Dryden never moved again. His crime-laden

soul had been summoned to the highest tribunal, and all that remained of the once dreaded outlaw now lay beneath the paws of the dumb avenger who had avenged his murdered mistress.

The group of Vigilantes turned from the scene with a shudder, and Tim summoned the beast to his side.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this dog has trailed that man for the murder of my poor wife—his own sister. If you think he has done wrong I'll shoot him."

"The dog has saved us the trouble of stringing him up to a tree," replied Sewell, the miner. "We offer a vote of thanks to the dog."

At the instigation of Jack Hilton, some of the Vigilantes hurried to Rabbit Island to try and capture Tornado Bess, and the other outlaws there. But the woman had fled, in some unknown way having learned of the downfall of Dryden and his men at Satan's Gap.

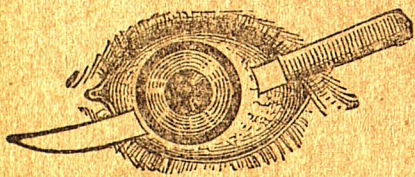
The Vigilantes made a search of the Rabbit Island retreat and the outlaw's main haunts and recovered all the stolen treasure. Then they raised a great pyramid of boulders to mark the end of the life of David Dryden, the outlaw.

And Jack Hilton and beautiful Ethel Errington now reunited after so many years of trouble?

They were married at Virginia City within a week after the death of the outlaw chief, and for years thereafter there lived with them in their happy home in Montana, a man who was always accompanied when he walked in his beautiful garden, by a splendid Great Dane dog—of course, you know that the dog and the man were our old friends Tiberius and Tim.

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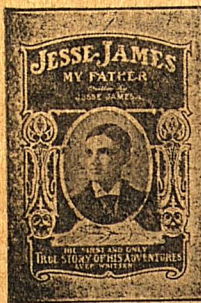
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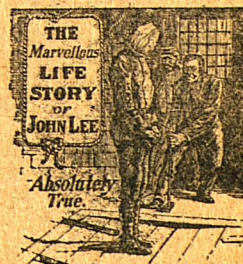
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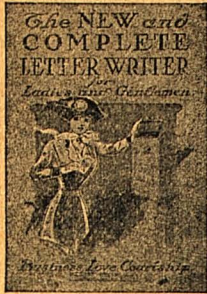
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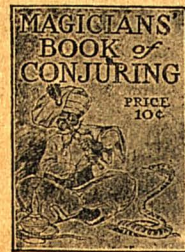
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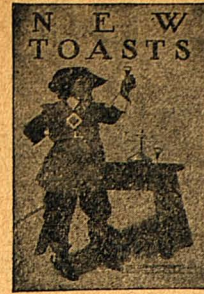


