

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

PLAGUE SPREADERS OF HUNGRY TRAIL

"I'LL TURN YOU LOOSE, BOUND AS YOU ARE TO DIE IN THE WILDERNESS, YOU 'TARNAL PLAGUE-SPREADER," CRIED THE BANDIT.



OLD FROSTY,

THE GUIDE

OR

THE WHITE QUEEN OF THE BLACK-
FEET

=

BY T. C. HARBAUGH

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OLD FROSTY, THE GUIDE

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BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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Plague Spreaders of Hungry Trail, or The Robbers of Little Wind

By Colonel Spencer Dair.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF THIS STORY.

BLACK TOM BARLOW—A jewel of a gold-hunter, who braved the terrible dangers of the Blackfeet Indian nation country, in the quest for the precious metal that rules the world, and who passed through incredible dangers when his progress was barred by Indians aided by outlaws.

ARROW HEAD—Great Chief of the Blackfeet nation, who made the pathway to fortune of a party of youthful Adventurers one of blood and danger and death.

DWARF DAN WOLFLAW—An outlaw as crooked in his life as he was in his form, and who met a deserved fate, at the hands of a man whom he had mutilated in his endeavor to thwart the plans of the gold-seekers.

FROSTY PADDOCK—An indomitable guide in the great Wild West, who got a "parmit" for his gallant band of Adventurers to hunt for gold in the Blackfeet nation land, after a waging of wits with the outlaws, and a courage that seems like a page from a mythical narrative.

KYD DOUGLASS—A man who went into the shadow of death to rescue a fair girl, whose fortune awaited her in the East, while she was a prisoner among the Indians, virtually, who had stolen her in infancy.

ARIEL RAMSDEN—A young man who preferred to keep the devious path and consort with outlaws, and who finally met a deserved fate that usually overtakes the outlaw.

NIOKANA—The White Queen of the Blackfeet nation, and who later resumes her right name of Adele Harmage. This girl won her way to freedom and wealth and love, through a succession of dangers that make brave reading.

RED WASP—A youthful Blackfoot Indian, but a boy with a man's heart under his dusky skin.

MARLEY MORGAN—An unfortunate white man, who dies a horrible death as a result of being captured by Arrow Head and his braves of the Blackfeet nation.

FRED SELLERS—The friend of Marley Morgan, and who took what he thought was the quickest way to avenge him.

KISHEWATA—Just an Indian broncho, but a horse that aided in the making of history.

"BIG" MURPHY—He thought he saw a ghost; but he didn't.

RED JOHN—A fine fellow and a born fighter.

SEGABO—A Blackfeet nation medicine man.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE BLACKFEET COUNTRY.—A SEARCH FOR GOLD.—THE
INDIAN FIGHTER'S RASH WAGER.—TREACHERY
IN THE CAMP.

"Plague Spreaders them chaps is, every one of 'em!"

A roar of laughter came from the lips of the score of bronzed men, who were seated around a camp fire in the Indian country, and then the laugh scattered, grew fainter, and some of the men who had not laughed grew grave as they exchanged glances.

"Better not let them Injuns hear that speech," one of the other men advised. "Ef y' do y' wont git no tarms from any Blackfeet Injun hyar erbouts."

"Sho!" cried the first speaker. "Say I ain't no bettin' man, fer money ain't so easy ter git in this hyar country, but I'll bet ye a hunnerd dollars thet I goes among them Injun plague spreaders, fer theyse rushin' roun' hyar spreadin' smallpox everywhar an' well ye know et—I say I'll bet a hunnerd thet I goes by my lonely, ter thet Injun village, and gits tarms—and wots more I'll bet I gits good ones—from the chief plague spreader himself!"

The speaker flourished a great roll of bills!

The party again exchanged glances, but there was this time no roar of laughter. The situation was too serious for that. The man issuing the challenge had a way of "making good!"

"Thar's gold in all them hills," the first speaker went on. "Et onny needs tarms from th' Injuns ter git ter th' gold. I'll proposition agin that I goes ter th' Injun village back thar behin' them hills an gits tarms that will 'low us fellers ter stay hyar, an wots more thet th' permit will be good fer years. Them Injuns ain't got no permit from Uncle Sam ter own th' hull Blackfeet country, boys. I don't cyar ef th' Injun chief hez sent us word ter git offen this hyar airth—I'm goin' ter stay, en I'm goin' ter go an' git permission from them plague spreaders ter do et. See?"

"You're plumb locoed. Ye 'uld git a arrer plugged inter ye in five minutes ef ye went ter thet camp," growled a swarthy chap. "An' say, theyse ain't a white man behint us fer more miles then ye kin think o'—an' th' Blackfeet are like grasshoppers, thicker en flies in August in a molasses factory. You ain't talkin' sense!"

"Wall ef ye think I am locoed, w't ye goin' ter do? Let easy money git by ye? I'm offerin' ter bet!"

The speaker again flourished a fat roll of bills in his tanned hand. He looked with some contempt over the faces of the men about him, some eager, some wistful, some incredulous, but all touched with some hidden fear.

The party were alone, they knew, in the Blackfeet Indian country.

That meant danger!

The camp fire before them was one of the first that had been lighted in the country by white men.

Its extinguishment had been ordered by a messenger from the Indian village a few miles away, and this glistening copper-colored young brave had delivered his message in true Indian style. He had ridden boldly into the pale-face camp, with hands extended in the shape of a great "Y," the universal Indian sign of peace; then he had loped up on his Indian pinto pony, and had pointed to the Eastern sky now red with the descending sun.

"Go!" the lad cried.

The gold-seeker, hunter, trapper, Indian fighter, and scout who was given the message knew well what it meant.

He notified his companions and now there was being held a council of war. Should the party remain? There was no one at all of their race near at hand to aid them. A decision to remain must be accepted with a great deal of caution; it meant war to the knife with a bloodthirsty savage foe.

And yet to go?

That meant the end of many golden dreams!

The Blackfeet country had been the objective point of many white men for years.

It was known to be a milk and honey country, rich in gold, in game, in all the white man lusted for—and it was safe from them in the hands of the red man. And the only way to get all they craved, every white man around the camp-fire knew, was to crave permission of an Indian chief—whom every one knew was certain to refuse it—and here was a crazy man offering to bet that he could gain the desired permit! Nonsense!

"By heck," cried a tall, young, clean-shaven scout, "I'll take a little end of that cash!"

"Let's pool it off," suggested a third man, and soon several of the band of brothers, "chipped in" various

amounts, and quickly had "covered" the bettor's wager, and there was a general air of relief all about.

"All right!" a tall man cried. "The bet's down. But how about Dwarf Dan an' his boys? Are ye goin' to get permission of him to remain after you have got it from the Injun, old Arrow Head—that's his name isn't it?"

Contemptuous laughter followed the last sentence, and the giant who had spoken scowled at the boisterous jeers flung at him.

"You boys will laugh now," he snapped, "but wait! I know Dwarf Dan and his gang and there isn't a man here that does know Dwarf Dan as I do. With Injuns on one side and Dwarf Dan on the other—and he's got his gang with him you know, every man an outlaw—we have got to walk Spanish. The man who is of the opinion that we have got rid of Dan and his gang, ain't talkin' sense, don't ye know; he plumb ain't!"

"Thet's so," the man who had made the rash bet spoke up. "I hev some knowleedge o' thet feller Dwarf Dan myself, an he's meaner then th' hull Blackfoot tribe together—he never fought a man open handed in his measly life. An' say boys, right hyar let me tell ye that I knows suthin' 'bout thet hoss-stealin' that came off last night—"

There was a roar from the party about the fire.

"Hey Frosty!" yelled a man, "ef ye knows suthin' git it eout o' yar system quick. I'm pinin' fer knowledge as to how them hosses of ourn was stolen."

"I didn't say thet I knawed who git em—I sed I knawed suthin' about th' job. But I ain't goin ter stay hyar plaverin' 'bout our hosses or Dwarf Dan—I'm goin' ter get them tarms o' the Injun chief."

"We can't afford to lose ye at this stage of the game," remarked a big chap with a kindly face. "You're the only one among us that knows this very bleak, wild country. Before we sacrifice you for a chance at the hills, by George, I will lead us all out of this place, you bet."

"That's what we'll do, Frosty!" chimed in several voices, which told the story that the rough bettor was a favorite among the venturesome gold-hunters. "We can't dig for gold without Arrow Head's consent, and he's already ordered us out of the country. Black Tom is right, though—we'll leave the kentry 'fore we'll let you take chances of bein' kilt."

For a moment the man who was bound to take chances was silent. The words of his companions had touched his heart, and his eyes seemed almost to be swimming in tears.

"Boys!" he cried. "Frosty Paddock ar' one o' them kind what kin appreciate sech words, but it ar' no use talkin'! Ef it war daylight enough I'd like fer ye ter see the hills around ye. They're chock full of gold—chock full. Now what's the use in goin' back when Arrow Head kin be brought around jest ez easy as I kin turn a flap-jack? I'm goin' to do it. No! I'll not hear a word, Black Tom. Do you see thet foot?" and the speaker thrust his right foot forward into the ruddy light of the camp fire.

At any other time some rough, laughable remark would have been passed concerning the size and shape of that foot; but now none greeted its owner; all gazed silently at the member encased in a dirty moccasin tied with a leather thong over the instep.

"Thet foot kin do more with Arrow Head than all the talk in the world," continued Paddock. "You've heard of masonry and sech-like, boys; but I know suthin' thet none o' you ever heard of! With thet old moccasin I

kin walk all over Blackfoot land, an' dig in every hill above groun'."

Frosty Paddock the guide, was now becoming more than an isolated member of the band; he was now an object of uncommon interest on the part of his friends. He stood in the center of an open-mouthed crowd whose members were staring at the ungainly foot that he kept in the foreground.

"A good deal of that may be mere talk!" ventured a voice on the outside of the crowd.

"Mere talk? Who said that?" cried the guide, Frosty. "Ah, it war you, Mr. Ramsden. Mebbe it be you who don't know what he's talkin' about! Whar's yer ten dollars thet says that I can't do it?"

"In my saddle-bag," answered the person called Ramsden, who was a young man of three and twenty. "I saw you had been betting 'a hunnerd' so I thought that I would get into the game myself, and with my poor ten spot, at that."

"Git t' yer cash quick," roared Paddock. "Put it up! You're one o' them chaps I thought would be in opperation."

The last sentence was muttered in a tone of self-satisfaction; it did not reach Ramsden's ears, however, for the young man had stepped to a pair of leather saddle-bags into whose capacious depths he had thrust large but womanish hands.

"By the eternal stars, he can't bluff me!" Ramsden said to the man who strode to his side to dissuade him from making the bet. "I don't want his money. I'll donate all I win toward getting him a tombstone. But I won't be bluffed, especially by a dirty Yankee like him."

As he uttered the last word, Ariel Ramsden, the youngest man in the camp, drew a small bag of gold dust from one of the pockets of his saddle-bag, and sprang toward Paddock.

"Here I am!" cried he. "I was never beaten out at the game of bluff, yet. And my last ten dollars say that you can't get a permit from Arrow Head for us to search for gold in this country. Now my 'deown-East' friend I've got the bulge on you—it's a case of put up or shut up!"

Ariel Ramsden was so excited that he did not see the lowering looks of the men who surrounded him. His eyes were full of triumph and sinister purpose.

Frosty Paddock, the trusty old guide of the wild-world, quickly ran his bronzed hand beneath the bosom of his shirt and produced a bag similar to the one the youth held.

"Here's m' cash," he snapped. "Take the dust, Tom! If I git Arrow Head's permit its all mine—if I don't, hand it over ter this boy. I'm coming back if I am a corpse when I get here! I am coming back to you all boys, if I come as a ghost!"

Black Tom, the selected captain of the Adventurers, did not come forward without urging.

"I'd rather not hold the stakes," he remonstrated. "It looks 'sif I had a hand in lettin' you go on this fools errand, Frosty."

"Nobody's makin' me go. I wanted t' go. We want the gold in these hills, an' thar's the old shoe what kin inlock the mountains fer us."

The wager was placed in Black Tom's hands, Ramsden not objecting to the stake-holder. As he turned away his face wore a leer of devilish triumph, seldom seen in one so young. He fairly clenched his hands as he moved off, nor did he pause, until he had left the camp several rods behind him.

"I was itching to get you started, Abel Paddock," he

hissed. "You might as well walk pinioned into a river, as into Arrow Head's camp. Things are working admirably. Five had got their quietus. There are seventeen left. With you out of the road, Frosty, it'll be an easy job! But for fear that moccasin business might help you, I'll guard against that. We all know Samson's power lay in his hair. Yours, you say, Frosty, lies in your moccasin!"

"How about stealing that?"

If a great shell filled with powder, warranted to blow him into fragments, had dropped hissing at his feet, Ariel Ramsden could not have started back quicker, than he did when he heard the unexpected voice. Ramsden in his rage and hatred had spoken aloud, and he knew from the voice that he had been overheard.

He laid his hand on his pistol belt, with a furtive, and sly motion!

"No shootin' necessary, pard!" cried a tiny voice, and the next moment Ramsden stepped forward to greet a pigmy; a tiny trifle of a man, not five feet tall; with a pair of broad shoulders, and a white face set with a pair of eyes that glistened and glared like those of a tiger.

"Not a word!" added the tiny dwarf, for such he was, "I've heard every word tonight—that pleasant hint about the horses—all, all! You may count on that cash, for Frosty's lost it right now. It's all right over the hills—but for our party, not for his. Oh, no, not for him! Pard, say, you ain't seen the half of it all yet. I know thars solid gold hills hereabouts! And say, they knows I know it back thar—I heered them cussin' me!"

"Quite right. You haven't been spoken of in a—well, in a very complimentary manner in Frosty's camp tonight. 'Meaner than all the Blackfeet tribe,' I think they called you."

"Yep. I heered thet! We'll let 'im go, all right, and try Arrow Head! I'll not be fur off if ye want me. Keep cool! Don't give him a chanst to fire you out of their camp. We didn't have no trouble last night. The roan was a lettle restive, but after we cut her out, she was all right. Arrow Head, when she had come to, thought her a beauty."

"Arrow Head?" Ramsden echoed, looking at the dwarf with a grin.

"Yep. We fellers sometimes git inter bed with queer fellers outen hyar in the Blackfeet country," replied the dwarf with a toothless grin. "But——"

"Listen!"

The conspirators turned their faces toward the rising moon!

The moon was just showing her golden disk over the edge of a hill, and made by the rays to appear of gigantic size, the two men saw the form of Frosty Paddock, lank, tall, grim and menacing, stand full in the rays like a figure carved in blood!

The next moment the figure disappeared.

"I wonder if he saw us?" shrilled Ramsden in a thrilling voice. "If he did it's all up with me!"

The dwarf looked into the youth's face. His misshapen form was shivering as if ague stricken, and his teeth chattered, and his face was white with nervous dread.

"I dunno," he gasped. "Hope he didn't—any way, you've got t' take th' chanst and go back an' face the music. Ef he has got next t' ye I'm wonderin' how he'll finish it—if he ain't next, ye kin still play the game out boldly."

Ramsden moodily shook his head. He argued for some time with the dwarf, then with his arms folded and his

face sunk on his breast, gravely started back to meet whatever fate had in store for him, in the camp of the men he was trying to destroy by his treachery!

CHAPTER II.

A DANGER THAT SPELLED DEATH.—THE QUEEN OF THE GREAT BLACKFEET NATION.—A WHITE QUEEN'S PLANS.

The chief village of the powerful Blackfeet Indian nation, stood just beyond the hills that bordered the gold-hunters' camp on the north, scarcely three miles away.

The village covered the greater portion of one of the loveliest plains in the far country, and presented a most imposing sight.

The Blackfeet could arm six thousand warriors and send them forth to battle; the nation, led by Arrow Head, the most unscrupulous and merciless red giant that ever trod the war-path, had never suffered defeat at the hands of an enemy. It was aggressive, unconquered, always conquering!

On the western side of the village of the Blackfeet grew a thicket of tall young trees which, standing at singularly equal distances from one another, might have made an observer believe that they had been planted there by the hand of man.

Here the Indians lounged on the yielding grass through the heated terms, and watched the rude games that the young bucks kept up with much spirit.

The natural grove was thronged with Indians; everywhere was observable the tall, sinewy figures of the Blackfeet. On one spot a group of chiefs were conversing in serious tones; while at another, at the edge of the grove, a scene of merriment was being enacted.

A number of Blackfeet boys ranging from thirteen to seventeen years of age were trying to break a young horse. The persistent efforts of the youths had attracted a crowd of older braves, who every now and then applauded the would-be trainers of wild animals, by a boisterous clapping of hands.

A stout lariat had been passed around the colt's neck. This in turn had been made fast to a tree. Two boys were trying with all their might to hold the colt, by clinging to the animal's mane, while another boy, twice thrown, was trying to mount the beast!

The colt, a powerful young animal, was not the least exhausted by his long battle, and moving around despite the efforts of the red boys, was preventing the persistent one from mounting. All at once, however, the watchful eye of the youthful redskin saw a chance, and he sprang like a panther astride of the horse.

But his victory was of short duration, for the colt darted forward a few feet, and then planting his forehoofs suddenly in the ground came to a halt which sent his rider far over his head, a handful of mane attesting his futile hold.

This horse's victory was received with loud yells from the spectators, and Red Wasp, the unlucky boy, picked himself up in no good humor, and not willing by any means to try it again.

But at this juncture, and while the intractable colt was in the full flush of success, there came upon the scene a person whose appearance was received with keen delight.

"Ha! Ha! Niokana, our White Queen, will ride Kishewata the strong!" cried Red Wasp. The other Blackfeet boys with one accord clapped their hands.

The person thus greeted, strange to say, was white!

She was a girl who could not have yet passed her seventeenth year.

She was rather dark-skinned, but very beautiful, with deep-blue eyes, and graceful figure. Clad in a rather fantastic garb profusely adorned with beads, she presented an appearance which would have commanded great attention everywhere!

She reached the spot where Red Wasp had alighted just as that individual was recovering his equilibrium, and said in the Blackfeet tongue:

"Kishewata threw Red Wasp? He can ride the earth with no danger of being thrown!"

The eyes of the discomfited young Indian flashed madly at these words.

"Then let Niokana ride him if she dare!" he cried. "Kishewata belongs to Red Wasp—he shall be Niokana's if she rides him!"

"Then Red Wasp will have to give him up," came the ready response.

The Indian boy shut his teeth hard but said nothing further in answer.

The girl hurried forward and fastened her eyes on the horse, now unsecured save by the lariat. Red Wasp followed slowly, a latent triumph over the White Queen rising in his eyes.

"Keep off! Keep off!" cried a score of voices to the girl, who was advancing upon the horse with her beautiful magnetic eyes fixed upon the beast. But she paid no attention to the warnings.

When she reached the horse and began to stroke his beautiful mane the astonishment of the spectators knew no bounds, and Red Wasp bit his lips.

"Now I will ride Kishewata," the girl said laughingly, placing one neatly moccasined foot upon the lariat stretched taut between the sleek neck and the tree.

The next moment she vaulted upon the colt's back, producing a toughened piece of buffalo-hide which she slipped over the beast's head and into his mouth as she did so.

Then before those in the tree could loosen the lariat, the girl leaned forward, and with a knife, that glittered for a moment in the dying sunbeams—for it was late in the afternoon—cut the rope or lariat, and was off!

A wild shout of exultation greeted this action, and those who looked saw the white girl seated on the back of the colt, guiding him, as it appeared, according to her whim.

