Rounding-up the Greasers

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CHAPTER I.

THE TRAIN ROBBERY.

"Number Twelve held up near Forrest, at eleven last night. Express messenger and engineer killed. Safe blown open. Contents and bar silver stolen."

This rather startling message was received at 7 o'clock in the morning at the office of the S. A. & U. F. Railway, at San Antonio, Texas.

FRED, ROUNDED ON A HORSE, WAS GUARDED BY THREE OF THE MEXICANS.
The Young Cowboy Captain.

The operator at Forrest had just been released from the bonds in which he had been held for twenty-four hours, when the train stopped for the night, and the above was the first despatch he sent.

"The Address Twelve" was an Express train, and Forrest a small station about twenty-five miles northwest of San Antonio, where no Express train ever stopped there.

The despatch, however, only confirmed what was already known, for immediately after the

railroad was lost over it by the bandits, the train proceeded to San Antonio, and there rejoined the main line.

Two empty boxes, with several auzer holes in them, told the story of the robbery that was performed.

The dead body of the faithful messenger and the blood-stained floor proved how bravely, though ineffectually, he had defended his trust.

The wounded fireman added his further evidence.

Just as passing Forrest, two men, who had climbed over the tender, appeared on the cab roof and offered the engineer to slow up.

The engineer was looking out ahead; the fireman attending to the front, and the messenger between them, the bandit, in a big, powerful man, instead of obeying the order, snatched up a heavy iron wrench, while Jackson found his back broken, and both sprung on the bandits.

Two revolvers cracked simultaneously; the driver being struck, and the fireman received a bullet in the shoulder.

With two revolvers stirring him in the face, and shouting the order to "Stop her or die!"

As soon as the train stopped a number of bandits, with extra horses came up to the baggage car.

The safe already had been blown open, and the money packages, together with a lot of spades and bar silver, were handed out by the two robbers who had killed the express messenger.

Four of the extra horses carried ston canvas bags and into these the treasury was stowed.

This part of the work was performed by five or six of the band, while the others rode up and down on each side of the train to prevent interference.

No attempt was made to rob the passengers, the game was too small.

When the train had stopped the men in the baggage car jumped out and rode away, leaving the pack horses, at a rapid pace.

For an hour longer the train was detained—evidently to give the pack horse detachment a good start before an alarm could be raised; then the man who remained in the cab called for his horse.

This man was apparently in command, for when his horse was brought he jumped from the locomotive, mounted, and, with two shill whistles, brought the entire band to his side, about a dozen of them, and having ascertained that all were present, the leader gave the order: "All aboard!—as though Jack Hay was after you!"

In an instant the command was obeyed, every man riding off in a different direction.

This was the fireman’s narrative.

But here he had finished. Sheriff Maguire had arrived, and within an hour had started with twenty men on a special train for Forrest, where the hunt must be of the previous day, and would not be back until later in the day.

Sheriff Maguire had been a miner and a hunter in his day, and was himself well fitted to follow a trail.

But when he reached the scene of the robbery he found it was not a trail—it was which he could follow, and quickly realized that his hastily gathered posse was not composed of the kind of men he needed to do it. It was just as Jackson had said—the bandits had all gone in different directions, and there were a dozen trails to choose from.

Suddenly the sheriff remembered the pack horses.

Sweeping round in a half circle, he quickly found the trail of these, and with a loud hurrah the posse started off.

The trail was full of men of the same crew, and for an hour followed it at a rattling gait.

They were approaching a small stream when the sheriff suddenly noticed that more riders, or at any rate horses, had joined the party he was following.

On reaching the stream, now a swift running, turbulent affair, though usually quite enough current to make the cause of the addition to the treasure-bearing party.

The heavily laden pack horses would never have been able to cross unless relieved of part of their precious burden, for, although a bar of silver is not much more than 175 to 180 pounds, and these additional men had evidently joined the party to assist in getting the great load through the stream.

About a hundred yards beyond the stream stood a blasted oak tree, and on reaching this another difficulty cropped up.

Instead of six or eight horses, the trail was marked as though twenty more had joined the party.