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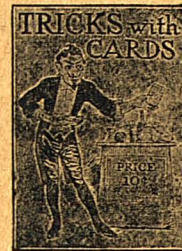
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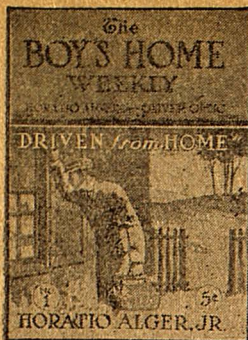
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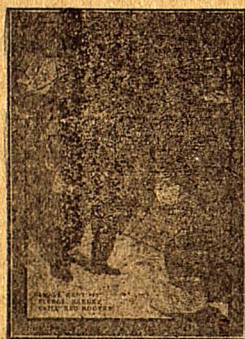
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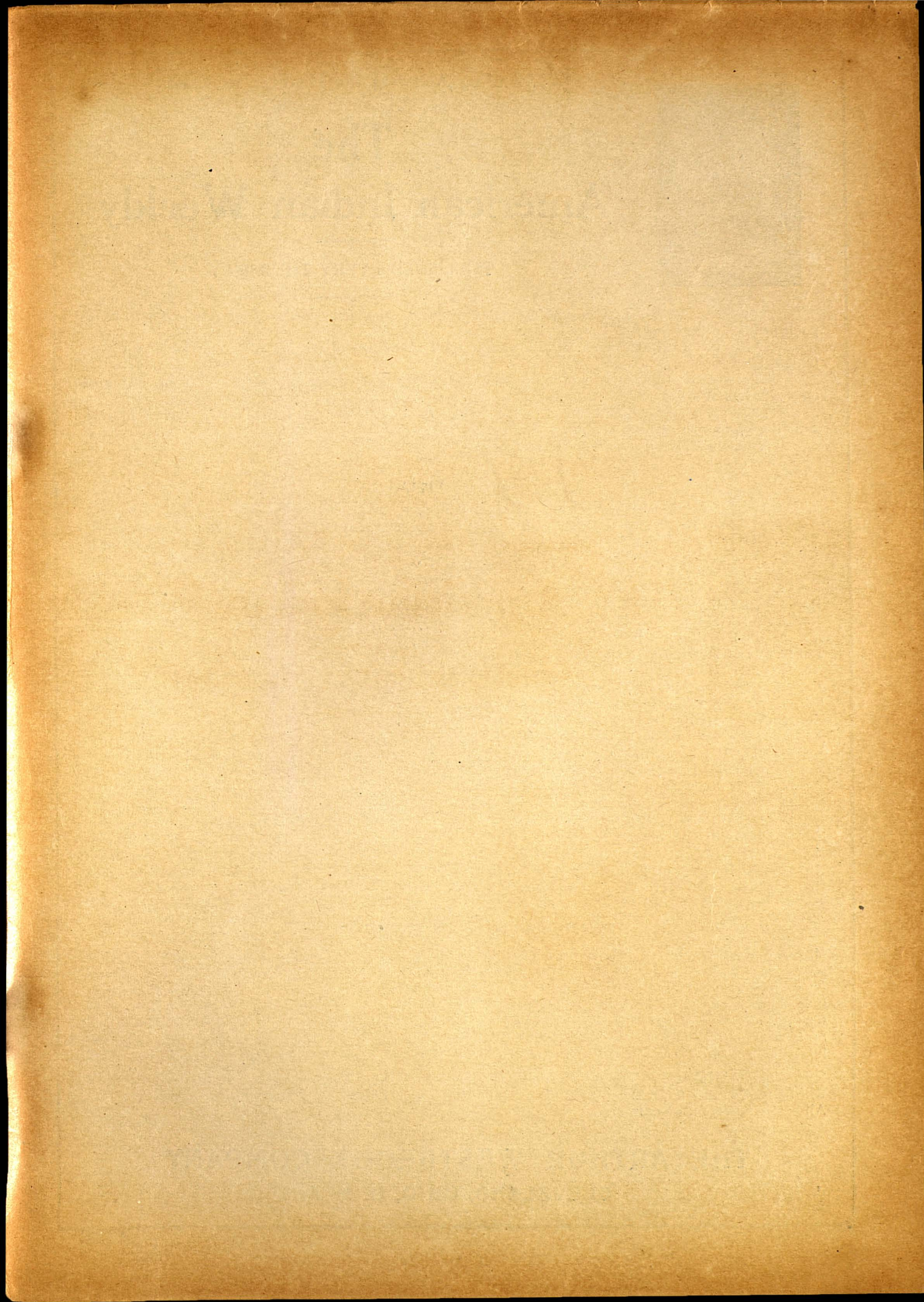
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| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR | | or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
| No. 3. | THE BLACK DEATH | | or The Curse of the Navajo Witch |
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| No. 19. | THE MYSTERY OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE | | or The Robbers' Round-Up |
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- No. 1. THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGEor The Raid on the Old Stockade
No. 2. TRACKED TO HIS LAIRor The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider
No. 3. THE BLACK DEATHor The Curse of the Navajo Witch
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- May 25—No. 26. THE HERMIT BANDIT'S REVENGE.....or The League of the Fur-Stealers
June 1—No. 27. THE CURSE OF CORONATION GULF.....or The Outlaws of Blue Waters
June 8—No. 28. THE DOOM OF THE BANDED BROTHERS.....or The Demon Renegades
June 15—No. 29. THE WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL.....or The Gun-Men of Split Lake
June 22—No. 30. TORNADO BESS THE KIDNAPPER.....or The Outlaws of Rabbit Island
June 29—No. 31. THE WRECKERS OF CARIBOU REEF.....or Border Bandits at Bay
July 6—No. 32. THE PLAGUE SPREADERS OF HUNGRY TRAIL....or The Robbers of Little Wind

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