The lateness, almost duskiness of the hour enabled horse and rider to disappear in a moment, and Red Wasp, who had claimed the colt, was overwhelmed by the derision of his comrades. For awhile the red boy received the keen tongue-thrusts of his companions with a good grace. But he soon lost his temper and almost before the hoof beats of the mastered colt had ceased to sound he was in the midst of a group of his deriders, punishing them with blows of his fists that brought blood to many a Blackfoot kid's nose!

A few took sides with Red Wasp, and at last the fighting became serious, knives flashed from buffalo belts, and tomahawks were brandished aloft; one lad was brought down by a cleft cheek before the older Indians interfered.

All at once with a cry that resembled the growl of the lion, as much as a human voice, a giant came bounding over the green sward and without hesitation threw himself among the combatants.

"Shame! Shame!" he cried in the tribal tongue.

"When we begin to fight among ourselves we will not stand long before our enemies."

He immediately began to put an end to the fighting which he did in a summary if not cruel way. For awhile he sent the boys whirling right and left with his brawny arms, and then, seizing two, one with each hand, he brought their heads together in a series of blows that seriously endangered their skulls. Dropping the two first he had seized, he pounced upon a brace of others, and proceeded to serve them in like manner. All the time he roared in his deep bullying voice: "Shame! Shame!"

The young redskins, not relishing the indignation and punishment which their disgraceful brawl had brought upon them, began to disperse. But they did not stop fighting until eight of their number had been well bumped.

"Go to your lodges and learn to carry water and dress skins!" thundered the giant, after them. "The Blackfeet ought to hide their faces and weep. When the old warriors have gone to the hunting-grounds of the Manitou, the Snakes will come and bind the once powerful Blackfoot tribes, for the young warriors fight among themselves like wolves. Go and hide your faces."

The chief—for chief he was—seemed to be in a tempest of passion, for with the last word he turned upon the older warriors with a scowling disapproval of their non-interference, and strode haughtily away.

The belligerent boys, shamefaced, crestfallen, but indignant, went to their respective lodges.

There was a temper of anger in each heart, and the name of Niokana fell in no gentle tones from more than one pair of lips.

"She shall ride Kishewata again!" cried Red Wasp, springing from the cot of buffalo-skins upon which he had thrown himself and buried his face. "By the lodge of the Manitou! she shall ride him, and forever! The young paleface who looked so long at her at the beginning of last sleep shall see her ride Kishewata the strong. Red Wasp will never make her his squaw, nor will he give her to the white-skin who will try to win her."

At that moment the young Indian caught sight of a beautiful object hanging against the side of the wigwam. With tigerish cry he sprang forward and tore it from its place, to hold in his hand a delicate and miniature shield fashioned from human-hair. As he held it at arm's length his flashing eyes saw only the girl who had made it and given it to him, and a moment later his angry hands had torn it in pieces, and his heel ground the fragments into the earth.

"She will come back on Kishewata with a laugh for Red Wasp!" he hissed. "But she will come back to ride him again, and when the colt stops the Blackfoot nation will have no pale Queen."

It was dark now. The sun had set behind the great village of the Blackfeet and the grove was almost deserted.

Almost!

At the edge of it a lank figure sat on horseback and looked toward the thousand lodges.

"Wall, hyar I am, right side up with keer," he said to himself. "Now, I'll go down and set about the parmit!"

The lines rested idly on his horse's head as he spoke, and he took them in his firm grip.

But the next moment they dropped from his hands, which shot quickly to his belt and felt for his revolver!

A sound, well known to the old guide, had fallen on his watchful ear.

"Two kin play et thet game," he murmured. "Ha! there ye are—an Injun boy, by gum!"

In the uncertain light the man could distinguish the outlines of the figure, by which he had just passed; it was crouching at the foot of a tree near by, and he could dimly see that the figure had an Indian bow in its hands drawn to the utmost tension.

The man saw his peril and raised his revolver!

The twang of a bow-string broke the silence, and the feathered shaft struck the man square in his breast!

"Hit fur the fust time!" cried the man, reeling in his saddle. "Cuss the young skunk! I'll chaw him up for this!"

With this he threw himself to the ground in spite of his deep and painful wound. He sprang upon the Blackfoot boy before he could fly, and in a moment *he had avenged his injury!*

"This don't look like gittin' th' parmit!" Frosty Paddock murmured a moment later, halting a second before he staggered toward his horse. "But I'll git it dead or alive! I'll see thet my boys are allowed t' hunt the yaller rocks in the Blackfeet country. Old Frosty Paddock want never yet outwitted. Cuss the red skunk and his baby arrow!"

He determined to make a further detour on his horse, and so threw himself into the saddle.

But he almost immediately fell forward on the animal's neck, and the beast remained standing under the trees with his silent and motionless rider!

Was it possible that death had cheated the intrepid man out of his "parmit?"

CHAPTER III.

DWARF DAN SCORES A POINT.—A BOY AND HIS RIVAL.—THE RETRIBUTION THAT COMES OFTEN QUICKLY FOR A DASTARD'S DEED.

While the white man lay swimming in his blood, so near the red men who were thirsting for it, a party of white men well mounted were riding toward the Indian village from the south.

To be precise the cavalcade consisted of four men, whose bearing in the saddle told any on-looker that they were white riders, used to the saddle for they came at great easy speed, over the undulating prairie!

The leader of the riders was low and squat in build. His head was set plump upon his shoulders, and his arms, unusually long, seemed to bother him.

Those who rode behind this man, were well-formed, and one seemed to be a mere boy in years.

But he sat his steed with the grace of a born rider and when the party entered the Blackfeet town to find it still, he was the first to draw rein at his companion and leader's order.

The leader looked about dejectedly.

"Thunderin' still, isn't it?" he remarked. "Bless me if theyse an Injun dog out, even. I'd like to know whether Frost Paddock's got hyar yit? What are ye thinkin' of boy? Come, wake up! Girl on the brain?"

The youth thus addressed by the dwarf flushed all over his soft cheek as he started.

"Me? Oh, I've been wondering merely at the quiet that reigns around us," he said, his looks, if the dwarf could have seen them belieing his words.

"That'll do t' tell the prairie-dogs," cried the dwarf. "Ye hez gal on the brain. Be keerful, Kyd, er you'll hev a rival er two, fur bless me ef she isn't th' prettiest gal west o' th' old Missouri. Be keerful! This is a kentry whar they ain't nice erbout puttin' a troublesome fellar out o' th' way."

Kyd Douglass, the boy, may have thought that he detected a threatening gleam in the snaky eyes of Dwarf Dan, the outlaw. But his reply did not denote it.

"Who has been saying that I'm in love?" he queried. "Not surely, Dan? Why, I never saw the girl till yesterday and I hear that she is betrothed to a young Black-foot!"

"Yer always discoverin' suthin'," replied the dwarf. "Goin' to marry a young greaser, eh? Now, thet won't do. But gals take queer notions, sometimes Kyd—as you hev found this out mebbe you kin tell us who the Injun is?"

"That sir, I can not do. I do not know one Indian from another—they all look alike to me!"

The dwarf bit his lip.

"I'd like to know," he said. "I've got a knife or a bullet for the heart of the skunk what tries ter cheat me."

For a moment the men did not exchange another word. Through his long, dark lashes, Dwarf Dan was shooting arrows of intense hatred at the boy. His lips were compressed beneath his gray mustache, which, hanging almost to his chin, did not enhance his personal appearance. He saw naught but the youth; the tiger was watching the fawn!

"We'll go!" he said, so suddenly, as to startle the trio who heard. "You kin hev the gal, an' welcome, Kyd—on'ny keep yer peepers open while ye'r courtin' her."

The boy raised his eyes, but did not smile. His looks said that he was inclined to doubt Dwarf Dan's sincerity.

All at once he felt a grasp on his right arm, and before he could turn his head to inquire into the meaning of it, he heard a voice whisper in his ear.

"Don't let Dan softsoap ye, Kyd," were the words the boy heard. "He's jest told the biggest lie that ever fell from human lips. If th' gal's engaged t' marry an Injun don't look at her! Let'er go! Kyd Douglass, yer bones will bleach in Blackfoot land ef ye try to get her!"

The youth listened spellbound to these words. He knew the man from whom they fell, and his answer was a pressure of the speaker's rough hand. That grasp poured out the thanks of his heart, and as they rode slowly through the Blackfeet village, his chin rested on his breast.

"Hold on thar!" whispered Dwarf Dan, in a tone that halted his followers. "Thar's a horse coming straight toward us, an' he's shod, too!"

The last words instantly placed all on the alert, and Dan drew his pistol as he leaned forward to catch a glimpse of the solitary horse approaching in a measured walk.

A shod horse at that hour in the Blackfoot village, could tell but one story to the quartette: It belong to and was undoubtedly ridden by a white man, and he—Frosty Paddock!

Around the listeners, in the dim light of the stars, stood the ashen-colored lodges of the Indians. The scene was ghostly, and the tread of the still unseen horse, did not, in any measure, take away the supernaturalness that invested time and place.

Kyd Douglass did not crane his neck forward for the purpose of seeing the coming man. He kept his eyes fixed on the dwarfish leader, who, pistol in hand, waited with the eagerness of the Sicilian brigand for his prey.

"By the gods!" suddenly exclaimed Dwarf Dan. "The old fellar got the parmit; but not the one he came to look fur."

"Mebbe he's shammin'! He's a cute one, Dan."

"Him shammin'?" cried the dwarf, throwing a look

of contempt at the speaker. "Does a man sham with an arrer in 'im? Look square at him. The horse hes stopped. He hes been carryin' Frosty all over the Injun town to-night. He said he would come back dead—back to the camp he meant. Now hyar he comes ag'in. Give way, an' let 'im pass!"

Dwarf Dan's face was pale as death as he drew aside to allow Frosty Paddock passage by.

"Look at 'im keerful, boys, an' ef ye see a sign o' life say so, an' we'll finish the job."

The horse bearing his ghastly burden came slowly forward. The old guide had risen from the position in which we left him at the edge of the grove; he now sat tolerably straight in the saddle; his hands hung listlessly at his side, and the feathered barb of the deadly shaft was plainly visible against the bosom of his shirt.

Dwarf Dan's command to "look at 'im keerful" was obeyed by the three as he went by.

Kyd, the youth, leaned forward and fixed his eyes on the guide's countenance, nor took them off until the horse had borne his burden out of sight.

The dwarf captain drew a long breath of relief as he turned to his companions.

"Wal, what did ye make out?" he asked.

"Dead!" said the youth's companions, and the youngster echoed: "Dead!"

"Didn't see a move?" queried Dwarf Dan.

"Nary move!" was the answer. "He's takin the parmit down to camp."

The dwarf showed his teeth at this brutal wit; but Douglass cast his eyes down the way that Paddock had gone.

There was a something in the boy's countenance which told more than he had spoken concerning Frosty Paddock's condition; it seemed to give the lie to the word that he had just uttered.

To be plain, Kyd Douglass had detected a lifting of the eyelids as the stricken guide rode by. More: he had thought that in the opening of his keen orbs the Yankee had realized his situation.

"I'll keep this from them," the boy had said, to himself. "They'd finish the Indian's work if they knew. Frosty, you and I have a great work to do in the Black-foot country!"

"Thet's the first dead man I ever see'd ride a horse!" said the dwarf, breaking in upon the youth's thoughts. "I hope they all don't do it in this kentry. Boys, we've got the winnin' hand. When we've did the other job, these mountains an' their gold ar' ourn. Isn't this wuth riskin one's skin fur? We don't want any pardners. Four ar' enough: four? no! I furgot Ramsden. Five ar' most too many!" and the speaker sent another quick glance at the boy. "All we hev to do is to act kind o' white with Arrer Head; keep away from the red gals. We didn't come hyar to make love. We come fur gold—gold! Don't furgit that."

"If I let a woman's face drag me from the yaller rocks, I want to be shot!" said one of the men.

The other echoed the same opinion; but Kyd Douglass was silent.

Fortunately his abstraction was not inquired into by Dwarf Dan; but one of the men was not unobservant, for he leaned forward and shot these words into the boy's ear:

"Leave us, Kyd, an' go back. You can't fool the cap'n. He's got the tiger in 'im, an' he's marked you. Go back an' leave the gal; let her choose between Dan an' the Injun!"

Kyd Douglass did not reply; but gave the speaker a look that said:

"Go back? I'll die here first!"

When the quartette resumed its ride, it was to move quietly through the silent town without disturbing a single inhabitant.

"We'll bunk hyar, fur thar's no use in disturbin' the chief till mornin'," said Dwarf Dan, drawing rein in the grove. "Marley Morgan, I want you to do me a favor. Go down and see ef Arrer Head hesn't left the village. He war talkin' about reconnoiterin' Camp Frosty. Mebbe he's gone."

The men thus addressed looked into each other's faces and then glanced at the boy.

"Ef ye won't go, I'll go myself," said the dwarf leader, tartly, scowling at their hesitation.

"No; we'll go!" was the response, and a moment later the two men glided away.

They went down into the Blackfoot town and heard the heavy breathing of Arrow Head in his own capacious lodge.

"Dan knowed we'd find the old chief hyar," Marley said to his comrade. "I wish we hedn't left the boy. He's in danger when——"

The sharp report of a firearm broke the man's sentence and sent both forward.

"If he's teched the young 'un!" said Marley, clenching his great hands. "I war beginnin' to like 'im. Somehow or other, the boy war gittin' a big hold on my old heart."

The men sprung forward and ran swiftly between the lines of lodges; they reached the line of trees and came suddenly upon a man on horseback.

In his right hand he held the bridles of two other animals.

Marley Morgan uttered an oath as he bounded forward, and laid his hand on the man's knee.

"Whar's the boy?" he demanded.

Dwarf Dan looked down upon him with a devilish gleam in his evil eyes.

"The boy?" he echoed, strangely. "I don't know."

Marley Morgan clenched his teeth till they cracked.

"Dwarf Dan, you lie!" he cried, and the next moment he had jerked the dwarf from the saddle and was holding him at arm's length, his tawny hand at his meager stretch of throat.

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK TOM AND THE WOLF.—ARIEL RAMSDEN'S DISCOVERY.
—TOM BARLOW STOPS THE SHOOTING AT ANGELS!

It was man's inordinate lust for gold that had led all but two of the party, headed by "Black" Tom Barlow, into the wild Blackfoot country.

Not many days prior to the opening of this history the party had left St. Louis. A report almost too visionary to obtain credence anywhere, had reached the ears of Barlow and a few reckless companions who, for some months, had been loafing around the city, waiting, Micawber-like, for something to turn up.

There was gold in fabulous quantities in the Blackfoot country; the hills were full of it, the beds of the streams deep in virgin gold; it was the land of Ophir—the real El Dorado. Fired by this report, Tom Barlow began to hunt up a lot of congenial spirits. In St. Louis, at that time, they were not hard to find; and in less than a week after receiving the news, twenty-four daring men had flocked to Barlow's banner. Money was needed to furnish an outfit; it came from the pockets of a youth named

Douglass, who appeared strangely among the ranks of the adventurers, and seemed eager to penetrate to the almost unknown land of gold and—death!

He was the brave lad that so far, has played such a fine part in the Blackfeet country!

From the first Tom Barlow was the chosen leader of the expedition which left the city with much secrecy; but as the way lengthened before them, contentions arose in the ranks.

Before the bank of the upper Missouri had been reached, the continuous quarrels between the leading mischief, Dwarf Dan, and Barlow, had ended in blows, and one night the dwarf and four others left their companions—stole silently from the camp, leaving behind a written threat that they were going to join the Blackfeet and assist in their (Barlow's party's) destruction.

Now, the desertion of Dwarf Dan and three of his companions did not surprise the others; but that Kyd Douglass, the youth, by whose generous aid the expedition had been fitted out, should make one of the party, was past comprehension.

"I didn't think that sech a scamp as Dwarf Dan could influence sech a sensible boy!" Tom Barlow would almost invariably say when referring to the subject.

"The devil's in the young 'un," Paddock would exclaim. "Heven't I noticed 'im ever since we left Saint Louie? He hesn't been still a minute; but jumps about like a frog on a hot griddle. Why, menny a night I've seen 'im come down to the edge ov the camp an' look to'ard the Blackfoot kentry an' say—'I wish I hed wings! We creep along like snails; we'll never git thar!' Menny a time I've heard 'im talk thus when he thought nobody heard 'im. Under these sarcumstances his goin' away don't 'stonish me. Dwarf Dan may hev gone up thar to git all the gold; but the boy sees suthin' else."

"What could he see up thar but gold, Frosty? Why, thar isn't a white face up yonder!"

"Mebbe not, Tom. But gold never makes a boy act that way. I've see'd too much o' human natur' to come to thet conclusion."

Such conversations would always result in a victor for the Yankee guide, and he would leave Black Tom in a state of doubt and perplexity.

Ariel Ramsden, a man already encountered by the reader, was the second "young man" of the party, and was well built and handsome.

If Frosty Paddock had bestowed upon him the attention that he had given to Kyd Douglass, he would have discovered that there was another youth eager to reach the land of gold.

But the old guide had taken more than a passing interest in Douglass; hence he did not care much for Ramsden.

Ariel Ramsden was brave almost to recklessness. In the little battle with the Indians in which the band had lost several men he had displayed great bravery, and Tom Barlow had dubbed him "a man to be trusted."

But none saw the secret conversations that took place between Dwarf Dan and Ramsden, prior to the former's desertion. A few moments of eavesdropping might have altered Black Tom's opinion of his trusted man.

With this digression, it is now time to go back to the gold-hunters' camp in the valley in Blackfoot land.

It has been seen how Frosty Paddock's farewell words affected Ramsden and Dwarf Dan who had met at the edge of the camp.

It was almost daybreak when Ariel Ramsden went back to the camp and crept silently to the spot he had lately

left. The fire was burning low, and the figures of the gold-hunters in many a grotesque position greeted Ramsden's eyes.

"Food for bullet and tomahawk!" murmured the young man, looking at his sleeping companions. "It is astonishing how far a man will go to—die. Well, sleep on, boys; you'll need rest before this drama of the Far North-west is played through."

Noiselessly Ramsden sought the blanket which he spread near the fire; but he could not sleep. His restless tossing promised to waken his comrades.

"There'd be growling if I roused them," he said. "I'll go down to the water and watch for morning there."

Again the young man left the camp; but this time not unseen.

The eyes of Black Tom Barlow were upon him, and the burly figure of the captain of the gold-hunters went noiselessly after him.

Ramsden did not lead Tom Barlow far, for near the confines of the camp, he threw the blanket at the foot of a tree, and cast his frame upon it.

"Queer!" muttered Barlow, in a somewhat disappointed tone. "A fellar's up to no good when he gits so restless. After all, mebbe he fought so back on the Katchewan because he hed to."

But Barlow did not go back and leave Ramsden alone.

Some startling thoughts were running through his head. He was calling up the many singular and, until that hour, mysterious remarks about Ramsden, which Paddock had casually dropped from time to time. He remembered now that he had seen Ariel scowl at young Douglass, and tried, in vain, to call up a time when he had seen the two youths in friendly converse.

Tom Barlow had food for deep thought, as he stood there in the hour before dawn, watching the young man who, he thought, was to become the evil spirit of the camp.

All at once the sound of hoofs fell upon his ears.

Ariel Ramsden, not asleep for a moment, leaped to his feet, and Barlow, as he started forward, despite his self-control, cocked the rifle tightly gripped by his tawny hands.

"More hoss-thieves?" he asked himself. "By George! this time they'll find somebody awake an' they'll git a dose o' lead that'll do 'em good."

The hoof-beats ceased, even as Barlow muttered; but soon after they were heard again.

"They're coming up the hard bed of the old river!" Black Tom said. "Now if they hev designs on the camp, they'll come over the hills an' right down this way."