The ground was all torn up, as by impatient wagons back and forth, and when one of the posse leaped from his horse to pick up a twenty-dollar gold piece, the sheriff exclaimed: "Boys, this is where they met and divided. Now let's get after 'em. They've got a little start on us, but they're heavily loaded."

With another cheer the posse started, three to one, and perhaps a kilometer before they had gone a quarter of a mile.

Leaving the blasted tree, the bandits had moved in a solid body, but at this point they separated into three parties, and from the hoof-prints Maguire judged there must be six to nine men in each squad.

There were, altogether, twenty-one men in the posse, which would make three parties of savages each.

Should he divide and follow the trails separately? It was no longer possible to say which embraced the pack horses—-even supposing they had not divided the treasure.

While inwardly debating this question, he happened to glance in the direction of the westerly trail—which was the center one of the three—and saw a thin column of smoke rising from a clump of trees about three miles away.

It was not like a campfire, being a pure white column from dry light wood—such a smoke as might be risked in cooking a breakfast in an enemy’s country.

"Boys, fire off the sheriff. We’ve got some of em, anyhow. They’re at breakfast, sure as shooting!"

A minute later the fire was tearing away at tremendous rate toward the grove.

Only six or eight of the bandits were there, and they had to fear.

For an old campaigner Sheriff Maguire was going at it somewhat rashly, and this seemed to occur to him when within a mile of the grove.

"Hold up, boys. Let’s go a bit slow," he said. "There’s no tellin’ what’s a’waitin’ in for us there!"

But the posse was too well formed to be turned around, and in a hurry rushed on toward the grove.

A hint from one of the posse, that if the sheriff was afraid he might be held up, was until they returned, ridiculed the matter.

"Well, blast y’er come along and explain it to Maguire," angrily. "An’ take care ye don’t regret it!"

The party rode on in silence until witheringly as they approached the grove, then the sheriff ordered a halt.

"Now, a half-doz’n ye swing round, ’till the wind was a-blowin’ and then lightin’ a thin charge, and the rest of us take ’em in front. When ye hear us fire, sail in! Now, git there!"

The point Maguire was heading for was due west, to the northeast, and about a mile or two in a line. This was a bad place, with a clump of bushes, and had he looked the sheriff might have seen a column of smoke rising from this immediately.

As the posse approached the grove a solitary rifle shot rang out on the morning air, and Sheriff Maguire fell-shot through the head.

"There! Sonny Maguire will not trouble the Moralees any more," said the speaker—a swaggering, villainous looking Mexican, who had fired the fatal shot from behind a tree not a hundred yards away—now hurried away and joined his party, which stood mounted and ready for action a little farther.

"Well, I’m not dead yet," urged one man, adding: "These chaps are watchin’ us, but we’ll be out of range then."

The six men in the wood watched this movement with contempt.

"Don’t worry," exclaimed a slim fellow, carrying four revolvers in his belt, and a Winchester rifle at his saddle-bow—"Cole! They’re a lot of green chaps if they think them a volley and charge they won’t stop running until they get home."

"All right, Jim! Let’s go!" responded the man addressed as Dick.

A word to Morales, and he, too, was in the saddle.

"Now, then, move quiet until we reach the open," ordered Jim, and picking their way between the trees, the bandits obeyed his directions so well that their proximity was not suspected until they had passed from the grove, the spot from which Morales had fired.

Six of the posse on the other side and Maguire dead, left fourteen men to face the bandits, who came swooping down on them.

Excellent horsemen were the soldiers, and with their horses by pressure of the knees, thus leaving both hands free to use their revolvers, which they seemed with deadly effect.

Half a dozen of the now demoralized posse were down, almost before they remerced, and the remaining hall, vomited from the mouths of twelve skillfully handled revolvers, proved too much for the survivors, who turned tail and fled, after firing a few harmless shots.
After a few minutes' thought he said: "Go ahead, Fred! You may tell Morgan I wish to see him." Then Fred hurried across the street, and after a few minutes' conversation, Captain Morgan was heard to say: "All right, Fred. It is what I can for you, but be off, now, and find the boys!"

Captain Morgan was a wealthy ranch man, and the "boys" referred to were his cowboys, who had come to town with a large drove of cattle. Leaving the captain to deal with his uncle, the young man hurried away and made his way in a short time with fifteen to twenty men, whom he left at the hotel, while going to ascertain the result of the interview between the captain and his uncle.