Ariel Ramsden, standing under the tree, heard the tread of the unseen horse with the same clearness that rewarded Barlow's attention.

But the young man thought that Dwarf Dan was coming back. Therefore, when with the first streaks of dawn a horse appeared on the crest of the little knoll upon which both men had fixed their eyes, he started forward with an exclamation, "Dan it is!" on his lips.

But it was not Dwarf Dan.

Ariel Ramsden made this discovery, and came to a sudden halt.

Daylight was fast illuminating the scene.

He saw that the horse was without a saddle, but his rider sat him with grace and ease.

"It's an Injun gal!" exclaimed Tom Barlow, gazing in astonishment upon the statue-like figures of the steed and rider. "Now, what does the boy intend to do?"

Mebbe he's in a love-scape already. An' I'm ter see a meetin'."

But such thoughts were speedily dissipated, for the captain of the gold-hunters heard an oath fall from Ramsden's lips, and saw him feel for the rifle that leaned against the tree.

"Fate has given her into my power," he murmured. "I can not be mistaken. It is she! Shall I let this opportunity slip, and then have to follow her into the mazes of the deathly Blackfoot land? No! Not when a bullet can settle matters for all time to come. I can go back and say that I fired at an Indian. If they come out and find a white girl they will curse my hastiness. But they dare not punish me. Yes, I'll put an end to the trouble she has caused us for fifteen years."

Black Tom did not hear all the words, but he heard enough.

He too, now saw that the rider of the horse was a white-girl, clad in the fantastic garments of the Blackfoot maidens. The animal appeared to be jaded from hard riding. But the girl kept her head well erect!

Ramsden was as yet unseen by the girl. But the eyes of Captain Tom were on him!

"Ha! The camp of the gold-hunters!" suddenly cried the girl in good English. "They are the men who must leave the country, or the Blackfeet will kill them. The little white-man and Arrow Head have put their heads together, and they swear that the hunters shall never go back to tell their people that the hills of the Blackfeet are full of the yellow metal. When the five days they were given to leave the country are up, their camp will be full of dead men. What shall Niokana do? She ought to go and tell her white-people. No! Not now. By and bye when she learns how the little white-man and Arrow Head are going to fight them, she will come and tell."

"You never shall, my traitress!" hissed Ariel Ramsden, throwing his rifle to his shoulder. "I'll make a round million by this shot, and fill Black Tom's camp with dead men besides!"

But there were eyes upon him that never lost sight of a single moment, and when the sharp report of a rifle broke the stillness of that Western dawn, Ariel Ramsden staggered back with a shriek.

His right arm hung limp and bloody at his side, and his rifle, so lately lifted against the girl's heart, lay undischarged on the ground.

"No shootin' at angels when Tom Barlow's about!" said the captain of the gold-hunters, stalking toward the wounded man. "Git out o' th' camp! You're the meanest dog what ever followed honest men. Look hyar, Ariel Ramsden—thar goes the gal! Wall, let her go—she isn't ridin' back alive by yer grace. Who is she?"

The question was shot fairly at Ramsden, as Niokana and her horse suddenly disappeared over the brow of the knoll.

But the youth bit his lip and, instead of a reply, sent a gleam of tigerish hate at the questioner.

"Who is she?" repeated Barlow.

"Find out if you can!" was the defiant answer.

"You will not tell me?"

"I will not."

"Do you know?"

"I do."

Black Tom stood for a moment before Ramsden. His dark, rough face wore an undecided expression.

"Did I break your arm, Ariel?" suddenly he said.

There was no pity in his tone, none in his eyes, but

instead there was a sneering hint of laughter in pose and expression.

"I—I think you did!" came the answer.

"You may thank your stars that I didn't put the bullet into your head. We're goin' ter dissolve pardnership. You must leave Camp Frosty—leave it furever, fur if you come back, we'll shoot ye down like a dog. Ye'r young yet and thar's stuff in ye to make a good man; but we don't want to bother with the makin'. I guess you've got friends hyrabouts. Now git out."

Ramsden stood still for a moment after Barlow's speech. Then his handsome face darkened with anger, as he advanced and raised his left arm.

"You've got me foul, Black Tom Barlow!" he cried. "I'm at your mercy, and cannot but obey. I will leave Camp Frosty, but I'll come back again. I'll do better than the fellow who has gone after the permit. He'll never come back—never! You don't know why I sought the Blackfoot country. But it was for a purpose. If you are good at guessing you might not shoot wide of the mark, from what you have heard and seen tonight. You will not always follow me, dog-like, as you have done to-day. The time will come when you will not be near to save the life that has just gone over the hill. And I swear by the good of Heaven and the bad of Hades, that for each drop of blood that has fallen from my arm to-day, fifty shall flow from your heart and the hearts of the men you lead. This is no boy's threat. It's a devil's! Good-bye, Tom Barlow. I'll see you later!"

With a look that was bitter enough almost to have killed, Ariel Ramsden turned his back on his captain, and unmolested, walked away.

Tom Barlow watched him out of sight without a word.

"I stirred the young 'un's bile!" he murmured. Then with a smile of utter contempt on his face added: "I wish I hadn't let him go. He's come cl'ar out hyar to find that gal. Thar's a mystery about it!"

There was a slight expression of fear on Barlow's face, as puzzled, he hurried back to the camp.

Tom found the camp somewhat excited for the rifle-shot had thoroughly aroused the sleeping men!

"It war nothin' much," Black Tom cried quickly. "I shot at a wolf—hit him in the fore leg—that war all!"

"But whar's Ramsden? Didn't you see him?" was asked.

"You bet I did. That war the name of the wolf I shot!"

The rough men looked into Tom's face, but he did not explain.

"Boys, I know suthin'," he said. "We're not goin' t' git the permit. Now, shall we go back and leave the gold?"

The answer came from every man as if but one had spoken:

"No! We'll die first!"

CHAPTER V.

A FAIR IDEA OF THE MERCY OF A BLACKFOOT INDIAN.—
ARROW-HEAD MEETS WITH THE BLOODY
DEATH-FIGURE.

This determination was uttered by the bravest spirits that ever had ventured into the Indian country.

Standing round their chosen leader, with bronzed faces and clenched hands and tightly pressed lips, the band looked like men who would never blench from the cannon's mouth, and would never break their plighted words!

"Thet's the talk," cried Black Tom Barlow, their in-

trepid leader. "I like them sentiments! Over them hills ar' thousands of Injuns! But they shan't drive us out of this gold-land—not ef we don't wish to go!"

This sentiment was received with keen approbation, and at Barlow's suggestion, the sixteen Adventurers held their naked knives above their heads, and swore to accomplish the object of their invasion of the Blackfoot country, or die together, in the brave attempt.

After this solemn oath, at Barlow's command, the gold-hunters seized their axes, and soon the near-by forest rung for the first time with the sound of the white man's peaceable steel!

The Adventurers worked with a hearty good will and the sun went down that day, as they threw the last log of a great strong fort in place; and which had been built around the only wagon of which the party could boast, a prairie schooner, with a great canvas top, and drawn by four half-tamed bronchos, when in action.

The fort stood on the level ground just West of the little valley where Camp Frosty had been established. Before it stretched a plain covered with alkali-dust and almost destitute of any living thing, while behind, and on either side, were patches of timber.

At the unanimous wish of the men the structure was called "Fort Barlow" and standing where it did was as defiant as a Gibraltar, and it was sure, all knew, to become the scene of a sanguinary struggle. The Blackfoot nation would never suffer it to remain if they could destroy it!

While Black Tom and his men were working on their fort, they often wondered at the continued absence of Frosty Paddock!

If the lank guide could get the coveted "parmit" from Arrow Head, then the old hills would open their golden stores to the white men; if not, then must come the crash of battle—and mayhap, death!

What would the permit be? Would it be mere permission to "get out" of the Blackfoot country unattacked, if one went quick; or would it be the "parmit" upon which Frosty had wagered his gold-dust?

According to Blackfoot usage, in case the permit to remain and hunt for gold, was issued, Arrow Head would ride to the gold-hunters' camp, and extend the moccasin on his right foot to Black Tom!

Frosty Paddock asserted this, and all knew that Frosty knew Indian ways!

But where was Frosty now? Where was Arrow Head?

Little did his friends know that he had not long before ridden slowly like a dead-man through the great village of the strongest red-tribe in the Indian world! He had just passed Dwarf Dan and his followers!

The bold guide, however, was not so dead as he seemed. In fact while it looked as if his horse was taking him whither it pleased, as a matter of fact there was some quiet direction of the beast going on, after all!

As Frosty passed Dwarf Dan he saw that individual, and shut his teeth harder, but he was careful still to assume the attitude of a dead man, drifting aimlessly about on a horse, and thus passed out of sight undetected; Dwarf Dan was sure that he was looking at a dead man on an aimlessly drifting horse, so Frosty passed out of sight!

"Now, what's to be did?" Frosty muttered, as soon as a safe distance had separated him from Dwarf Dan. "I can't be o' much account till I gits this hyar arrow bizzness fixed up, an' out o' me! Some strange kinder strength seems ter be a keepin' o' me up! That fainty feelin' is all gone! Queer! By George! Perhaps, the

arrow hez stopped the blood flow, an' I'd better leave it whar it is a stickin' inter me, like fun—seems ez if 'ut hed gone plumb through ter me back bone!"

The moon which had swept slowly from her bed below the horizon was now shining with bewitching effulgence, and turning to the golden disk, Frosty Paddock gently opened the bosom of his hunting shirt, and while he grated his teeth, fixed his eyes on the feathered barb that stuck in his breast.

"I don't think it's tipped with bone or iron!" muttered the guide. "The baby Blackfoot arrows are not such sure-death as the grown-ones! It hezn't bled much—a bad sign. I'll try to pull it out!"

The fingers of the guide's black sun-burned hands, now gently yet firmly grasped the shaft and slowly drew it forth. As the point, sharp but barbed as the guide had fancied, left his flesh, a few drops of blood welled from the wound. The man's face was ghastly in its pallor!

"I don't feel so well!" he whispered. "I wish I'd let the arrow stay whar it was. This may be the same case like I've know o'—wounded man feels all right, till he pulls th' arrer out; then he dies quick—oh, I feel th' old spell a comin' back. Whar's th' camp?"

Frosty looked about with rolling eyes and face white as paper. His looks showed that a terrible crisis of some kind was near.

"The camp!" he murmured. "Frosty Paddock, hev ye lost yar manhood? Does a baby arrow scare ye like this? The man who talks about goin' back ter camp without that hyar parmit, is a bloody coward, an I kin mop th' ground with him. Aha! The parmit! Thet's what I come hyar fur!"

He wheeled his horse suddenly and urged it into a gallop back over the ground he had just traversed, until the sharp report of a fire-arm broke the stillness.

The horse stopped without any command and turned its head toward its rider as if for orders.

"Thet'll rouse the Injuns!" muttered Frosty. "They'll swarm out o' the lodges like bees out o' a hive. Hello! What does thet mean? Hev the thieves and outlaws fell out among themselves?"

The voices that fell upon Paddock's ear caused him to turn in his saddle toward the west.

He heard Marley Morgan demand the boy, Kyd Douglass' whereabouts, and he heard the answer and the retort that quickly followed.

"Let Dan touch thet boy," grated Paddock. "I've got moren a passin' int'est in 'im. I'm one o' the few who knows what brought 'im inter this kentry. Tech 'im if you dare, Dan!"

A moment of attention told that Marley Morgan was grappling with the leader, Dwarf Dan!

The guide could not control himself.

"I can't stay outen a fight, thar's no use tryin'," he exclaimed. "Besides ef Dan's teched the young 'un, my hand belongs in th' scrimmage."

He started forward, riding down the edge of the woods, but he had not proceeded far when a figure sprang from behind a tree and stopped his horse!

"Thank Heaven! you live!" cried a youthful voice. "I thought I saw life in you a while ago. Don't go down there; let them fight and destroy one another. You see I am not touched; that gun was mine. It went off accidentally. Listen! the whole village is roused."

"Good! I'll get to see Arrow Head," said Paddock.

The boy, Kyd Douglass, gave him a strange look; then he saw how white and haggard the guide was.

"You had an arrow in your breast a while ago. Where is it?"

"Hyar!" and the scout drew the shaft from his belt and held it up before Kyd's eyes. "The boy what guv it to me hes stopped makin' sech presents; he's gone outen the bizness!"

The smile that played with the corners of Paddock's mouth as he talked, was ghastly. Kyd Douglass fairly shuddered.

"But I'm goin' down thar!" said the guide, suddenly. "Don't I know thatt voice that sounds like the bellow ov a bull? Listen! you can't understand what he's sayin', fur he's talkin' Blackfoot. He's cussin' all the white people, swearin' thet not one shall live in his kentry. Thet means Frosty Paddock an' you, boy, just as much as anybody. I'm goin' down an' see about it."

"No!" and Kyd Douglass held firmly onto the bridle. "Why, man, you'd hardly get there. The arrow has given you your death-wound, Frosty. Come to the camp. I'll take you back. You'll have friends about you there!"

"Say, what ar' ye talkin' about?" roared the guide, as he leaned forward and seized the boy's wrist. "Who is it thet says die to Frosty Paddock, before he gits the parmit? Young 'un, ef it warn't fur what I know, I'd knock ye into the middle o' next week. Take yer hand off the rein, boy, an' go back to the camp yerself. Tell 'em I'll be along arter awhile, with the parmit. I'm one o' them what don't die 'til they're ready, an' Old Frosty ain't ready, by a long ways, to go on the spirit trail."

Kyd Douglass started back with a look of horror at the man, who with death apparently written in face and tone, could talk thus.

"Thet's right, boy; go back! I'll try an' get the gal when I get the parmit. Go back!"

The outstretched hand of the tall guide pointed toward Camp Frosty; but Kyd Douglass did not stir.

And while he stood there, with his eyes still fastened on Paddock, the horse touched by the guide's heels shot away.

"He's not only dying, but mad!" exclaimed the young adventurer.

He started after Paddock with the words on his lips, but he soon stopped; already the guide was out of sight.

Meanwhile, on the spot where Marley Morgan jerked Dwarf Dan from his saddle, there were loud voices.

The accidental discharge of Kyd Douglass's gun, had roused the Indian village. Armed in an instant, the Blackfeet poured from their lodges. Led by the giant and merciless Arrow Head, they had rushed to the scene of the struggle in time to wrench Dwarf Dan, already choked to insensibility, from Marley Morgan's grip!

Of course the two deserters were surrounded in an instant, and then it was that the great chief lifted his voice and declared that the whites should be driven from the land that they had invaded.

Marley Morgan heard all this without a murmur; but with eyes fixed on the dwarfish figure on the ground.

"I hope I've choked 'im to death!" Morgan thought. "He killed the boy—murdered 'im in cold blood!"

These words had hardly passed through the man's brain, before Arrow Head, the Blackfoot, whirled upon him.

"White man kill his chief—Arrow Head's friend!"

"I hope so!"

"White dog glad, eh?"

The flash of Morgan's eyes and the glance that he sent to the prostrated dwarf, answered Arrow Head's envenomed words.

With one majestic stride, the Blackfoot fiend halted before the man, who, held by a score of scarlet hands, was as helpless as a captive in irons.

"You got me foul," was all that Marley Morgan said, looking undaunted into the glittering eyes of Arrow Head.

The hatchet which the chief had lifted fell bloodless at his side.

"Take the white dog to the tree that stands in the moonlight and tie him there!" he said to the braves who held Morgan.

This command was promptly obeyed, and the gold-hunter soon found himself fastened to a tree, with his face turned toward the Blackfeet.

During the tying process, Arrow Head had not been idle, and when the guard had finished their work, six bowmen stepped forward.

"Great Heavens! Arrow Head is going to treat me to the death he always gives a foe!" muttered Morgan. "But I'll face it like a man. Look up, Marley Morgan; grit yer teeth an' cuss the scarlet skunks to the last. But Fred Sellers will avenge me."

As he looked he saw the shining tips of the Blackfoot arrows drawn to the bow.

"Shoot an' be hanged!" he cried.

The next instant six bowstrings were released from the red fingers, and Marley Morgan's head dropped upon his breast as four arrows buried themselves in the seat of life.

An oath and a strange cry caused many to wheel and see Dwarf Dan standing erect, but still almost black in the face from his terrible choking.

Arrow Head, with a cry of pleasure, sprung forward and seized the dwarf's hand.

"Arrow Head has struck!" he said, pointing to the motionless figure at the tree.

"Morgan?"

"Yes, Marley Morgan! He died like a man, too!"

Dwarf Dan said nothing; but his look told that he was glad.

"Gods! what a grip he had," he suddenly cried putting his hand to his throat. "I saw all the worlds that shoot around the sun. I'm goin' to see 'im. Mebbe he's not dead yet."

"Arrow Head go, too."

Dwarf Dan started forward. If the arrows had not finished Morgan, the pistol that he held in his right hand would.

The tree was not far away; but a cry from the Indian arrested Dan's progress.

"Wahhee!" (look yonder!) exclaimed the chief, pointing at an object which seemed to have risen from the earth.

Dwarf Dan was not a moment in recognizing it.

"Old Frosty!" he cried, starting back, fear-stricken. "Look! he's dead, Arrow Head—dead! an' sittin' bolt upright in the saddle!"

With one hand clutching the naked arm of the Blackfoot chief, while the other pointed to the apparition on horseback, Dwarf Dan was the picture of terror.

"Not dead?" said the Blackfoot incredulously.

"Dead as a tree cut to the heart! He's been ridin' through the camp all night without a speerit in his life-box."

"Arrow Head go see!"

The chief rudely jerked his arm from Dwarf Dan's grasp, and strode boldly toward the silent horseman.

A minute's walk brought him to the spot, and as he

raised his eyes to the figure that sat motionless in the saddle his red hand fell upon his knee.

That touch seemed to break the spell, and old Frosty fell forward heavily, crushing Arrow Head to the earth! A wild cry of horror rung from Dan's throat.

CHAPTER VI.

YOUNG GLADIATORS.—KYD DOUGLASS MOURNS THE DEATH OF MORGAN.—SCALPED AND MUTILATED BY RED DEVILS.

Like a man in a trance, but with his eyes wide and staring, Kyd Douglass saw Frosty Paddock ride away.

"What! go back to the camp just because he told me to?" he said at last. "Go back where Ariel Ramsden is, and leave her here while that merciless deformity lives to plan—to possess, or kill! No!" and the boy shut his hands hard. "I will not go back. I will see what he is going to do."

He went down in Frosty's wake with these words on his lips; but soon halted before the scene that we have just described.

"That is the last of him!" he ejaculated as the Indians, rushing forward, gathered around the guide, from whose embrace Arrow Head had disengaged himself. "I can do no good there, although among them I would be safe—yes, safe until Dwarf Dan could get a chance to do with his hands what he could not do with his eyes to-night—commit murder. Now if I knew where *she* was! Dare I go down and lok for her? Dare I?"

He went to the right and walked boldly into the Blackfoot town.

The spot where, on the previous day, he had encountered Niokana, the White Queen of the Blackfeet, he had not forgotten; and by the assistance of the moon soon reached it. Boldly he threw aside the curtains that formed the door of Niokana's lodge but found it deserted.

Was she a witness to the scenes transpiring at the edge of the timber, not far away?

"I'll go and see!" said Kyd Douglass to himself.

But before he could reach the spot he discovered that the Indians were returning to the village.

The youth stopped and then, as swiftly as flits the shadow, he glided into a lodge and looked out.

Past him poured the flood of savages. He saw Arrow Head and the Dwarf walking side by side, he saw the Dwarf's companion, free but guarded by hundreds of evil eyes, and he wondered where Marley Morgan was.

But a close scrutiny of the many female figures that mingled with the men failed to reveal Niokana to the boy's eyes. He bit his lips with disappointment, and waited for the last Indian.

Then he left the lodge and went toward the timber. There he found poor Marley Morgan quite dead, with his scalp gone—stripped off by some red-skinned urchin, as the job attested.

"He was one of my few friends," said Kyd with a sigh as he turned from the disgusting spectacle. "I'll make the miscreants pay for this before I go back."

After some study the boy resolved to proceed at once to Camp Frosty with intelligence of the old guide's death.

The spot was some miles distant; but the youth knew that by following the little stream along whose banks he was walking, he would come almost abruptly upon it.

Therefore, the first flush of dawn found him pushing in a southerly direction.

Besides the rifle that he carried, he bore a pistol—a revolver on which he could depend.

More than once he stopped and looked wistfully back, for every step, he believed, was taking him from the white girl Queen of the Blackfeet. In these abrupt halts, he never saw the figure, in stature boyish like his own, that followed him in that unwearied dog-trot of the American Indian.

The trailer did not try to keep the white youth always in sight, for this he could not do; but he came on, seemingly satisfied of final success.

When at last Kyd threw himself on a log for repose, the trailer began to creep forward with the agility of the cougar. He never took his snaky eyes from the youth, and the tomahawk that he grasped with his right hand was ready for the throw.

"Bless me if I know what I ought to do, at this late hour!" the young adventurer was saying to himself, continuing the train of thought into which he had unconsciously fallen. "They will not be helped by hearing about Frosty, and while I am away, that deformed tiger may carry out his designs. I—I believe I will go back!"

At that moment, in the grass just behind the log, crouched a veritable human leopard. He had heard Kyd's every word, and he slipped his hatchet back into his belt.

Then, with a spring that would have reflected credit upon the most agile of the tiger kind, he sprang up and fell upon the white youth so heavily that both went over the log and rolled some distance away!

Kyd Douglass, taken by surprise, did not recover until he found a hand at his throat, and saw glaring at him the eyes of an Indian boy.

Although our hero had been but a short time in the Blackfoot town, he knew those glaring orbs—knew that he was in the grasp of Red Wasp, the betrothed of Nio-kana the white girl.

There was a laugh of victory in the red-skin's eyes, but Kyd by a desperate effort drove it out, for all at once, he wrenched the dusky hand from his throat, and the next instant they stood erect, breathing hard, like youthful gladiators.

Face to face, hand to hand.

"White boy quick as cat!" said Red Wasp, acknowledging his enemy's suppleness. "Him first boy ever turn Red Wasp that way."

"I am, eh? Well, red-skin, I'm glad you found your match. You followed me?"

"Red Wasp trail boy. Him have his head so full of think, that he could not see behind him."

Kyd did not reply; but eyed the boy. He noticed the muscles that stood out on his powerful arms, bared to the shoulder, and could but inwardly praise the massive chest that Red Wasp owned.

"Boy strong! so is Red Wasp. Let us fight."

The Indian's laconism at another time would have amused Kyd Douglass; but now, as he stood at arm's length and looked into the eagle eye of the young Blackfoot, he knew that a struggle for life and death was at hand.

"Of course we will fight!" the boy exclaimed, and the next moment he tried to jerk Red Wasp from his footing.

But he might as well have tried to uproot an oak tree.

The eyes of the Indian boy sent forth a merry twinkle at the failure, which served only to exasperate the white lad, who with his teeth clenched together, and his eyes flashing, hurled himself forward again with irresistible force.

Both the boys went headlong to the ground.

There they fought, hot and furious. Now Red Wasp

had the advantage. Then, in turn, Kyd, the Adventurer, secured a short-lived triumph. Two antagonists were never before so evenly matched.

"If I can force him against a tree!" thought Kyd, "then, I'll have him at a disadvantage."

To accomplish this the boy summoned all his powers.

But Red Wasp, as if conscious of his tactics, baffled the attempt!

As they struggled the sun peeped over the eastern hills and chased the last vestige of the gloom from the glade. It bathed the dancing ripples of the little stream near by, in golden beauty.

Puffing and blowing, covered with sweat and almost exhausted, the combatants fought on.

"You're the toughest customer I ever took on!" thought Kyd. "If I could I'd take you east and pit you against all comers, in the fighting game—you'd be a Red Hope, this time! I could make a pile of money with you Red Wasp, for when you stand up this way before Kyd Douglass, you ought to have the wrestler's badge that I won two years ago—to say nothing of the string I won in sparring last season!"

As if conscious of the mental praise his honest young adversary was bestowing upon him, the Indian's look turned to one of pride, and the next moment he took his hands from his foe and folded them across his chest.

The white boy opened his eyes with surprise, and at the puzzled look that came to his countenance, Red Wasp essayed a faint smile.

"White boy only one that ever stand up against Red Wasp!" cried the Indian, in his harsh, rasping attempt to cope with the English language.

"What do you mean?" asked Kyd.

In answer Red Wasp put out his hand in a friendly manner.

"White boy, good fighter," he grunted.

"We're even," rejoined the white lad. "For I'll tell you right here that I never heard of any one before—let alone ever saw the boy—that could stand up and hold his own the way you did today. But can I trust you? They say you Indians shake hands one minute and stab a fellow in the back the next!"

With a flash in his dark eyes at the accusation, the redskin lad stepped back and drew his knife.

"See knife?" he questioned, holding it up before Kyd's eyes.

"Oh, of course I do."

Then the Blackfoot seized the blade at the point with his left hand, and with a quick snap the steel was broken, and the two pieces lay at the white boy's feet.

"That looks like business!" cried Kyd, putting forth his hand but Red Wasp drew haughtily back.

"White boy thought that the red hand did not mean friendship?" queried the Indian. "Red Wasp will not touch his skin till he has proved it. Go! Tell the gold-hunters that they will all die if they do not take up the trail that leads from the land of the Blackfeet!"

For a moment Kyd stood before his young foe thoroughly abashed!

"Red Wasp, I did not——"

"Go," came the interruption. "They must go, or if they stay they must not shut their eyes. The Indian's hand was not good enough for the white boy. He think that Red Wasp told out a lie. Go!"

The word "lie" was full of bitter sarcasm, and while it came gratefully through the young Blackfoot's clenched teeth, he deliberately turned his back upon the white lad and bounded away like a frightened antelope!

CHAPTER VII.

DWARF DAN POSES AS UNDERTAKER AND SURGEON.—BURIED
IN THE AIR.—A HORRIBLE SITUATION.

If Kyd Douglass could have swept with his youthful vision the space that stretched between the new trail he was making and the Blackfoot village, he might have beheld a scene that would have possessed more than passing interest.

Riding from the Indian town, and toward a lot of hills, making up the famous Little Wind mountains, and which sheltered the famous Robbers of Little Wind, to which, he might have known had he investigated, Dwarf Dan and his gang belonged, were two men. They were Dwarf Dan, and Arrow Head, the implacable chief of the Black-foot nation.

The white man and the Indian were well mounted but not equipped for a journey.

Before the dwarfish figure, on the neck of his horse, and held in place by the dwarf's strong hands, lay a human body, rigid and motionless.

The upturned face was ghastly and full of death, and the eyes stared strangely into the wicked face which now and then looked into them.

"They'll never find him, you say Chief?" questioned the dwarf, as he turned in his saddle and looked at his companion, Arrow Head, with a grim smile.

"Never find 'im!" was the echo-answer that the deep voice of the Indian gave. "Arrow Head will put white man where sunlight never see 'im."

"And, not under the ground?"

"No! In air!"

Dwarf Dan gave the Indian a puzzled glance. But he did not speak again until the party found themselves among the hills of the Little Wind!

They were now in the midst of a very wild scene. There were great ragged peaks on every side. Some were fringed almost to the tops with a prickly bush that made the horses wince as they were urged along.

Daylight broke almost suddenly upon this scene, and drew an exclamation from Dwarf Dan's lips!

"This is the very Devil's roost!" he said, with a shudder that showed the superstitious part of his nature. "If the gold of Ophir war hyar fer th' diggin' it might rust afore I'd lift a pick agin them rocks, thar!"

"Gold all 'round!" said Arrow Head with a quick sweep of his bronzed hand. "White man come here quick if Arrow Head say 'come!'"

The dwarf did not reply.

A bird leaving its ghoulish retreat, flitted so near his face that its wing had actually touched it.

"Big bird touch, brother, eh?" observed the Indian.

"Yes, curse it! I say let's git out o' this region as quick as we kin. Whar is the buryin' ground?"

But Arrow Head was in no humor to hurry.

"This bad place," he said. "Years ago I find it. They call it Hungry Trail! White bandit he live here—
all die of the plague."

"Smallpox, eh?" cried the dwarf.

"White man so call it," gravely said Arrow Head. "Indian call it the great plague. Two bandit as I say live here. One he get the plague. It was winter, and one bandit he have sleigh and dogs to draw sleigh."

Knowing that some horror was coming soon, the Dwarf halted and listened intently.

"One bandit load sick-plague stricken friend on sleigh. He turn him out into great wild-desolate country to die. I hide behind rock there—and I hear these words:

"'I'll turn you loose, bound as you are to die in the wilderness, you 'tarnel Plague-Spreader,' cried the bandit."

The dwarf shuddered to think what must have been the fate of the man on the sleigh, sick, and bound and mercilessly turned out to die in the wilderness.

"What become of the man?" he asked.

"I don't know. He go off by the team—I never hear from him more. And I kill th' man left," chuckled the implacable Indian. "No white man, alive, but you ever come here since!"

Silently Arrow Head rode away, followed by the dwarf, who again shuddered at the scene that had christened this place.

The twain soon rode into a dark cavernous place arched overhead by rocks that almost excluded the light of day flushing the eastern Heavens, and Arrow Head, pausing for a moment, slid from his saddle.

"Hyar at last ar' we?" ejaculated Dwarf Dan, in a surprised tone, but one of supreme satisfaction. "I've wished forty thousand times since we left your town, thet I hedn't insisted on a Christian burial for Frosty! I wanted 'im to hev it fur the favor he done me in Saint Louie!"

At the chief's command the dwarf glided to the ground, and Arrow Head lifted the body of the guide from the saddle.

The horses were left in the ravine and the pair went down into the gloom, the stalwart Blackfoot in the advance, carrying with apparent ease the body of the man who wanted the "parmit."

Dwarf Dan followed Arrow Head, with a cocked pistol in his nerveless hand, and his face rendered absolutely hideous by its ghastly color, seemed to belong more to a dead than a living man.

Dwarf Dan followed Arrow Head until the chief stood in some dark place which Dan knew was a cove of some kind.

"White brother got light?" asked the chief, and the echoes came back from the gloom and sounded like the voice of a thousand imps.

Dwarf Dan produced a match, and the light, that flashed like a new star in the darkness, ignited a prepared torch that Arrow Head had carried from the Indian village.

"Now we bury white man in air," said the Indian, thrusting the torch into Dan's hand.

Stooping over Frosty Paddock, the Blackfoot worked for several minutes with a coil of rope, and when he rose, the dwarf saw that the old guide's coffin had been made.

He was then told to pick up the body and drag it after the chief, who went forward, torch in hand. This was done, and when Arrow Head halted again it was as could be plainly seen, at the very edge of a cliff!

The dwarf knew that they occupied the gallery of some gigantic chamber for the torch revealed the opening beneath him. Before them several spurs of rock ran into the air; but the points he could not see.

After awhile Arrow Head picked up the body and went forward with it. Dan saw him tying the rope to one of these rocky spurs, and then something shot around and disappeared!

Arrow Head came back with a look of satisfaction in his savage eye.

"Old trail-finder buried!" he said in reply to the dwarf's look.

"Buried—whar?"

"Arrow Head will show brother."

The hand of the Blackfoot encircled Dwarf Dan's arm and the two went forward.

Arrow Head stooped and swung the torch below him. *It revealed—what?*

A man lying in a net-work of sinewy-rope and suspended from a splintered rock by a single cord!

Below the man was Egyptian darkness; around him the dim glare of the Indian's torch.

Dwarf Dan did not look long upon the scene. He turned away with a shudder.

"Thet isn't the kind o' a coffin I want!" he said, in a weak attempt at humor.

"By an' by white-trailer get another one!" said Arrow Head.

"When?"

"When rope get rotten an' let him drop."

"Good God!" shuddered Dan. "How far would he fall?"

A faint smile glittered in the redskin's orbs.

"Watch!" he said significantly, as he whirled the torch about his head, and then sent it whirling and hissing downward, like a falling star.

Dwarf Dan, with his merciless heart in his throat, ventured to bend over the edge of the cliff and watch the descent of the torch.

It seemed an incredible time reaching the bottom of the underground chamber, but at last it struck, scattering its sparks in every direction. Almost immediately the torch went out.

Dwarf Dan did not speak. But he turned to the Indian whom he could not see.

"Come!" cried the welcome voice of Arrow Head, and guided by the Blackfoot, Dan passed from old Frosty's tomb and soon after reached the horses which now stood revealed in the broad daylight.

"I wouldn't go back thar fur all the gold in Chris'endom!" said Dan, next venturing to cast a look at the hills beneath whose tops the hands of Arrow Head had entombed the famous guide of early times.

The Indian gave him a look of lofty contempt, but did not reply, and urging their horses over the ground, now comparatively level, they entered the village at a brisk gallop.

"Now I'll hunt the gal up!" said Dwarf Dan to himself. "They've settled Marley Morgan, an' will fix Fred Sellers' fate afore night. Thet is they will ef I kin git the chief's ear fer a minute! I'm beginnin' ter lose interest in the diggins' hyar, ef thar's whar we planted Frost, is whar them diggins is ter be found! I'd rather hev the gal. She's the one what them two young roosters want and ef I play a good hand, and play it well, thar'll be as much money in her fur me, as fur Kyd, the boy. Hello! what does that mean?"

The dwarf had separated from Arrow Head, and was not far from the southern confines of the Blackfoot village, and as he looked he saw that the rider of one of two horses that were coming toward him at a sharp gallop, was the White Queen of the Indians, Niokana. The other rider, he saw, was a representative of his own sex, but he rode like a captive, one arm hanging at his side as if pinioned there.

Dwarf Dan watched the pair with interest.

"The gal an' the boy, by the eternal!" he suddenly cried, recognizing Ariel Ramsden in Niokana's companion. "What on airth brings him hyar, afore his time fer comin'?"

Then fearing that the girl, who was holding the bridle

of Ramsden's horse as well as her own, might turn suddenly aside, he galloped forward, and planting himself firmly in the narrow thoroughfare halted the twain.

Niokana's eyes flashed fire at this proceeding, but she did not speak.

Ariel, old boy, what on airth's the matter?" exclaimed Dan. "Your hyar ahead o' time!"

"Yes, but not against my will!" grated the youth. "Captain Dan, I want the blood of every white man who is in Camp Frosty; but especially that of the devil who broke my arm."

"Yer arm broke?"

"Shattered!" exclaimed Ariel.

"What war ye doin'?"

Ramsden glanced at the girl.

"Nothing that called for Black Tom's interference!" he said, lowering his voice.

"But for Heavens sakes——"

"Let me have medical attention," added Ariel. "I have suffered a thousand deaths since daylight."

Niokana's hand left Ramsden's bridle as he spoke. Before he could address her she was beyond tongue shot.

"Now," said Dwarf Dan, moving up to the young man, "what made Black Tom shoot you?"

Ramsden bit his already bleeding lips.

"I was cursing that girl—that was all!"

"Only cussin' her, boy? I'm a bigger man in these parts than you think I am. Lyin' won't do you any good hyar!"

"Why should I lie?" said Ariel, meeting the dwarf's look with one that disconcerted him. "The gal isn't much to either of us. I want my arm dressed."

"Well 'tend to thet now!" was the response, and the dwarf led the youth to a large birchen lodge, which his ally Arrow Head had presented to him.

Once within, Dan turned upon Ramsden, and with frontier roughness began to remove his jacket.

"Stop, Dan!" suddenly cried the youth. "Such work as that would kill me. Cut the sleeve. I can stand that!"

"Jest as you wish, my boy."

The dwarf's keen knife went to work, and was not long in exposing the member terribly shattered by Black Tom Barlow's ball.

Ramsden grew faint at the sight, and gritted his teeth till they cracked.

The dwarf examined the arm for several moments, watched with varying emotions by the boy, who waited impatiently for his decision.

"It was a purty arm afore Black Tom got in his work!" broke forth the dwarf suddenly. "But now it's usefulness hes departed. We'll hev to cut it off, boy!"

Ramsden's young eyes flashed.

"Never!" he cried.

"I'm the doctor in the case!" was the cold-hearted rejoinder. "An' that's the doctor's opinion. The arm must come off to save the patient."

Ariel Ramsden stared speechless for a moment into Dwarf Dan's unsympathizing face.

"Cut off my arm?—my right arm?" he yelled, breaking from the dwarf's grasp. "By the foul fiends! it shall never be done! It is mine—mine only, and I will yet deal blows of vengeance with it. Don't talk to me about cutting it off. Dan Wolflaw, if you repeat the words you have just uttered I'll kill you where you stand!"

The dwarf did not retreat from the infuriated youth who, with the last sentence on his lips had snatched a pistol from his belt.

He stood in his old tracks with a perplexing smile on his hideous face.

"Wal, keep yer arm, then, an' be dead—dead as Old Frosty—afore two days!" he said, cruelly.

The words drove every vestige of color from Ramsden's face.

A groan, torn from the depths of his heart, fell from his lips, and dropping the pistol, he stepped forward, holding out his right arm with his left.

"Dead before two days? No! not that! Here is my arm, Dan. Cut it off!"

Then seeing, perhaps, the fiendish look of triumph that scintillated in the dwarf's eyes, Ramsden's stalwart nature gave way, and he dropped insensible at the feet of the fiend.

"Yes, I'll cut it off," hissed Dan. "An' I'll cut deeper than you think, too!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NIOKANA DRAWS BLOOD.—ARIEL RAMSDEN LOSES HIS RIGHT ARM.—SCHEMER DWARF DAN GETS THE LASH.

One hour later the sole occupant of the Blackfoot lodge was Ariel Ramsden, and he, propped up by a bundle of skins, was looking at the stump of the once strong arm that now hung illy bandaged at his side.

His teeth were tightly shut and the pallor of his face would have frightened many a one not strong-hearted.

"Tom Barlow," hissed the youth, "I have thought that my great work would be to hunt you down and scatter your brains as you have scattered my blood! This thought has afforded me indescribable pleasure; it made me forget pain, and I even dreamed that, on vengeance and that alone I could live. But this day—this devil-work—has added another name to my death-list. I have been a fool! I swallowed his lie. When it was too late I discovered all. Dan Wolfaw, you cut deeper than I thought you would, for by Heaven! you cut for a purpose. I see it all now, accursed that I have been! But shall he kill? Must I go under by the arts of such a villain—now when I have found the girl; now—No! all the butchering-knives of this country shall not slay me. I will live—live to send a bullet crashing through the brain of Captain Dan!"

Strengthened for a moment by his hot words, the youth sprung to his feet, but the next moment he fell back on the cot of heated skins, and with a groan sunk into unconsciousness.

The sun came up and moved meridianward, showering its beams upon the Indian town. At high noon, a dwarfish figure whose little eyes danced like dervishes in their sockets, went to the lodge and peeped inside.

Ariel Ramsden, the girl-hunter, was lying there, with the bloody bandages torn from his arm, from which, from the dark stains on the ground, a great deal of blood had exuded.

Was he dead?

"Mighty nigh the end!" muttered the dwarf, moving away. "They don't get ahead o' Dan when he undertakes a job. I cut deeper than the boy wanted me to! The old knife didn't slip accidentally; it never does!"