The captain proved an able advocate, for when Fred entered the office it was settled that he should accompany the cowboy expedition.

"Found 'em, Fred?" asked Captain Morgan.

"Yes, sir! All across the street! Is it all right?"

The two men smiled, and Captain Morgan replied:

"On one condition, Fred! You must not ask to have charge of the expedition."

The young man did not care about the fun that way. He left all the treasure—separately and together.

He looked up angrily on hearing the noise, and frowned as he said, "Come in!"

"Oh! It's you, Fred?" he continued, a smile breaking the place of the frown. "Sit down for a few minutes. I'm very busy with that infernal robbery just now."

"Yes, sir; and if you can possibly spare me five minutes now it's that I wish to speak to you about."

"Yes," he continued, as the colonel pushed back his chair, and, with a look of surprise nodded to him to proceed. "I heard of it very early this morning, and I hear the sheriff and his party start off a few minutes ago, but, uncle, they won't do anything."

"Won't do anything?" repeated the colonel, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Just this. Mazure is all right, himself, for this kind of work, but the men he left me, Fred, and no good at all. I doubt if they will ever lay eyes on the robbers, but if they should it will be to the company, who can depend on the last of last night are not likely to be conjured by a lot of vagabonds and braggarts."

Colonel Soulé stared at the young fellow, too astonished for a few moments to speak.

"Well, Fred," he said at length, "you have something to propose?"

"Yes, sir. I believe—in fact I am sure—that, if you will ask Captain Morgan for a dozen of his cowboys, we can set back the sheriff and punish them murderously thieves!"

"We?" echoed the colonel. "Do you think there are any of us who ride the moment the news comes, and sit down to things? You are offering big rewards, and I don't see anything against my trying for part of the money! Captain Morgan is across the street now, and almost all his men are in town. May I tell him you want to ride?"

The young fellow spoke so eagerly and looked so handsome, the excitement dyeing his sunburnt cheek a deep red, Colonel Soulé laughed—and felt a little proud of him, too.

I heard he was in this neighborhood and wired down to keep him until we arrived, for you'll find him better than three and four strenuous and excited. Better than all, he knows every hole and corner in the State, and across the border.

Every one likes praise, and Red Lightning grumbled approval of this speech.

"Yes, and now," continued Fred, "Captain Morgan, "who is to boss this crew?"

There was no reply to this—each man naming one to command, though expecting him to do the talking.

"Bold enough to fight, but too modest to talk," commented their employer, and then added:

"Suit yourselves, of course, but, as I can't spare Jim, your own cap't, from the range, and as you are all too modest to talk, what do you say to the boy, Fred? You're spare, it's smart, and it will avoid jealousy! Make Bill, here, lieutenant, and he can advise him."

"Good enough! Keep out, let 'er go at that! "Rah for Captain Fred! And Lieutenant Bill!" were the exclamations that came from the captain's suggestion, and, to his astonishment, Fred was made Commandant of the second expedition, which took the trail five minutes later.

The stream and the dark rank were quickly reached and left behind; then came the division of the trail into three different directions.

"Guess we'd better take a run after the sheriff—four or five of us, while 'th' range south," suggested Bill. This split-up looks ez th' they wuz tryin' t' draw him off 'n' mebbe inter a trap."

"No, no, no! No need look farther than trees!" was the attentive Indian's comment, indicating the grove.

Accordingly, at the party, headed by Bill, rode rapidly toward the scene of the slaughter, while the others followed on a trail.

Looking back, shortly after, Fred saw Bill's party coming, and hailed long enough to learn that they all knew it, the first expedition. The dead left on the ground told the terrible story.

"Good enough! Keewai! We must've covered forty miles t'day!"

"Nearby fifty, Moses, and between this and the range t'night we must do a hundred more, even if we kill the horses."

The other part of the party, who had been listening with amusement to Moses's questioning, now stared in amazement.

"Tell me what morrow they rode!" asserted Bill Hawkins, quietly, but emphatically.