The scoundrel went down the village-way, but a pair of eyes were upon him, and he had scarcely disappeared, when the owner of those watchful orbs glided to the lodge.

A light cry of horror fell from a pair of whitened lips, and the young girl who had been looking in upon the terrible sight that the noon-day sun revealed, started back with the most pallid of faces.

"The little man cut arm off!" she said. "And white-face bleeding to death."

For a moment Niokana stood undecided where she had halted; then, venturing to look once more at Ariel Ramsden, she flew down through the town.

When she came back, there ran at her side, an old Indian whose fantastic paraphernalia hastily thrown upon his scrawny figure, proclaimed him one of the medicine-men of the tribe.

The two entered the lodge together. The savage doctor shook the youth, but could not open the eyes, so tightly closed. He then tried several other rough arts to restore consciousness, but as often as he tried, he failed.

Niokana watched him intently.

At last the Indian doctor gave up in despair.

"What says our great medicine?" asked the girl, in the tribal tongue.

"Must die!" was the sententious decision.

Niokana rose and went out. Her lips were tightly shut; her eyes flashing.

This was the young man who had lately attempted to take her life. She did not know why he should be her enemy.

At the threshold of the lodge the girl paused and looked back at the perplexed doctor.

"Try again!" she said, and then went away.

Not far away she entered a lodge, whose sides, of dressed skins, were covered with various designs in pigments, which told that some person of delicate tastes, for that wild region, had made them.

"His skin is white. He is Arrow Head's brother; but he wanted *his* brother dead. Niokana would have saved the arm. He will die now, for when old Segabo cannot cure, all is lost. Where is the stunted killer?"

The White Queen emerged from her lodge, with the question on her lips. She held in her hands an object seldom seen at that day in Blackfoot land—a wagon-whip.

It was one of those formidable affairs called a "black snake" by the teamster. On the California trails it was not rare; but so far north as the Indian village stood, it was pre-eminently a rarity.

Scarcely had Niokana left the lodge, when a familiar figure appeared in sight. Her eyes beamed with delight as it approached.

A few minutes later, she stood face to face with Red Wasp.

"Red Wasp want to talk to Niokana!" said the Blackfoot boy, keeping back a certain desire that his mad eyes but illy concealed.

"Not now," said the girl. "Does he want to know how Kishewata rode?"

"No!" and the Indian winced under this allusion to his unsuccessful attempt to break the wild colt. "He wanted to tell Niokana that he has broken all her things in his lodge."

A smile wreathed the lips of the white girl, angering the young red-skin till he ground his heel into the soft earth.

"Is that all?"

"What more does Niokana want?" he cried, seizing her arm. "Must Red Wasp break her arm, as he broke up all her trinkets—the beads that she strung for him, and all? She can laugh Red Wasp's hand into her pretty mouth!"

"If you dare!" said the eyes of the indignant girl, as she tore her arm from the red boy's grasp, and, a few feet away, with her fine figure drawn to its full height,

stood proudly erect, with the whip held threateningly in her right hand.

For a moment, the Blackfoot boy, taken aback by this display of resentment, stood undecided in his tracks.

"The hand of Red Wasp will never touch Niokana's mouth!" said the girl. "He can break up all the trinkets that Niokana gave him but he cannot ride Kishewata!"

There was a poorly-concealed taunt in the last sentence, and the display of laughing teeth that accompanied the utterance, was too much for the boy's temper.

He went boldly forward, with a mad cry on his lips; but the whip, whirling over Niokana's head, shot forward with a pistol-like crack, and struck him squarely across the face!

A yell of rage and pain followed the blow.

Red Wasp staggered back, cut to the bone, almost, by the sharp lash, while the white girl, ready for another stroke, looked half-pityingly on.

But the irate lover did not fall. Quickly recovering, he looked for a moment at the girl, and then, without having uttered one threat, or a word of revenge, he turned sullenly on his heel and walked away.

This proceeding on his part perplexed Niokana, and the looks that she gave him were full of wonder.

"Let him go!" she said, at last. "By and by he will come back and say that he is sorry. Now for the stunted killer!"

Turning her back upon her scarlet lover, the girl hastened to the corral on the western side of the village, and, assisted by the savage in charge, secured the steed which we have already seen her master.

Mounting the animal after the usual manner she turned his head toward the town, nor drew rein until the sight evidently sought fell upon her eyes.

The heat of the sun had driven the savages to the cool structure that occupied a greater part of the main square. This was a building whose sole support consisted of a number of strong poles; it was well-roofed with boughs, thickly covered with leaves, totally excluding the beams of a vertical sun.

Here lounged the chiefs, through the sultry days, away from the suffocating closeness of the wigwam, for a light breeze invariably blew through the building, making it a loungers' Paradise.

Niokana saw in the center of this building a figure that made her eyes flash.

Dwarf Dan was talking with Arrow Head, who, with an Indian pipe between his teeth, was listening attentively.

When the girl drew rein, she let the long whip, stained near the end by the blood it had just drawn, drop at her side, and the next moment rode forward again.

She went straight into the great structure, her keen eyes riveted upon the apish figure that stood beside the giant person of the Blackfoot chief, and when she halted it was right before the twain.

"Why comes Niokana here?" asked Arrow Head.

"Ask the mangling wolf that shows his fangs at Arrow Head's side!" was the rejoinder.

"That means me!" said Dan, quickly. "What hev I done to make you huffy, my purty one? By the leapin' jingo! I'd want you to be mad all the time. When I git ye, I'll git some fellar to rile ye, fer ye'r' the purtiest when ye'r' mad!"

Did the dwarf see the whip shoot upward—above the head of the avenger of her enemy's blood?

He started back with an oath—a cry—for he saw what Niokana was going to do.

But as well might he have attempted to retreat from the hands of avenging fate. Her agile body, darting forward, followed him, and before Arrow Head could interpose his stalwart frame, the cruel lash, dealing three tremendous blows in rapid succession, had dashed Dwarf Dan to the ground!

The schemer roared like a beast, and writhing in the dirt, covered his lacerated face, and rolled over and over in his agony.

"Back!" cried Niokana, drawing the whip an Arrow Head. "I want to teach the stunted slayer that this hide-snake can bite like his knife. Ho! ho! would the Blackfeet take his part and punish Niokana? They shall not!"

A pair of spurs would not have sent her horse forward quicker than did her word.

Arrow Head sprung aside in time to prevent being dashed down, and among the Indians who evinced a disposition to arrest her, the whip executed a cut that drew forth cries of pain.

Niokana dashed from the lounging-house of the Blackfeet; galloped swiftly through the village, and, with a wild cry of farewell, and a crack of the "black snake," now double dyed with blood, she passed into the woods beyond!

CHAPTER IX.

FIVE THOUSAND RED AGAINST SIXTEEN WHITES.—A
WRITTEN MISSIVE IN LETTERS THAT LOOKED
AS IF MADE OF BLOOD!

"What ails you, boy? Hyar ye've sot fur an hour, lookin' straight inter the ground, jest as if ye war seein' suthin' thar!"

Tom Barlow's rough words seemed to arouse Kyd Douglass, and he raised his eyes to encounter the friendly gaze of the captain of the gold-adventurers.

"Was I saying anything, Tom?" asked Kyd, with much anxiety.

"I should say ye warn't," replied the astonished captain of the gold-hunters, with a laugh, "but ye've been doin' a powerful sight o' thinkin' in the last half hour. What's up?"

As Black Tom put this pointed interrogatory, he left his station and took a seat on the log which Kyd occupied.

"A feller gits in er fix when thar's a gal in the case," pursued the old gold-seeker. "I hev'n't come out hyar with my eyes shut. Thet isn't Tom Barlow's way of travelin'. Kyd, boy, you can't be blamin' yerself fur bringin' bad news to the fort?"

Then the boy spoke:

"I wish I had not brought it of course," he said. "It has discouraged some of the boys."

"Some of the weak ones," said Barlow. "But they'll show grit when the time comes. Don't let thet bother you. We've lost a host in Old Frosty—and he made the fooli-hest bet—an' the young skunk that took part o' the bet, put up th' job, and helped t' force the old man inter the wager; thet feller knawed jest how 'twas comin' out. I hope my bullet sent death to his dirty, cowardly heart. They be poor surgeons up thar—them Injun doctors, they calls medicine-men!"

"May be he didn't go there, Tom!"

"But he did! I knowed he would come back fer his hoss, so I told Red John who war watchin' the critters to let him have his animal. Sure enough, jest as I ex-

pected, back he come with a to'rniquet round his arm, an' took the hoss—took him, Kyd, an' rode off, straight toward the Injun town. So dead or alive he's thar."

"I am compelled to think so," said the youth.

"Now," and Black Tom's copper-sun burned hand fell upon Kyd's knee, "I want to know suthin' about the gal on which you two chaps seem to be so interested."

Kyd Douglass looked around the darkened enclosure.

"Nobody about," said Tom. "But look here, if you don't want to tell me, all right. No hard feelin's about it. But I'd like to know."

"Then, Tom, you will forgive me if I refuse to tell you now, for after all I may be on the wrong trail."

"Do as you please, boy," replied the gold-hunter, somewhat disappointed. "Keep the secret jest as long as you please; but I know one thing—if ye be on the wrong trail, Ariel Ramsden hez struck the *right* one."

Kyd Douglass started.

"Then," he said. "So have I."

Black Tom gazed curiously into the youth's face for several moments, but did not speak. The young eyes again sought the ground, and remained thus in a dreamy expression until the approach of a stalwart miner roused the occupants of the log.

"*Thars figgers in th' woods!*" said the miner.

"*Injuns?*" asked Tom.

"Or ghosts!"

"Ghosts! Pshaw! Who saw 'em?"

"Murphy."

"Where is he?"

"Over thar tellin' the boys."

As Black Tom spoke a tall fellow came from a group of men on the further side of the fort. He was a courageous looking man with a pair of dusty trousers set deep into cowhide boots. His upper garments comprised a gray shirt, as uncouth as his pantaloons; and his name was Murphy which tells the rest. He was one of the spies employed in watching for Indian signs.

"I war out thar," he said to Barlow as he nodded his head toward the west. "Presently thar came a hoss up the creek, slow like, as if it war goin' ter a funeral. I war squatting at a tree, waitin' fer it, with my fingers on my gun, when all at once it came into sight agin' jest onter the edge o' the moon, it seemed ter me. Then suthin went over me jest like a bucket o' cold water, and the air all around seemed ter git cold. I couldn't had shot a elephant fer the thing on thet hoss wasn't flesh an' bone. By Jupiter! It looked jest like them speerits we see'd in thet Saint Louie theater the night fore we left—onny this hyar thing was more real, more nat'ral like. It was tall, slim, and long. I couldn' see its face plainly, fur the moon war behint it, but I knowed jest what it war like—I knowed who it used ter be when it was a livin'."

"Who?" asked Barlow, who had not lost a syllable of Murphy's narration.

"Old Frosty Paddock!"

The manner in which the frightened spy uttered this name was enough to send a shudder to the heart of the listener.

For a moment not a sound was heard.

"He said he would come back!" continued Murphy. "If not in the flesh, as a ghost. He kept his word, for he war out thar tonight in the speerit."

"What became of him?" asked Black Tom.

"By Jupiter, I can't say! I never took my eyes offen 'im but he want some whars right before my eyes, an' I don't know how or when! He war lookin' at the fort all

the time, an' once or twice he nodded his head as if he liked it. Arter he dissolved I sat thar in a cold sweat. My clothes got wet an' I couldn' move till the Injuns begin ter come."

"Injuns?" and Black Tom's eyes flashed. "They war n't speerits too?"

"Speerits? Not much! When a Injun dies they don't let 'im come back. The Injuns was alive, all right, an' they came up the little creek, some afoot an' some on hosses, till I war near surrounded by the skunks! They seemed ter be a huntin' ole Frosty, fur they got down whar he had stood on his hoss, an' examined th' tracks. But the hunt didn't seem ter satisfy them. They're out thar now! Wait till mornin' an' then we'll see 'em! The time's up fer our gittin' out 'less Frosty got that parmit ter stay—an' as he ain't got et and ain't come back 'cept in the speerit I suppose them Injun's are a comin' ter throw us out o' thar country!"

The situation of the hardy Adventurers was apparent to all in its stern reality. Tom Barlow would have given his good right hand at that moment if Murphy had not told his highly embellished story of Frosty Paddock's ghost! He could see by the faces of his men that the narrative had unnerved them!

"They'll stan' and fight the hull Blackfoot nation, but one ghost will take every bit of grit out of them!" remarked Tom to himself. "Murphy saw suthin' that's sartin, an' Frosty said he would come back to us all some way!"

Tom did not say this aloud. He dared not!

"We are beseiged!" said the young but firm voice of Kyd Douglass, and every eye was turned upon the boy. "Those fiends are bound to have the fort. They will try strategy, open warfare, all the cunning arts of savage battle; we have but to remember this, and then we know that we have not to deal with ghosts—no, we are to deal with living men—Indians! A thing that is not tangible—an object through which you could move your hands, which comes and goes—why, boys, what could such a thing do? Nothing? It wouldn't be even able to fight an Indian! We know how to fight them, and can!"

"That's it! Go on, boy!" cried Black Tom, rejoiced that the youth had come to the rescue.

"If we allow ourselves to believe in ghosts we will go to the torture tree like frightened sheep," added the lad. "Arrow Head is out there at the head of his warriors. We are here, sixteen Americans, well armed, and not cowards! If Dwarf Dan is with the Indians, we will receive a demand to surrender soon, probably by daylight. Let us anticipate! I propose three cheers for Fort Barlow, defender of Frosty Camp, which we will defend with the fort to the last!"

As the boy spoke he leaped upon the log and swung his hat over his head.

"Three cheers for the honor of Fort Barlow!" he cried.

The men, so lately panic and fear stricken, by Murphy's ghostly story could not resist. The boy's enthusiasm took hold of them, and over the walls of the little fort rang three stentorian cheers to startle the scarlet fiends who filled the wood beyond.

Tom Barlow seized Kyd before the last cheer had died away, and jerked him from the log.

"Ye've got grit thet will win!" exclaimed the rough gold-hunter. "Thar isn't a man hyar what wouldn't die fur ye. Now let the message come! By George the skunks needn't send any. They know by our cheers what we ar' goin' ter do."

A spirit of defiance now prevailed in the hearts of the men. Murphy's story had for the time been forgotten, but that individual himself stood apart from the group, with a tinge of fear in his face. He was not the man to believe that he had not seen Old Frosty's ghost!

"Boy, you'll change your mind now?" asked Barlow suddenly.

"About what?"

"Why, about goin' out to look fur th' gal?"

"I came out here to find her," Kyd Douglass replied. "If I go you must not think that I desert you and the boys. I swore—well, no matter about that, Tom—If we had the permit you and I would stand a show—you for the gold, I for her."

"The parmit I fear has gone up the spout! Frosty was a fool to go arter it. What good did he think his moccasin could do him?"

"Heaven knows! Some time we'll know all! When that time comes——"

"Great Cæsar's spook! What's that?"

This startling utterance fell from Black Tom's lips, and he sprang back as if a sheet of flame had drifted toward him.

And something had dropped before him—a strange something!

It apparently had fallen from a star-studded sky overhead, and it lay there on the ground at Tom's feet, shapeless, and without motion!

"It came in from the outside!" cried Barlow, pointing at the object. "What on airth kin it be?"

Some of the miners, recovering before their stalwart leader, sprang forward to investigate, but Kyd Douglass was ahead of all and he picked up the object and immediately gave vent to an exclamation of horror!

"Look!" he cried. "It's a human hand!"

The miners who had gathered about the youth saw that he had spoken the truth.

"A hand! By Jupiter!" echoed Barlow. He shut his teeth hard, as he took the disgusting object from Kyd's grasp. "An' it's a white 'un too! They've tied the fist sht with buffler sinews. Mebbe thar ar' suthin' in hyar!"

A moment sufficed for Black Tom to cut the cords that kept the dead hand in a closed position, and as he pried the cold fingers back, his eyes caught sight of a paper.

"Jest as I expected," he said jerking at the paper forthwith. "Dwarf Dan is at the bottom o' this. Thar's writin' on this paper. Take, it boy, an' make it out. Stand back, men, an' git out o' Kyd's moonshine."

The stern-faced miners, with anxious eyes, fixed on the boy, moved back until he stood in the uninterrupted moonlight, his eyes fixed intently on the piece of paper that he held in his hand.

The rough unlettered pen of the wild frontier had been at work! The lines were a miserable scrawl, and had been traced in a dark liquid that stained like human blood!

But the youth mastered them after a minute's inspection, and in a voice that did not contain a tremor he read:

To Captain Tom:

We ar' five thousand ag'in yer sixteen. You will not be allowed to give up. We ar' goin' ter cut yer hearts out an' eat 'em. We'll cram yer mouths full of gold. Mercy don't live in this hyar country. This hand come all the way frum St. Louie to carry this notis ter ye.

Tom Barlow heard the last word and dashed across the little square to a short ladder that stood against the western wall.

Springing up he mounted the topmost log and shouted at the top of his strong voice.

"Yer'er the same old liar ye always was, Dwarf Dan! We're only sixteen; but Kingdom come will be full o' sech skunks as ye ar' afore ye'r through with Black Tom and his boys!"

The gold-hunters below in the fort applauded Black Tom with a rousing cheer!

CHAPTER X.

MARLEY MORGAN IS NOT FORGOTTEN.—FRED SELLERS PLOTS AND DWARF DAN LEARNS OF THE CONSPIRACY WHEN IT'S TOO LATE!

Black Tom Barlow's words fell upon the ears for whom they were intended!

For not far from little Fort Barlow, anxiously waiting for a reply to the message enclosed in the *dead-hand* lay Dwarf Dan Wolfaw!

When he heard the voice of the gold-hunters' captain, a devilish expression crossed his distorted face, still bearing the marks of Niokana's whip and he sent back in answer to it a coarse laugh that went over the strong walls of the fort like the shriek of a fiend!

"Why, poor fools, thar ain't th' ghost ov a show fur ye!" he said, hard upon his laugh. "What Arrow Head can't think of I kin punch out o' my own noddle. We kin starve ye out, fur we're on the outside. Five thousand ag'in sixteen—big odds, I tell ye, Tom!"

Behind the dwarf dark figures glided through the forest. They were Indians whom Arrow Head had marshaled against the tiny band of gold-hunters, and since their arrival Fort Barlow had been completely invested. As the Blackfoot chief had warned the gold-hunters out of his country, and they had not obeyed, the war was therefore looked upon by the Indians as one of extermination absolutely. The whites were doomed, the Indians were sure!

Dwarf Dan whirled abruptly on his heel after delivering the scathing message by all the force of his lungs, and he went into the midst of the Indian forces and there found the only other white face save in the besieging ranks.

Its owner was Fred Sellers, the companion of Marley Morgan, whose death had already been encompassed.

A few words from Captain Dan had saved Sellers' life, and he seemed to have forgotten the cruel death of his companion.

"Did you hear what Tom said?" asked the dwarf.

"I could not help hearin', fur he has lungs of iron!" was the reply. "I just got in in time to hear."

"See anything of the gal?"

"Not a sign; but I saw suthin' back on the way."

"The boy?"

"Nary boy! I would call *it* a ghost ef I believed."

Dwarf Dan started.

"Do you think it's thar now?" he asked.

"Mebbe so."

"Shall we take the horses?"

"It had a crittur."

A few moments sufficed to procure horses for the two renegades, and they left the Indian lines.

Seller's led the way, and did not draw rein until they had reached the base of a hillock several miles away.