"We must, Bill! We are twenty-five miles away from the nearest town, and they are probably that far on the other side of it. Now, we must get in sight before to- night, and in the morning we can have our liquor and they are only about twenty-five or thirty miles from it. If they once get to the county, we shall be worth a dollar to doughnuts we lose them altogether."

Red Lightning nodded his head ap-
The Young Cowboy Captain.

provingly, Bill looked puzzled, while the rest wondered to hear such language from the boy captain. "Well, Fred," answered Bill, "I'll agree with ye 'bout losin' 'em, but how're ye goin' to do it? The horses won't stand it!"

"This way: I've got a powerful re-
flower, and I'll stand on her head, and I intend to start in an hour or so with Red Lighting. You and the boys can fit up the breakfast, and then we can start."

"By Gum! You've got the grit, any-
how!" exclaimed Bill, admiringly, "but what's up to it?"

The horses 'peared out ag'in daylight!"

"Oh, no! We will have to go slow until dark, and then, with an hour's rest, while we eat, they'll probably last it out at a pretty leisurely pace until noon," returned the young captain, so placidly that Bill laughed as he asked:

"Well, after that—what'll ye do?"

"Do? Why, foot it, of course—and lively, too, but if we can get within ten miles of 'em, I can tell where they are and what they're doing. I will carry the flowers in my hand as I ride. You can pick up the horses—if they are alive. Call me in an hour, please."

He rolled himself in his blanket. Fred went to sleep, while Red Lighting grunted at the astonished cowboys, following his leader's example.

Promptly at the expiration of an hour they started, Fred holding the lantern, while the smoke from a slender light on his saddle, ahead, gave the way, with the wary Red Lighting at his saddle skirts, and leading his steed. Bill, as he turned back to the group at the fire, said: "Boys, we're 'way behind the age! On the whole, it was a good joke, but I'm 'willis' to give up that Fred's got the biggest head in the crowd."

"Well, you think, when he comes to us only a year ago, a pale faced kid from the East!" chimed in another.

"Him 'n you wurr pootty thick from the start, Bill. Wot the deuce's his last name?" came from another.

"Campbell," replied Bill, "and don't make any mistakes, boys, he'll get that to-morrow ez sure ez my name's Hawkins. We'll have t' hustle t' ketch up with him to-morrer night, so let's turn in. Jim! You 'n Mose better keep yer eye peeled for a chance to catch him."

But within an hour, poor Mose, on guard, was shot dead, and Hawkins awak-

"Now, Josie, look sharp for the signal!" cried Jim Dalton—for one of the dread Dalton brothers, who had dashed forward to meet the advancing horsemen. The Mexican addressed as Josie, sitting motionless as a statue, with his deadly rifle lying carelessly across his knees, merely nodded his head, and calmly continued to puff away at his cigarette. The sudden advance of the bandit leader startled the posse, and stopping within hearing distance of them, Jim Dalton called out:

"Who commands that party?"

"I do, I reckon," replied a big, brawny fellow, advancing from the front of the posse.

"Well, gentlemen, you don't look over friendly, nor do I reckon you're after me."

The bandit leader spoke pleasantly, which caused the brawny sheriff (for such he was) to assume a more businesslike air, as it was intended he should, saying:

"I don't git ye, stranger. What did yo say?"

Jim repeated his question.

"Well, I reckon that that crowd's 'bout the size of what we're after;" replied the sheriff, with a grin.

"Sheriff, I suppose?"

"That's what I be, young fellow—Sheriff Reynolds!"

"Then you know 'bout the bandit, raising his hat."

"That was the signal, and the sheriff's death-warrant, for a ride cracked. The sheriff topped from his saddle and his frightened horse galloped away, dragging the bandit. Bill, they was all gone from the foot, which had caught in the stirrup."

Murphys' shot was the signal, in turn, or a charge by the remaining bandits. Headed by Jim Dalton, they dashed into the posse, delivering two deadly volleys at short range before the latter had re-
covered from the surprise.

This posse, however, was built of better stuff than the first one, under Sheriff Maguire, and fought bravely and with de-
termination, but at great disadvantage.

They had lost their leader at the outset, horrible breaths, by two terrific volleys, and divided by the bandits, who charged them in a wedge-shaped body, the apex of which was one of the finest pistol-shots in the world.