"It war up thar!" said Sellers, pointing up the acclivity.

Dan looked his man curiously in the face.

"You'd like fur me to think thet it warn't flesh an' blood thet you see'd, wouldn't you?" he said.

"I don't know what it war, myself," was the answer. "I war standin' right hyar, when—Look! up yonder! By the jumpin' jingo! thar it is again!"

Dwarf Dan raised his eyes, and saw quite distinctly the combined figures of man and horse, apparently one hundred feet above them. The sky was lightened by the effulgence of the moon, and the figures wore gigantic proportions.

Dwarf Dan looked at the apparition with mouth half open in wonderment, while Sellers regarded him with a look of self-satisfied triumph.

"Wal, what is it?" he ventured, at last.

"The devil, mebbe!"

Dan kept his eyes on the figure but cocked his gun.

"Goin' to shoot at it, eh?"

"Yes!"

"The bullet will go right through a ghost, they say!"

The deserter did not reply, but took as deliberate aim as he could with his nerves a little unstrung.

The report of the rifle awoke a thousand slumbering echoes; but the sound that startled Dan the most, was the hollow laugh that came down from above.

Sellers, with a gasping cry, wheeled suddenly; but Dan leaned over, and as he grasped his bridle, shot him a stern look.

"Not a foot, Sellers!" the dwarf said, fiercely. "You've heard that laugh afore, jest as I hev. Ar' you in league with thet feller, up thar?"

Sellers' answer was a stare of astonishment.

"I'm in 'arnest!" thundered the deformed. "How did he get out of his coffin?"

The stare deepened.

"Coffin? What coffin?" said the now thoroughly astounded Sellers.

"The hangin' coffin we put Old Frosty in! How did he git out? Thet's the question?"

"You're tacklin' the wrong man, cap'n!" said Sellers, into whose obtuse brain the dwarf's last words had shot a little light. "I don't know anything about a hangin' coffin. He war dead when you put 'im thar; but thet laugh sounded jest like his'n."

"And it was too real to come from a ghost!" said Dan. "I had a dead aim on him."

"But yer hand shook a little."

"Mebbe it did."

"I saw it."

"Then you war watchin' me?"

"Kinder so. I couldn't help it."

The puzzled dwarf, looking up, saw that the object at which he had fired had disappeared, but he did not loosen his grip on Sellers' rein.

He knew well that such an action would have been followed by the fellow's ignominious flight.

"The ghost is gone!" he said, with a sly glance at his companion. "Now I'm goin' to satisfy myself about a sartin matter. Will you go along?"

Sellers replied in the affirmative, and the next instant they turned their horses' heads toward the North.

For a short time Dan continued to keep his strong hand on his companion's bridle-rein; but at last, with a significant glance into his face he released it, and straightened in the saddle.

Once beyond the wood, which they speedily left behind, the country became comparatively clear, and the two white men rode over it at good speed.

Sellers soon began to observe with feelings of surprise that he was riding across the same country which he had lately traversed with the Blackfeet. There were certain well-marked landmarks, that told him that he was going toward the Indian town. Once or twice he was on the point of questioning the deformed, but the uneasy look that appeared in his eyes, kept back the question.

The moon was in the zenith, when Sellers glancing down from the ridge, along which he was riding, saw the white sides of hundreds of teepees; but instead of entering the Indian village, Dwarf Dan veered abruptly to the right, and left it behind.

"Dan's comin' back to see if Old Frosty is still in his coffin!" murmured Sellers at last, divining the meaning of that long, nocturnal ride. "He was talkin' about a *hangin'* coffin, too. Thet's a new kind o' shebang, even fur these wild parts!"

Shortly after the utterance of the last sentence, the riders entered a ravine, and when Dan at last sprung to the ground, Sellers saw that they stood near the mouth of some underground cavern.

"Hev ye any matches?" the Dwarf asked, looking up into the countenance whose puzzled expression was enough to provoke a smile.

Sellers produced several dirt-colored ones which the dwarf took.

"Cuss me ef I don't more nor half believe that Old Frosty hes got out o' his basket!" the deformed said, as he wrapped a piece of cotton goods about a stick.

"Bad work ef he hez!" responded Sellers.

"It will be the Injun's fault. I wanted to give 'im a different kind o' funeral. But hyar we go to settle the question."

Shutting his teeth hard, and with all his rough courage summoned to his aid, Dwarf Dan pushed into the cavern beyond whose gloomy portals he and Arrow Head had lately borne Old Frosty to his horrible entombment.

He went ahead with the torch, closely but not willingly followed by Sellers.

The torch but illy relieved the gloom.

Dan went forward with the greatest care; but an exclamation at last announced that he had made a discovery.

"Hyar's the p'inted rock, an' the rope jest as we left it, an'," sweeping the torch beneath him, "I kin see the basket, too!"

Sellers crept forward.

He looked over the jutting rock and saw a strangely shaped basket—more particularly some network—swinging at the end of a rope.

"I can't make out ef thar's a man in the coffin," said Dwarf Dan, a little disappointed.

"Couldn't you ef you war to lean over an' wave the torch under the rock?" suggested his companion.

"I might."

A moment later the ill-shapen figure of Arrow Head's ally dropped upon the rock and crawled to the edge. He leaned over and waved the torch as far beneath it as he could.

"It's all right!" he said, satisfied. "Thar's a corpse in the coffin, an' of course it's Old Frosty."

Sellers heard a part of these words; the last ones he drowned with the maddest cry of vengeance that ever awoke the echoes of that cavern.

With a cry he pounced upon the prostrate man like a tiger, and before Dwarf Dan could summon one thought to his assistance, he was hanging over the abyss by the edge of the rock.

"This fur Marley Morgan one o' the best men thet ever died in Blackfoot land!" cried Sellers, holding the torch dropped by the attacked man near his victim's face. "He'd be alive to-day ef it hadn't been fur you, Cap'n Dan. I said I'd git even with you. I'm even now!"

The dwarf was utterly helpless, and with his last mad word of triumph, Sellers struck him across the face with the torch.

A cry more brutish than human pealed from the dwarf's throat, and swinging back before the stroke he went down—down into the darkness below!

Sellers, with face illumined by revenge, held the torch over the cliff, and saw to his horror that Dwarf Dan's hands had severed the rope, and that he had carried the "coffin" and its terrible occupant with him to the bottom.

"They'll want some light on the subject!" said the avenger with a grin, and he sent the torch hissing through the impenetrable darkness that concealed the depths of the cavern.

Then he began to retrace his steps.

CHAPTER XI.

PRESSED INTO SERVICE.—ROCKS OF GOLD.—A CAVERN OF MYSTERY AND OF RICHES.—THE WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

At the mouth of the entrance to the singular cavern Fred Sellers stopped and listened, but no noise came up from the darkness into which he had hurled the dwarf.

"I'd jest like to know whether thar is another way into this place," the man said to himself. "This land is full o' sech holes, they say, an' then I'm right among the hills which ar' full o' gold. Gold? That's what I came out hyar fur, an' mebbe I'm runnin' from worlds o' it goin' out from hyar. Of course Dan is lyin' down ther dead as a door-nail; he'll never trouble the gal any more; she'll never git to whip him ag'in. Jest think of it, Fred Sellers! Mebbe you're leavin' a gold-mine. No! I'm not goin' to run. I'll go back and see!"

Thus determining, the miner sat down at the mouth of the cavern, and by dint of labor and patience in the uncertain light of the stars, he improvised a torch, which, to his delight, burned with much brilliancy.

Then he went back into the cave with the fire over his head.

Now, Fred Sellers was a judge of gold-bearing rock and dirt; he had mined along Feather river, and had prospected during the early days among the Rocky mountains.

He went around the natural gallery from which he had lately hurled the dwarf. It was a stupendous affair, enough to excite the wonder of any man.

Now and then the avaricious outlaw stopped to examine particles of rock that lay at his feet, but to cast them aside with an oath of disappointment.

But at last Sellers' eyes flashed as he weighed a piece of rock longer than usual in his hand. He set the torch down, and riveted his whole attention upon the object.

Was it gold? Had he discovered one of those golden hills that, rumor said, abounded in the Blackfoot land?

In the strange flaring of the torch the dark faced man looked more like a maniac than a sane being!

"It is gold!" he cried starting up, and from the depths of darkness far away came back a thousand confirmatory echoes of "gold! gold!"

"It was no lie!" he continued. "This is a mountain of gold; I have been walking over a pathway of golden boulders. It is all mine, for the little labor of picking

the rocks up. I shan't trouble myself about Old Frosty, or the gal. I want to go back to Saint Louie with all this mountain mine. I will go back that way, er—not go back at all!"

Half an hour later Sellers stood in what appeared to be a vast chamber whose ceiling as indistinctly as he could see it by whirling the torch above his head, was hung with gorgeous trappings like that of some cathedral. His lust for gold had led him to the spot on which he stood; he had pushed on, on, feasting his eyes on the heavy rocks that had the color of unrefined gold; he had traveled down, down, until the gallery from which his leader had been dashed seemed hundreds of feet above him.

But the fretted ceiling excited no wonderment in Sellers' eyes. He looked at his torch almost burned to a crisp in his tawny hand.

"Ef the thing goes out, I'll be in a purty fix!" said the man, shutting his teeth hard. "It is always night hyar. I can't burn gold. I can't eat the yaller stuff. I—mercy! don't go out, an' leave me hyar."

He whirled the flame around his head; but he could not brighten it, save for one moment.

With a cry of joy at his temporary success the gold-hunter started forward; but the next moment he hurled a sparkless and smoking stick far from him, and started back with a cry of despair falling from his tongue.

He was lost! how far under ground he did not know—lost in a mountain of gold—and in the same apartment, no doubt, where lay the mangled remains of his leader and his victim!

The agony that took possession of the stalwart miner as he realized his situation cannot be described.

He stood in the gloom for several minutes, bereft of volition, a cold sweat standing out on his forehead. His capacious pockets were filled with the weighty rocks his hands had lately picked up with such eagerness. He suddenly fell to taking them out, and one by one he threw them madly away, at the same time filling the cave with the sound of his oaths.

"I can't eat 'em!" he said, over and over. "War Fred Sellers born to die in a mountain o' gold?"

The desperate man, nerved by desperation to do something, tried to find a path to the starlight, in the gloom; but in vain.

Wearied with the fruitless efforts, he threw himself madly on the ground, and covering his face with his great arms, groaned from the depths of his soul.

Suddenly he began to roll hither and thither, thinking only of his situation, or cursing the man whose wild stories of gold in the land of the Blackfeet had decoyed him into their country.

All at once, in one of his movements, Sellers struck an object in the dark, the touch of which made him recoil, with a shudder.

He scrambled to his feet in an instant.

"That war one of them!" he exclaimed. "It war Dwarf Dan or Old Frosty. An' dead too!"

Although he stood but a few feet from the body against which he had accidentally rolled, Sellers could not see it. He tried to make it out—but failing drew his revolver, and with the weapon in his hand, crept forward.

The fingers that he stretched out were not long in finding it, however, and Sellers drew back with a shudder.

"It's Old Frosty fur thar be a lot o' ropes wrapped around him!" he said. "I reckon as how the old chap didn't git his parmit fur th' boys! But wot kind o' a face hez he got now? This sk'n is smooth an' ef I recollect

right, Frosty's face war rough, and badly made. Now, ef I hed a match."

But the match—the last one that Sellers had, had been used—and the unfortunate gold-seeker was in trouble for a minute.

"I'll shoot across his face," he said, bethinking him of a fortunate idea. "I'd know Frosty in a minute ef this be him."

Sellers knew the exact position of the unseen face, and held his pistol above it. The next moment a flash lighted up the immediate spot, and the loud report of a fire-arm filled the cavern.

"Great Jehosaphat! It's an Injun!" cried Sellers, springing erect and almost dropping his weapon. "Thunder an' guns! What does this mean? Old Frosty war lyin' dead in this basket, up thar—now thar's a redskin in it! I wish I had never come hyar. I expect to be a dead injun myself, directly!"

What anyone placed in the gold-digger's situation, he did.

He fled—ran through the gloom—on—on—until he felt cold air on his ashen cheek!

What strange fate had guided Sellers from the cavern? He did not stop to inquire, but dashed onward, out into the starlight, nor paused until he came suddenly upon the back of a man who sat like a ghost on the back of his horse.

Sellers had run suddenly upon him, and was totally unaware of his presence until he felt a bony hand on his throat. Then it was that Sellers' eyes almost shot from his head, and he thought that wonders would never cease when he heard these words from the lips of the apparition that leaned from the saddle:

"You're the very man I war lookin' fer, Fred Sellers! I want you to help me git the permit!"

Sellers if he had been released, would have dropped senseless to the ground.

As it was, he could only gaze, bewildered at the occupant of the saddle and in serious doubts whether it was Old Frosty alive, or the lank guide's ghost!

CHAPTER XII.

THE BRAVERY OF KYD DOUGLASS.—A STRANGE MESSAGE THAT MADE THE HEART BEAT FAST.—A FELON BLOW!

"Some of the men will not believe the note I left behind; but Black Tom will, and that is enough. Gracious! How dark it is? The valley is a bid for the black-gloom of the tomb! There should be a moon tonight—but where it is just at this hour I don't know! Heaven guide my steps aright! 'Missing' for one week and in all that time not seen by a single Blackfoot! What has become of *her*? Has Dwarf Dan got in his work? Or has the jealous rage of Red Wasp succeeded against her? I was dying beyond those walls. I am not a deserter! I would not leave such gallant fellows as Black Tom and his boys without cause. But I must discover her whereabouts, or her fate!"

The young speaker, Kyd Douglass, had crept into a little valley that was as dark as death. Crept—yes, for thus he had actually reached the spot—creeping through the Blackfeet lines that completely invested Fort Barlow!

The first week of the strangest seige ever to take place in the Far Wild West was drawing to a close!

Not a Blackfoot arrow had fallen into the fort, not a gun had been discharged by the scarlet besiegers. The stern wan faces of Black Tom and his men told how

desperate the end would be if that silent siege continued long.

Arrow Head's tactics had been disclosed to the gold-hunters, who, as they saw their scanty stock of provisions dwindling to a few morsels, cursed the red men who were fighting them with the most potent of weapons, starvation; and with bony hands clenched resolved to die this horrid death rather than surrender themselves to torture which they knew would be their only fate if they gave up!

During the week rapidly passing away, the whites had obtained a bit of news from the outside world, which possessed more than ephemeral interest for Kyd Douglass.

One night Black Tom had a suspicion that something unusual was about to occur. There was a strange noise at the foot of the west wall, and almost directly beneath his post of observation something, which in the semi-gloom resembled a young bear, climbing up the logs!

Like a tiger watching for an unsuspecting fawn did the giant leader of the gold-hunters wait for the climber!

At last a hand was laid upon the topmost long log!

Then a head appeared and—Black Tom's hand leaped to an Indian's throat.

In the twinkling of an eye the Blackfoot was jerked over the ramparts, and brought up standing by Tom's hand in the midst of the desperate whites.

As to his mission, when questioned, the Indian maintained a dogged silence. But from him the whites drew finally the story of Niokana's abandonment of the Indian village after whipping Dwarf Dan. Since that hour no Blackfoot had seen her!

This story interested Kyd Douglass.

Niokana missing, and that after drawing blood from the cheeks of a man who knew not aught of mercy?

The intelligence made him turn back. It paled his cheek but a question that Black Tom put to the captive Blackfoot drew him forward again.

"Where is Dwarf Dan?"

"Him not be in Indian camp for six sleeps—Arrow Head not know where Stunted Tree is."

The whites exchanged looks of wonderment!

"Where he is the girl can be found!" said Kyd to himself. "He has followed her and he has found her. Now I have a work to perform—to wrench her from that outlaw's hand."

The boy's presence in the little dark valley beyond the Indian lines is now plain!

Intent upon finding the White Queen of the Blackfeet, in whom he took such an absorbing interest, he had quietly left the fort, and, by some good crawling, had reached the spot without accident.

But now he was lost!

He knew not which way to go or where to look for Dwarf Dan, and the fair girl, whom he thought was the outlaw's victim!

Behind him the scarlet lines encircled the brave miners like the coils of an anaconda, and the boy shuddered and flushed as he thought of the few mouthfuls of food that remained in the guarded larder of the fort!

More than once he started back but one thought made him pause.

"No! I came away for her. I must not let anything turn me from my mission!" he would say.

When he went forward for the last time, he did not stop until he had crossed the valley and ascended to the summit of a hill beyond.

Then he saw the moon just coming up, full, round and like a circle of silver.

Kyd Douglass stretched forth his hand as if he was

directing a companion's attention to a land that lay beyond the planet.

"Over there lies the Blackfoot village. There I may obtain information of them. My person will be sacred there—at least until I have accomplished my mission, for they know me as Dwarf Dan's friend, and he is in league with their chief."

"Over there" meant a distance where death in twenty forms lurked; but the brave youth was not deterred!

Looking to his weapons, he started forward, not on all fours as he had crept through the Indian lines, but at a smart trot.

The moon came up majestically as he went on, tireless as the most renowned Indian trailer, for he had the great work of his life to urge him on! At length panting, and thirsty, he halted and knelt over the little spring that bubbled from the rocky ground beneath his feet, and sent its clear waters sparklingly up into the moonlight.

Kyd Douglass drank long and plentifully at the spring. The cool waters reinvigorated him, but all at once he started back with a cry, and seizing his gun looked around him at the rocks and hills.

Astonishment was depicted on every lineament of the youth's face and he saw nothing save the strange object that had fallen into the clear water.

Recovering to a certain degree, the youth went to the spring and picked up the wing of the great night-hawk that floated on the water.

Holding it in his hands he looked up as if in quest of the bird itself but the next moment burst into a smile of self-derision.

"Birds do not lose entire wings and continue their flight," he exclaimed. "And then—what is this? A piece of iron at the end of this wing gave it weight. Ah! Somebody threw it at me, and for a purpose—not intending to kill me—ah, that is sure; there is no attempt to murder me behind this mystery!"

Regardless of any eyes that might be watching, Kyd Douglass began to examine the wing so mysteriously obtained, and was rewarded by finding a narrow strip of buckskin ingeniously interwoven among the grayish feathers.

Unlinking it the youth saw some rough tracery on the linking, and after some labor made it read these words:

"Hold out to the last minut! I'll bring the parmit when I come!"

Kyd Douglass read the strange message twenty times before he looked up. He felt his heart beating in his throat.

There was no signature to the sentences. But he knew a man who might have dictated the thrilling words.

"Frosty Paddock could not read or write," Kyd said reflectively. "If this message comes from him, who wrote it? That's the question! It was intended to be thrown into Fort Barlow, but it has been given to me and it means for me to take it back. Gracious! How it would encourage the boys! They all had confidence in Old Frosty! I'll take it back. The fort is only a few miles away. I can get through the lines again!"

Several minutes later the boy was running toward the fort with the singular message hidden in his bosom.

He went back through the little black valley, and passed the Blackfeet nation lines at a point where the beams of the moon did not fall.

His heart grew still, as it were, as the outlines of the fort rose before him. He was almost near enough to toss the hawk-wing over, indeed, he had drawn it from his

bosom when a savage cry behind him made him start, and a body leaped upon him.

The lad was thrown forward by the shock, but quickly recovered, and looked around.

He saw a sight that chilled his blood.

Indians were rising from the darkened earth.

The brave youth was surrounded!

"They shall have the message after all!" he cried, clutching the hawk-wing with his teeth and clubbing his rifle, as he bounded forward!

Strong, a young athlete, Kyd Douglass dashed his first opposers back with a terrible sweep of his rifle, and then jerked the wing from his mouth.