Once divided, they were under the dead-

"Phew! But those were plucky devils!" exclaimed Dick Dalton, another of the bandits, when the last of the posse had fallen.

"I tell you, Jim," he continued, "with the desperation from his brow, "it wasn't for your idea of getting the sheriff out first, we'd have had a tough job!""

Jim smiled, "Thon art right! See what it is to have one big head in the family."

"The posse was asked Frank, the third of the trio, interrupting them.

A hasty investigation proved that the posse had put up the best defense possible. One man had been killed, and six more wounded, two of them so badly that recov-
yer was out of the question. The watching Cowboy Chief, from the hilltop, saw these two carried to some trees a short distance from the scene of the conflict, and then, to his great joy, saw the road teeming with Indians.

"We've got them now, Lighting," he exclaimed. "Bill and the boys will be here before long, and we can attack them tonight."

"Mobbe!" returned Red Lighting, doubtfully.

"Why, don't you think they'll get here before night?" asked Fred.

"No can tell what happen, was the reply.

Bill said it was "mobbe," for night came, and no Hawkins with his boys. Fred and his band were left where they were, and the bandits, who, just as darkness came on, began to prepare to break camp.

Lightning, we can't wait for them! We must follow this crowd, for they'll cross to-night. What can keep Bill?"

"I reckon Hawking the Hawking, boy chief was greatly troubled over his non-

appearance, but there was no help for it;
The Young Cowboy Captain.

CHAPTER IV.
CAPTURED AND RESCUED.

The Cowboy Captain crept to the edge of the camp through the long grass without being observed, but, in moving around the left behind the horses. Dick and Frank Dalton, had got directly in the path of one of the outlaws returning from the party that had been cut off.

This man fell right on top of Fred, and the shout he uttered brought the whole band to his relief.

"Who the devil have we got now?" exclaimed Dick Dalton, looking at the prisoner curiously.

Fred, after the first effort to escape, had made no resistance, and now stood in a rather close circle of the ruffians, more as an object of curiosity than as a prisoner.

"One of the natives, I guess! What were you after, my boy?"

Instead of answering, Frank Dalton, who had put the question, Fred made a sudden plunge through his unsuspecting guards, knocking over senseless with the butt of his revolver.

He was twenty yards away, flying through the woods, and the gang recovered from their surprise and started in pursuit.

Fred had reached a small clearing, and fleet of foot, Fred would have easily dismissed his pursuers, who could scarcely see him, had not his foot caught in the long grass and caused him to fall.

Before he could get on his feet the outlaws were upon him, but this time he was not captured but closely strung up. Three times he fired, and each time a man fell, before a blow from a rifle butt brought him to the earth.

At first it was supposed Fred Campbell was dead, and that alone saved his life, for the ruffians were furious over the loss of their comrades.

"By George! Three for one, and that one a boy, don't pay!" exclaimed Dick, as Fred fell.

"Not much," returned Frank. "But, is he alive, or is he dead?"

In the darkness no one had seen the blow dealt, and it was, of course, supposed that Fred had been shot.

As Frank Dalton asked the question, he supposed over Fred and examined him. "Dick," he called, in a low tone; and, when his brother came to him, continued: "He's only stunned. Lead me your flask. We must find out who he is and what he was doing.

A few drops of liquor brought Fred to consciousness, and he was led back to the camp.

Disarmed and brought into the light of the camp fire, Fred was now an object of wrath as well as curiosity.

"Who are you and what brought you here?" demanded Frank Dalton, sternly.

"My name is Campbell. I was creeping up to see what was going on,

Fred said this boldly, and it made a good impression; its very frankness was in his favor.

Frank asked these questions in a more friendly tone, for he felt sorry for the youthful prisoner, who, he believed, had been actuated by boyish curiosity.

"Yes, I'm from the town," replied Fred; he had never attempted to come just what you were up to."

"Well, my boy, I'm sorry you made that blunder; they'll make you pay for those dead men. But I can try to get you out of it easy; they were only Greasers, anyhow.

The bow, earnest tone in which this was said, and the scowling, vengeful looks of the bandits, showed Fred the tight place into which his folly had gotten him, but he had great faith in Lightning and Hawkins—if he escaped immediate death.