"Catch what I throw you!" he cried, frantically to the dark figures that lined the walls overhead. "There's safety in this night-hawk's wing!"

The arm of the boy went back to deliver the strange message, but he felt a pair of hands seize his wrist, and he fell backward, as the undelivered wing dropped from his nerveless hand!

But he soon started up only to find Arrow Head's hand on his shoulder and to see the glittering eyes of the frenzied Blackfoot leader staring at him.

The heads above the logs at Fort Barlow had been lowered!

"No shootin'!" Kyd heard the rough and well-known voice of Barlow say. "That feller out thar hed some good news fer us!"

"I had, Black Tom!" cried Kyd, jerking himself from Arrow Head's grasp. "Old Frosty says—"

Kyd said no more for the fist of the Indian leader shot straight from the shoulder and the victim went to the earth as if he had been struck by a sledge-hammer.

Tom Barlow and his half-famished men heard the dull sound of the truly savage blow!

"Shoot 'em down like dogs!" he bawled. "No mercy to the red fiends who kept the good news from us!"

The Blackfeet knew what would follow, and they sprang away!

A host of dark figures, running like frightened deer, greeted the eyes that looked over the ramparts, and the next moment, a line of flame lighted up the top of the western wall!

It was a telling volley, for at least ten Blackfeet stopped yelling and fell dead!

But Kyd Douglass—where was he?

CHAPTER XIII.

"A LIFE FOR AN ARM."—ARIEL RAMSDEN TURNS
EXECUTIONER.—AN OATH OF JOY.—
THE "CORPSE" OF OLD FROSTY.

When Fred Sellers saw Dwarf Dan disappear over a projecting rock from which Sellers' mad hands had flung him, he was satisfied that he had terribly avenged the cruel death of Marley Morgan!

But it was not so!

The end of the "Stunted Tree" had not yet come. It was not for the hand of Marley Morgan's would-be-avenger to deprive him of life.

Dwarf Dan, as he shot downward, struck the strange coffin suspended in mid-air, and dragged it after him.

Fortunately for the deserter, the basket and its deadly contents, which he firmly believed consisted of the body of Old Frosty, notwithstanding the apparition he had fired at, kept beneath him in the swift descent, and served as the means of effectually breaking his fall. The dead and the living alighted on the floor of the cavern with

a thud, and the dwarf fell backward, stunned, and for several moments entirely bereft of consciousness. How far he had fallen, he did not know; but if he had been questioned when he recovered, he would have asserted that he had shot through miles of space.

He thought that all his bones had been jumbled into a heap as he essayed to lift his body. He looked up; something glimmered far above him like a star, and as he watched it, it seemed to descend until, with a flash, it struck the floor of the cavern. It was the torch which Sellers threw down to keep him momentary company.

"May you come down here headlong, Fred Sellers!" grated Dwarf Dan. "No doubt you imagine me crushed into jelly down here. Well, well, my dog, I'll pay you for this. Indeed, I will."

Finding, to his joy, that no bones had been broken—thanks to the fortuitous circumstance of having fallen upon the basket and its dead—the dwarf sprang to the torch before it expired and jerked it from the ground.

The next moment he saw a sight that filled his soul with horror—saw it for an instant; but plainly enough to remember it to his dying day.

A few feet from the spot where the torch had struck lay the coffin and its occupant. The ropes which had composed the burial casket had fallen apart in many places, and the corpse lay without.

"Old Frosty, ha! ha!" laughed Dwarf Dan approaching the object with the torch.

Then it was that he saw the face of the dead, and, bereft of speech—struck dumb, as it were, by the sight—he staggered back and, dropping the torch, which went out as it fell, he fled nerveless through the gloom, he knew not whither!

"Injun! an' not Frosty!" gasped the deformed, his mind going back to the hideous scarlet face that had rolled from the coffin in which Arrow Head and himself had lately fastened the inanimate guide. "How on airth could he turn to be Injun arter death? Thar's suthin' strange about it! He war white—Old Frosty himself—when we put 'im thar, now he is an Injun dead—rotten!"

The coldest sweat that ever stood out on human brow chilled Captain Dan's at that thrilling moment. The substitution of the dead Indian had to him no explanation, save by the ghostly mysteries of the supernatural.

He did not stop to fathom the mystery; but ran on and on, down a corridor whose sides or ceiling he could not see. He cared not whither it led; he hoped, almost prayed, that it was taking him from the cavern and its transmogrified corpse.

At last a cry—an oath of joy—burst from the outlaw's throat and he bounded out into the starlight. There beneath the myriads of beautiful lights that glittered in the blue archway of the skies this frightened fiend gasped for breath and cooled his blood.

When he left he rushed toward the Blackfoot town; but all at once he came to a halt.

A horse was coming up the little canyon, which he was descending.

There was a ghostly sound in the very tread of the animal. At that moment the sweetest song that bird could have sung would have had a supernatural tone to the ears of Dwarf Dan Wolflaw.

He was weaponless now; but possessed strength enough to shrink from the path in which he had halted, and there, with his mouth in his throat, he waited for the ghost.

"My God! Old Frosty in the speerit!" fell from the tongue of the outlaw, and while the last word still trem-

bled on his ashen lips the horse which had come up the canyon went by.

Astride of the animal sat a long figure whose heels dangled far below the deerskin girth. The garments that he wore seemed to fit him with a looseness that proclaimed him a skeleton, wearing a habit made for a man of generous proportions.

Dwarf Dan watched this apparition with eyes almost bursting from their sockets. He did not move or open his lips until it had passed beyond sight.

"Thet's the same thing I shot through!" he said in a husky voice. "Ef I hed the gal now I'd git outen this 'tarnal kentry, where dead men—white men I mean—turn into Injuns, an' ride over the land in the speerit. Old Frosty, I wouldn't try to tech you fur all the gold under ground. By Jingo! I'm as wet as though I hev been standin' in a rain all night."

The last sound of the—to Dan—ghostly hoofs had died away, and alarmed by the silence that had followed, the deformed turned and resumed his flight.

He paused no more until at the edge of the Indian town he saw two figures standing beside one of the lodges.

The bright moon was full overhead, and the eyes of the dwarf were not long in distinguishing one of the pair.

"By Jingo! the youngster didn't kick the bucket!" ejaculated the dwarf with evident displeasure. "Thet old Injun doctor hes put 'im on his pins ag'in, an' given him license to hunt the gal an' to kill her, fur thet's what brought the youngster into this kentry. I'd like to hear what ye'r talkin' about, my lads. You an' Red Wasp must hev become pards. Cuss you, Ariel, I winged ye. Birds can't fly with one wing; yer other one I sent, with my compliments, to Black Tom, an' the boys in the fort!"

Leaving Ariel Ramsden, the one-armed, and Red Wasp talking in the moonlight, Dwarf Dan crept down the village and disappeared beyond the curtains of the lodge that he called his own.

An exclamation of satisfaction fell from his lips. He was home again, and the dwarf threw his enervated body upon the couch of skins that graced one corner of the apartment.

But he did not see the two figures that were nearing his lodge. His entrance had not been unperceived.

"Now bring the villain out, Red Wasp," said the young man who took up his station scarcely twenty yards from the lodge door.

This individual had but one arm; but he rested a rifle upon the stump of his right one, and his eyes flashing at the butt of the slender barrel, were full of the eagerness of merciless revenge.

Red Wasp approached the lodge and pulled the heavy skins aside.

"Does the Stunted Tree sleep?" he asked, in a tone that started Dwarf Dan from his cot.

The next moment Dwarf Dan was at the entrance.

"What's up, Injun?"

"Let Stunted Tree come out. He is wanted in the moonlight."

"Sartinly I'll come out," was the reply, and as Red Wasp stepped aside, with a quick glance at the youthful executioner, Dwarf Dan sprang into the moonshine.

"Hyar I am, Injun!" he said. "Who wants to see me?"

"I do, devil!"

Instantly the dwarf looked forward, and saw the figure that confronted him!

"I've got you, Dan!" said the youth.
 "That's so, Ariel. What ar' you goin' to do?"
 "What should I do? You stole my arm."
 "Well?"
 "Give it back!"
 "I can't!"

"Then, I'm going to send a bullet crashing through your head. Did you ever pray? You see I'm not altogether heartless, Dan."

"Me, pray? ha! ha! ha!" and the laugh of the man who stood on the brink of death, sent a chill to the heart of his executioner. "Shoot! boy, an' then I'll be done seein' ghosts."

Ariel Ramsden started. "Did you see it?" he said.

"What? Old Frosty's ghost?"

"Yes!"

"I warn't ten feet from it awhile ago. Hez it been hyar?"

"It rode right through the village an hour since."

"He said he would come back in the speerit, you know, Ariel."

"Do you think you will, Dan?"

"I don't know! I wouldn't make a han'some speerit. I ain't built right."

There was a grim humor in the dwarf's words that evoked a smile from Ariel Ramsden; but it did not deter the boy.

"All spirits can't be shapely, Dan," he said. "Mebbe they'll mold you over. So, here goes."

The dwarf looked straight at the rifle.

All at once a jet of flame leaped from the barrel, and with a wild yell, the deformed staggered back a pace, then whirled and fell headlong into the lodge!

"A life for an arm! That's it!" said Ariel to the Indian boy.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOUR DAYS WITHOUT FOOD.—GETTING "TARMS."—TOM BARLOW'S POSITION!—FROSTY PADDOCK'S "SPEERIT" SPRINGS A SURPRISE.

Black Tom, gaunt, pale, and wolfish in appearance, leaned against the gate, or door, of the defiant little fort, and looked at the crowd of starved men who, huddled together on the opposite side of the "square," regarded him with maniacal stare.

The dusk of twilight was falling around the scene. The sun had set behind the dark-fringed Western river, not far away.

To add to Black Tom's make-up, he held two formidable pistols in his hands.

"The boys ar' goin' crazy!" the gold-hunter said, with a sigh. "When men who hev'n't a bite to eat git to seein' plenty o' food, it isn't hard to tell what ar' comin'. An' they're the grittiest men as ever crossed into the Injun kentry, too. Four days without food! We swore thet Arrer Head should find us dead when he got inside, an' I'm goin' to make 'em keep their word."

Tom Barlow's position, coupled to his words, needs but little in addition to explain the situation at that moment.

Girt in by the Blackfeet, the strange siege of the fort had continued for ten days. Save the incidents which we have recorded in the course of our story, nothing extraordinary had transpired. Down deep in his determined heart, Black Tom had harbored a thought of Frosty Paddock's continued existence; but as the days went by, bringing neither the gaunt guide nor his "parmit," that belief had gradually left the leader's breast.

The last morsel of food had been devoured; the men, once stout, lusty fellows, full of adventure and enthusiasm, were reduced to skeletons that prated of tempting tables—men with wolfish looks and wild eyes; in short, men on the verge of insanity.

Tom Barlow stood at the gate, with pity in his eyes. He had just driven them back. They wanted to rush out and, attacking the savage camp, die like men, with arms in their hands!

"Boys, mebbe our cap'n hes news from Old Frosty an' his parmit," said one of the famished horde, addressing his companions in a sarcastic vein.

Barlow felt the keen thrust made by the man.

News from Frosty Paddock? Alas! the resolute captain could not answer his men.

After awhile, as it had happened several times before, the crowd dispersed, and crawled to their respective places; but Black Tom did not stir.

"My place is hyar at the gate. I'm the strongest man left, an' moreover, I'm the cap'n," he said to himself. "Why, even the boy is gone. Five days ago he deserted us, an' since then not a word hes come in from 'im. Gone to hunt the gal he takes so much interest in! The gal, I don't know. She's the cause of more'n one fellar crossin' to this hyar Injun kentry, to die hyarabouts."

Mounting to the top of the wall that rose above him, Black Tom tried to penetrate the night that had now settled around the fort. Before him, he was satisfied, lay the main body of the Indians; a strong line was also behind him.

To stand and die the terrible death of starvation was repulsive to the leader of the gold-hunters. If he could only make terms with them! Ah! if he could *force* them into terms.

"Listen at the boys!" he said, looking beneath his position. "Thar goes Metcalfe across the square, singin' about Cordigan's Feast, a song which he hed forgotten fur thirty years. By George! it makes my mouth water. I wonder what the Injuns think when they hear the boys at night? Don't they know thet we're all goin' crazy? I'm goin' to do suthin'—suthin' desprit. Old Frosty failed to git his parmit. Mebbe I kin git one. Not fur myself; but the poor boys down thar!"

A bigger heart than Black Tom Barlow's never beat in the wilds of the North-west.

He crept down from the wall and disappeared. But he soon reappeared at the gate accompanied by a man.

"Next to me, you're the stoutest man in the fort, Randall," he said to the man. "I'm goin' out to git tarms?"

"Tarms?" echoed Randall, starting back. "I thought we war to die hyar, an' never surrender!"

"Who talks of givin' up? We may git tarms an' not surrender t' them redskins out yonder. I hev a plan!"

"A good one?"

"I 'opes so. Now Randall, stay hyar till I come back. Tell the boys, if they ast thet I'm sleepin' somewheres. You know how I cow them? Thar goes Metcalfe ag'in'."

Randall shuddered.

"Tom, ef you don't git tarms this fort will be a lunatic asylum soon."

Black Tom tore himself away with a groan. He went up the logs and left Randall at the gate with his ears stuffed by his pressing fingers, so that he could not hear the wild, mad song of Metcalfe.

The gold-hunter had seen so much of life in the Indian country, and it was by his knowledge of this that he

was enabled to creep into the very heart of the Blackfoot camp without being perceived.

"I'm doin' this fer th' poor boys!" he said more than once to himself.

He passed through the little woods filled with the recumbent figures of Indians, and entered the level lands beyond.

"Oho! The moon! I hed forgotten et!" said Tom. "I must git t' the place I'm bound for, afore it gits cl'ar over the edge."

Between him and the long plain where he knew Arrow Head had pitched his lodge, there were comparatively few Indians. The warriors were in the timber through which he had just passed.

Black Tom calculated well, for when the young Queen of the Skies sailed majestically over the rim of the horizon, she revealed to him the personage he sought.

Arrow Head, the Blackfoot, stood there before him; but not alone!

The chief stood erect before a log fire that burned on the ground. Arranged on logs around the blaze sat at least twenty sub-chiefs arrayed in a profusion of feathers, beads, and other paraphernalia of their savage rank.

Crouching in the shadows not twenty feet away, Tom Barlow gazed upon this scene. It was full of savage grandeur, even to him at that hour; but the gold captain did not permit his mind to dwell upon it.

As he looked he almost started to his feet. He saw something that had hitherto escaped his eye, taken from the fire.

"Buffer haunch!" exclaimed the captain. "It could save the boys—Metcalf could stop singin' ef he could taste it."

As the man seemingly reckless, sprang erect, the odor of roasted meat came to his nostrils, and his eyes dilated with delight, and his whole frame shook with the hungry man's anticipation.

"I can't stand it," he muttered. "The cussed Injuns ar' livin' fat while the boys heven't tasted meat fur four days."

There was a quick tiger-like leap forward that lessened the space between Black Tom and the Blackfoot fire!

And the next moment with a roar of madness the gold-hunter sprang clear over the heads of the astonished warriors, and alighted before the wonder-stricken Arrow Head!

Every Indian jumped to his feet, while Black Tom, following up his attack, darted upon the throat of the savage chief. He grasped the Indian by his lean, strong throat, and in Tom's right hand glittered the blade of a knife!

"A hungry wolf hangs on like grim death," Tom snarled, darting a look at the frightened savages while he firmly held the stalwart chief by the throat, "I don't want blood. I don't keer fur et in partic'lar, but what I want is meat! Tarms! Tarms! Ef you Injuns will look you will see that I hold th' winning cards! My old knife will settle the game as far as Arrer Head is concerned, ef y' don't open yer mouths an' talk business! No foolin' with guns! Fer if ye do, by th' whale thet swallied Jonah, I'll bury my blade in Arrer Head's life-basket—yaas I will do et, ef I see a sign o' an attempt ter do any shootin'!"

The savages could see the insane flash of the speaker's eyes.

While Tom barked his words he could not keep his eyes from the haunch of meat which the startled Indians

had dropped. This proved the man's desperate condition!

Arrow Head's face was almost black! His eyes seemed ready to burst from their sockets! The bony fingers of Tom were choking him to death.

"I don't want to kill 'im!" said Tom, looking at his victim. "I come hyar fer tarms—not blood! Now, old feller, git yer wind ag'in an' open yer mouth!"

The fingers grew loose on Arrow Head's throat, but did not release it.

"What does our white brother want?" gasped the chief.

"We want to be left alone."

"Will you all take the back trail to the big towns of the whites?"

Tom thought a moment.

"No!" he cried. "We'll make our own tarms. I want the ones Old Frosty started out to git."

At the mention of the old guide's name, Arrow Head started back, but he saw the knife and paused.

"How did the old feller die, anyhow? Like a man?" asked Tom. "Wall, never mind. I can't stay hyar all night. What do you say, Arrer Head? Ef ye don't promise to draw off yer men afore mornin' an' leave us, I'll kill you hyar—now."

It was a moment for life or death!

Arrow Head looked into the gold-hunter's eyes.

Did he see death there?

At any rate he shut his lips; shut them tight with a sign that read: "I reject your terms."

Black Tom read correctly.

"I'm going to git no tarms, eh?" he said. "Wall, I'm satisfied."

The chief of the Blackfeet went back before the hungry man's left hand, and the right shot aloft with the knife.

A wild cry pealed from Black Tom's throat as he sprang upon the chief but before his knife could descend and make the Blackfeet nation Kingless, a gaunt Indian jerked him back. The Indian had jumped from the circle about Tom and the chief!

Arrow Head staggered back and fell to the ground!

"It war my funeral!" hissed Tom, looking at the figure that confronted him. "I'll finish it yit, or git th' tarms!"

With the last word on his lips, he started toward the fallen chief, but heard a voice that seemed to root him to the spot.

"Don't over-do the thing, Tom! I've jest about got my fingers on the parmit."

Well might Tom Barlow stop and stare at the Indian-red figure that towered above his head.

It was Frosty Paddock!

CHAPTER XV.

FOUND AT LAST.—THE MYSTERY OF NIOKANA.—RED WASP SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE A REAL MAN.—
THE ESCAPE.

"Heaven pity the poor men over there! They have been four days without food! There goes, that wild, unearthly song again! I wish I could keep my ears shut to the sounds! Oh, the poor chaps in the fort! I can not help them—I am powerless—myself a captive—with a mysterious fate staring me in the face—they will not surrender, those dauntless friends of mine; they intend to keep their vow; to die by starvation, rather than give up to the Indians!"

Kyd Douglass, the speaker, leaned carelessly, as a casual spectator would have at first supposed, against a tree—but a stout cord passed around his girdle, and told the story that he was fettered!

Some days had passed since his capture while trying to deliver the message concealed in the hawk's wing, to Black Tom and his men. When confronted by Arrow Head in the Blackfeet camp, he was surprised to find himself spared for the time. The Indian King told him that he was considered to be Dwarf Dan's friend, and assured him that he should not be harmed until the dwarf had spoken.

Hence the boy's present condition!

From the Indians he learned that Stunted Tree, as they called the deformed, had not been seen for some days; and the boy was at a loss to account for the non-appearance of the dwarf in the Indian camp.

But there were really two persons who could have told Arrow Head that his white ally had stolen his last horse, or buried his last hunter!

"I wish this would end!" continued the restless boy. "I have lost my trail—lost it forever. From present appearances I will not be permitted to return to St. Louis. I can not go back and tell the heirs at law that the babe stolen from an emigrant train, sixteen years or more ago, is the white girl who is called Niokana by the Blackfeet Indians who stole her! And she, unaware of her identity, has left this land, or is perhaps in the clutches of Dwarf Dan, who has more than a supposition as to her true identity. I have no friend here! That Indian boy Red Wasp, whom I fought and then insulted, will not keep his word. Why should I expect him to? I can not! He has forgotten me! Last night I am sure he went by here with the look that he bore when I told him that he lied."

Kyd Douglass had hardly paused, when a figure came into view, and the next moment he shrunk from it with a light cry, for, to his utter astonishment he found himself face to face with the very person who had just been the subject of his muttered thoughts.

Red Wasp, the Blackfoot boy, stood before him.

For several moments Kyd could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses! But the touch of the young Indian's hands, as he glided to his side, dissipated all conjecture.

"White boy just saying that Red Wasp he never come back!" said the Indian youth.

"That is true," replied Kyd. "I insulted you when we fought. You Indians are called treacherous by our people."

"Indian's heart made just like white man's heart; it kin be good as he."

As the youth spoke, Kyd Douglass felt a cold touch on his hand. Casting his eyes downward he caught the glitter of a knife!

"What are you going to do?" he exclaimed.

The answer was the quick severing of his cords—and to his amazement he stepped forward—free!

"Forgive what I said in the wood!" he said, putting out his hand. "I was hasty then."

He felt Red Wasp's scarlet hand drop into his, and that moment he knew that he had one red friend in the Blackfoot land.

"White boy go with Red Wasp. Want to show 'im something!"

"Go where you will, I will follow you."

Clutching the white boy's hand the young Blackfoot hurried away, Kyd wondering where he was being guided, but asking no questions.

For almost an hour the pair went on, now through a belt of timber, and now across a little valley whose trees cast the most fantastical shadows.

All at once Red Wasp halted.

"We are here, white boy!"

Kyd looked around him. He stood in the center of one of those wooded valleys, but on a spot where trees were scarce. Far above him was the silver disk of the moon, flooding the spot with her soft effulgence; and a cool night breeze which he supposed came from the north, fanned his face.

"Yes, we are here," he said accompanying his words with a curious look. "But why have you brought me hither?"

"White boy shall see!"

As Red Wasp spoke he turned, and a peculiar whistle fell from his lips.

Almost immediately the neigh of a horse saluted Kyd's ears.

"Aha!" he thought. "A horse for me to escape on."

Sure enough the next moment a horse came in sight, but the boy saw that the animal was already mounted.

A minute did not elapse before the animal was halted in front of the wondering boy, and Kyd sprang forward with a light cry.

"Ah! Is it you whom I behold?" he exclaimed, and the person in the saddle looked at the Indian boy.

"It is the boy with two arms!" she said, in a tone of disappointment, for it was the White Queen, that now stood disclosed to the wondering gaze of Kyd.

Red Wasp came forward and addressed the girl.

"Red Wasp know all the time that Niokana think that he will go back and bring the one armed boy to her. But him fetch the little chief who never lifted his rifle against her."

"That is true—this boy never tried to shoot me," cried the girl.

"Now talk together," put in Red Wasp, with a wave of his hand, and gracefully retiring, he left the strangely met pair, alone.

Niokana leaped nimbly from the back of her horse, and with one hand on the bridle-rein came up to Kyd Douglass.

The youth could scarcely restrain his impatience. This was the long lost girl of the emigrant train, that more than sixteen years ago had started for the Blackfeet country—this was the last survivor of that voyage in the Ship of the Desert—several times before Kyd had seen this girl, but now at last they were standing face to face, and he was holding her hand in his.

"I thought that you had fled after striking the deformed," he said.

Niokana's dark eyes flashed.

"Ah! The white boy heard Niokana cut Stunted Tree's face because he stole a white arm that the bullet of a gold-hunter had broken! And it was the arm that once lifted the rifle against Niokana. Does my brother know why he hunts me?"

"Yes! Yes!" cried Kyd. "Girl, how far back can you remember?"

"A way back. An Indian took Niokana a long ride on horseback; he rode till his horse fell dead, for some white people were after him; but he reached the village of the Blackfeet and was safe. Niokana grew up among the Indians; they call her their Queen."

"But that Indian that carried you a long distance on horseback? where is he now?"

"Back there!" said the girl, pointing toward the sav-

age camp.

"What is his name?"

"Arrow Head!"

"The King of the Blackfeet nation!"

Kyd Douglass was astonished.

"I'd give much," he said, under his breath, "to have that Indian King in New York to-day."

"What white boy thinking about?" suddenly asked Niokana.

"About you, girl," he said. "But where is the dwarf?"

He saw a shudder pass over the girl's frame.

"Ask Red Wasp!" she said.

"And Ariel Ramsden?"

"The boy with one arm?"

"Yes! so he has but one arm? Where is he?"

"Niokana does not know. He has paid Stunted Tree for cutting it off. Red Wasp can tell how. Mebbe he is in the Indian army. Red Wasp has kept Niokana hid, for he says that the One Arm hunts her."

"I know why he hunts you," Kyd said. "Some men will do anything for money."

At this juncture Red Wasp reappeared.

"Time to go!" he said. "Big time over yonder. Indian camp all full of voices!"

"What has happened?" queried Kyd.

"Don't know. Boy get on horse."

The Blackfoot's hand was on Kyd's shoulder; but our young hero hesitated.

"What! go and leave the boys starving to death?" he said.

"Never mind! The moccasin is not far off. It will save 'em."

Kyd's answer was a stare: what could Red Wasp's words mean?

"Yes; get up," said Niokana, and with a glance at her Kyd mounted.

"Am I to leave my friends?" he asked.

He was not answered, for Niokana was the only person in sight.

"Where is Red Wasp?"

"Here!"

Kyd looked behind him and saw the Blackfoot boy holding the bridle of a horse as lithe limbered as the one which he had mounted.

Upon the back of the second steed Niokana was soon seated.

"Go!" said Red Wasp. "The white boy knows that Red Wasp did not lie after the hard fight."

"That is true; but——"

The sentence was broken by the whiz-z of a bullet which passed between the heads of the young couple.

Instantly everything became hushed.

"Go!" suddenly cried Red Wasp. "The One-Arm miss this time. Do better when he shoots ag'in!" and as the last word fell from the young Blackfoot's lips, he struck both horses at once with a long switch which he had broken from a bough and they bounded forward, carrying their riders away!

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD FROSTY WINS HIS WAGER.—HE HAS THE "PARMIT"
AND THEN COMES THE RUSE THAT ENDED THE
GREAT FIGHT WITH THE REDSKINS.

"Frosty! by the eternal!"

Black Tom could not suppress this exclamation.

"It ar' me!" was the response. "How ar' the boys?"

"Mad! starvin' to death!"

This brief conversation was carried on in an undertone, and in the presence of the red-skins who seemed to have latent suspicions of the identity of the gaunt Indian who had hurled Tom Barlow from his victim, the chief.

Arrow Head sprung erect as the last words were dropping from Black Tom's lips; but Old Frosty threw himself between him and his braves.

"Not an inch, Arrer Head, till I've got through with ye!" he said, clutching the chief's naked arm. "If one o' yer red-skins makes a move to tech Old Frosty an' his pard, Tom, yer greasy tribe'll hev to look up a new head."

Arrow Head stared into the face of the speaker. Did the countenance of the lank figure of the guide resemble the man whom he and Dwarf Dan had entombed in a swinging coffin in the gloom of a cave not very far away?

"See here, chief! Look at this!" said Frosty, and the next moment he had slipped one of the moccasins from off his feet and was holding it before Arrow Head. "Ye didn't seem to notice the shoe when you an' Dwarf Dan toted me to the buryin'-ground, eh? Look good, my red skin! Ha! you recognize the way the sinews ar' tied!"

The shoe had certainly astonished Arrow Head, for his eyes dilated as he gazed upon it.

"I've got a lot of cash bet on what thet shoe could do!" continued Frosty. "I bet with one o' the meanest young white skunks thet ever came to this kentry to shoot a gal. You may hev forgotten Old Frosty Paddock who war on thet awful trip up the Assineboin, when we ate our moccasins. But, anyhow, I'm the same old 'coon, at yer sarvice—one o' the members ov thet brotherhood we made arter we got to whar thar war game. You know what thet shoe means, chief—thet kind o' tie is as potent as all the Masonic emblems on the globe."

The king of the Blackfeet listened to the guide like a man awakening from a strange dream.

Black Tom and the Indians looked on and listened, almost petrified from amazement.

"Why didn't I show up sooner, seein' thet I've been fur some time in the kentry?" continued Old Frosty. "I came up to yer town fur thet purpose; but one o' yer Injun skunks—a boy it war—giv' me an arrer right in the breast—one o' them little arrers thet hurt like thunder. But I went on till I fell on you arter you shot Marley Morgan! While I war unconscious, you an' Dwarf Dan put me away. Thar I came to, climbed outen the basket, caught an Injun prowlin' round outside, an' put 'im whar I hed been. I b'lieve thar's a piece of thet arrer in me yet. Feels thet way, anyhow. Arrer Head! can't you salute a brother?"

A light seemed to dawn upon the bewildered mind of the chief.

The living man before him, was the person he had actually entombed!

When he found his tongue he addressed his followers: "Blackfeet, stand still!" he said, and then he turned to the whites.

"Come with Arrow Head!"

With a significant glance at Tom Barlow, Old Frosty stepped into the wake of the chief who did not pause until he had walked a godly distance from the spot.

Then he wheeled suddenly upon the twain.

"Tall man Arrow Head's brother. The chief ov the Blackfeet not forget him now. What do whites want?" Arrow Head was an Indian of few words.

"In the first place we want horses," said Frosty.

"How many?"

"Three!"

"But two pale-faces."

"No difference—three horses!"

Arrow Head moved away and gave a peculiar whistle. An Indian appeared.

"Three horses!" said the chief.

"We must be quick!" whispered Old Frosty. "Daylight will catch us. It's comin' over the hills now."

This was even so; the sky was growing light.

The three horses were soon brought upon the scene by the Blackfoot.

"Horses here!" said Arrow Head putting the bridles into Frosty's hands. "Who goin' to ride the odd one?"

The long guide's answer was brief.

"You!"

The chief started back; but the daring man followed him up.

"Ar' ye goin' back on the sign ov the shoe?"

"What white men want?" queried the mystified.

"A parmit from you to stay hyar an' hunt gold as long as we please!" was the startling rejoinder. "You must giv' it er go squar' back on the order, for didn't you swear that time that you would do whatever the wearer ov one o' them moccasin asked?"

The chief was astounded, but he shut his lips firmly; and "never!" seemed to flash in his eyes!

"Arrow Head will let the pale-faces in the fort go back; but—"

"Cuss the gold, Frosty!" said Tom at the guide's ear. "The boys would sooner hev a bite o' buffler than all the yaller rocks in the diggin's."

But Old Frosty was not to be moved.

"Won't give it, eh?" he said firmly.

"White men shall go back well fed; but the yellow rocks must stay for the Indian!"

The next instant the gaunt Indian-fied figure of Frosty Paddock fell upon the chief like a descending thunderbolt; and threw him to the ground.

Arrow Head struggled; but without avail and when he drew a long breath he was seated astride of one of the horses.

"Thar's more than one way ov gittin' a parmit!" said Old Frosty looking up at the bewildered Blackfoot. "Now, sir, act like a man an' the mornin' won't get into ye when it breaks."

At a sign from the speaker, the two whites sprung upon the remaining horses and gathered up the Indian reins.

"Hands to the side! Yer a good rider without techin' a line!" said the lank guide. "Now forward, march, the shortest way to the fort!"

For a moment the chief looked at the men with whom he was dealing. He saw the determination that flashed in the eyes of each, and caught sight of the tawny fingers that touched the trigger of the deadly weapon they held near his head.

"We mean business!" said Frosty, seeing Arrow Head's look. "One move—one sign to yer men as we go through the camp—an' we'll let daylight into yer brain!"

The Indian chief groaned, and dropped his head.

At a light canter the trio moved forward; but the gait soon dwindled into a walk, for almost before the whites were aware of their situation, they were in the midst of the Indian camp.

Recumbent figures were rising into statues of amazement on every side, and the camp was resounding with excitement.

"Keep yer eyes straight ahead!" admonished Old Frosty, with a glance at the immobile chief.

The forest that intervened between the place of the

renconter just described and the fort with its starving inmates, was relieved by the glimmerings of day. All around Indians were to be seen; they swarmed forward with startled look, only to shrink back and stare at the sight that burst upon their vision.

Arrow Head's perilous situation seemed to strike them dumb.

Slowly the three horses tramped through the savage lines, and when Old Frosty reined in his steed, the open ground before the log fort had been reached.

The Indian ranks swayed backward as if moved by some unseen machinery.

"Now," said Old Frosty, breaking the silence that had reigned between the trio during the journey, "now we want the parmit. I know the Blackfoot customs. Yer word, once given, is law hyar—law an' gospel!"

But Arrow Head did not move.

Frosty and Black Tom exchanged glances.

"A leettle harder on the trigger, Tom!" said the guide, across the neck of the Indian's horse. "Now, one minit fur the chief to make up his mind. You understand that, Arrer Head?"

The chief glanced at the hundreds of painted Indians who waited for him to speak, and the pistols came closer, till the muzzle of each almost touched his scarlet temples.

"Off with the shoe!"

An expression of pain crossed the face of the haughty Blackfoot.

He bent forward and lifted his right foot, then he quickly and madly jerked the moccasin off and thrust it into Old Frosty's left hand. The guide's fingers closed on the shoe; but he never took his eyes from the Indian.

Arrow Head looked at his braves.

"Warriors of the Blackfoot Nation!" he said in a tone that told that he was tearing the words from his very vitals, "we have made peace with our white brethren; they are to live among us and come and go when and wherever their feet wish to walk. They are to hunt for the yellow stones in the country of the Blackfeet, and their trails shall not be watched. We will treat them as brethren and when they choose to go away they shall depart in peace!"

The Indian ceased and glanced at Old Frosty.

"That's the parmit!" he said smiling at Black Tom.

"Will the word be kept?"

"The word of a Blackfoot is never broken though it takes trouble to bring him to a recollection of it!" was the reply. "Arrer Head, we'll do the generous thing by you. We won't take all the gold; but if we catch a certain chap, thar may be somebody hurt."

"Does my brother speak of the Stunted Tree?"

"Yes; Dwarf Dan we call 'im, an' a meaner skunk never lived."

"He has left the land of the Blackfeet."

"With the gal?"

"He went away on the wind. One-Arm shot him in the great village of the Blackfeet, and set fire to his lodge. By an' by a strong wind come an' blow all the ashes away!"

"That boy has saved us trouble!" said Black Tom. "Whar is he?"

The Indian shook his head.

"He'll turn up like bad money by an' by. This kentry might git onhealthy for him. He come out hyar to deal meanly with the white girl who has lived with your people for many years. He'd better not tech her."

The *coup* of Old Frosty had ended without bloodshed; and Arrow Head, crestfallen, rode back among his braves.

When the gates of the fort were opened the mad men rushed out, and filled the air with their cries of deliverance.

"We're all right while I hold the shoe!" cried Old Frosty, holding the chief's moccasin above his head. "I've got the parmit, and won the young skunk's money!"

It was true! The "parmit," potent to save the lives of gallant men, had been obtained.

CONCLUSION.

THE LAST DESPERATE CAST OF ARIEL RAMSDEN.—A DEAD RIDER AT THE GATES OF THE FORT, AND A RIDERLESS HORSE.

"Halt!"

The youth who uttered this command stood in the middle of a narrow pass not far from Fort Barlow, and held a rifle in his left hand. The slender barrel of the weapon rested upon the stump of his right arm, and his eyes flashed upon the couple he had halted—a boy and a girl.

"I knew you would come back!" he said, fiercely. "Why didn't you keep on to the confines of the Black-foot country—yea, to the fortune that awaits you, Adele Harmage?"

"I do not desert my friends, and she has a motive for coming back," answered the youth, nodding at his companion.

"No doubt of that!" was the sneering response. "Kyd Douglass, we came out here to find the same person—the girl at your side. You came to find her and take her back to New York; I to——"

"Find and kill! You need not try to disguise the truth, Ariel Ramsden."

"I do not hide it. I came to this land for that very purpose: and here I do my duty."

Quick as a flash, and before one of the startled pair could move, the rifle of the one-armed boy shot to his shoulder, and a flash followed by a report was the result.

Niokana, with a loud shriek, reeled in the saddle, and her horse, plunging forward, overthrew the boy's steed, and both animals went down together.

But only for a moment, for Ariel Ramsden's horse, unhurt, extricated himself, and dashed away.

Kyd Douglass looked and saw something dragging

from the stirrup. It had life, shape; it was the white queen's young trailer!

In a few moments the horse had passed out of sight.

White-faced Niokana was picked up by the boy left behind, and when he rode off he was smiling to know that, thanks to Ariel Ramsden's hasty aim, she was unhurt.

Not long afterward they entered the fort, and the inmates told how a wild horse, dashing by, had left a dead rider at the gate.

Kyd stood over the body and looked down into the face of—Ariel Ramsden!

He and Dwarf Dan had perished miserably in Black-foot land.

And did the miners, the brave band of gold-seekers secure the treasure they had wasted their long days of agony upon?

Barrels of it!

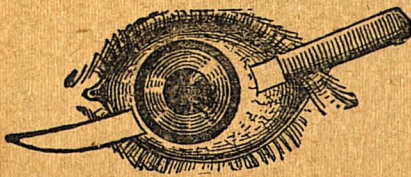
They made themselves rich for life as long as "Old Parmit" as they called the dearly loved guide, now, was with them; but when he left the country to enjoy his wealth elsewhere, there was nobody like him left to treat with the Blackfeet nation, and after a time the Indians, no longer led by Arrow Head, drove them all away, and shut out the tremendously rich gold-bearing region from the world!

But Kyd Douglass felt that he had found something far better than gold in the great country of the Blackfeet. He saw also that the wife he wed, once the White Queen of the Blackfeet Indians, was put in possession of her rights and certain heirs-at-law, East, were not pleased with the great fortune that the girl-wife was accorded by the courts!

Of course Red Wasp, the Indian boy married! He found a second love, who shared with him the danger of a savage life—and as for all the brave men of the great quest, no single Adventurer but that was made a millionaire—but strange to say, no one of them after securing fortune beyond the dreams of avarice in the far-country, cared to go back, and face the dangers that shrouded the gold after the passing of the Blackfoot Chief, who had awarded them the right to hunt for the precious metal in his "own countree!"

THE END.

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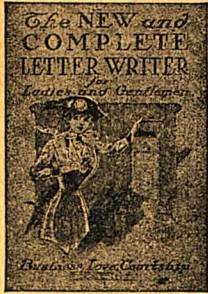
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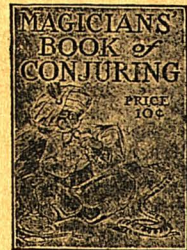
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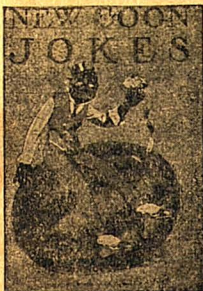
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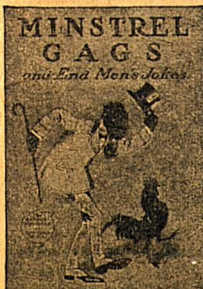
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- June 1—No. 27. THE CURSE OF CORONATION GULF.....or The Outlaws of Blue Waters
- June 8—No. 28. THE DOOM OF THE BANDED BROTHERS.....or The Demon Renegades
- June 15—No. 29. THE WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL.....or The Gun-Men of Split Lake
- June 22—No. 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
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