As Fred turned away from the gang, the bandits seized and bound the young man, but it was scarcely done before Jim Dalton entered into conversation with the prisoner, and the young prisoner heard Morales say: "Shoot him! Shoot him!"

"Nonsense! Give him a chance; he's only a boy, protest of a prisoner.

"But we've no time to waste! Half the town will be after us inside of an hour! Come, I'll settle him!" and the Mexican rode toward Fred, revolver in hand.

"Stop that! If you shoot, I'll shoot!"

Fred Dalton, who spoke, and the Mexican pulled up short and looked back, to find the muzzle of a revolver aimed fairly at his heart. The gang recovered from their surprise and started in pursuit.

"Do you sacrifice friends for enemies?" Morales cried. "I have but to call, and your boys will be beside you hot and quick.

"Not much! Your men have not arrived, to begin with. And, even if they had, they'd be glad the lot of you!" cried Jim Dalton, now riding forward, a revolver in either hand.

"Stop that, Jim," interposed his brother, and addressed Morales, "You must remember, Jose, that until we reach the Rio Grande, I am in command.

"Very well. What shall be done with him?" asked the Mexican, sullenly.

"Cuffing him, with us, then. We can give him a trial—a fair one, too, by George!" was the reply.

Morales made no response; the rest of the band mounted; several horses were loaded with the bags of silver, and then the caravane started off toward the coast.

Fred, bound to a horse, was guarded by three of the Mexicans, and in this manner was conducted until the coast was reached.

At dawn the party halted in a grove near the banks of the Rio Grande, for breakfast, and here Fred recognized the grizzly face of the engineer killed on the night the train was held up.

Mrs. Chestham's face wore a cold, stony expression, while her sister's countenance bore traces of weeping.

"Frank is pretty safe, having met her many times in San Antonio with her husband, but her sister had seen only two or three times.

The three prisoners were placed a little apart from the others, and Fred was greatly surprised to find that it was the younger woman only who appeared to recognize him.

"Don't you remember me, Mrs Chestham?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Oh, Mr. Campbell, I'm afraid she doesn't recognize you!" exclaimed the young lady whose name was Chestham.

Her sister had not replied to the question—did not even appear to have heard it.

"He—th-that Moralese—that one—de—no, I—it—last night," continued Rita, "and I'm afraid its driven her crazy.

Poor Mr. Chestham's body had only been brought home at noon, and—_it must have been burned up._

They proceeded on, rider with a sob, and began to weep just as Morales approached.

He glanced slyly at Fred, but changed instantly on approaching Mrs. Chestham.

"Tired, I suppose. But, never mind; it will be over soon," he said, soothingly.

"Oh! I can't believe you," exclaimed
Mrs. Cheatham, pettishly, and then, after a moment, asked, with a half smile.

"How did Jim was dead?" asked Mr. Morales stared at her in surprise. He had expected tears, pleadings, reproaches—even, even a cunning look, and the same queer smile.

"I was there!" he replied.

"Ah! And you killed him? Oh! you mean you killed him for Jose?" she said, with a cunning look, and the same queer smile.

Just as Morales was called by Jim Dalton, and, with a muttered curse at the interruption, he turned and left her, saying:

"I'm a few minutes late.

But he did not return, and soon one of the band brought some breakfast, and while he was being eaten, Fred saw Lightning had finished eating, "but we have no time, now, to look for it. We must go on and try to rescue the girl.

The Indian nodded and arose to his feet.

"Leave sign?" he queried.

"I'm afraid so," but I suppose I might as well," replied Fred, despondently.

"What sign?" exclaimed Lightning, looking in the direction from which they had come.

Turning, Fred saw two men approaching, one on foot supporting another on horseback, whose horse was moving at an easy gait.

They were too far away to be recognizable.

Indeed, the rider's face was almost on the neck of his horse; but, as they came nearer, Fred recognized thevezian as Captain Morgan's Chahique cook, and a sudden chill came over him as he advanced to meet them.

"My God! It's Bill!" he exclaimed, when they met.

And it was Bill, all bloody and bandaged, and almost unconscious.

CHAPTER Two

HAWKINS'S STORY AND FRED IN A FIX.

"What has happened? Where did you find him, and where are the others?" demanded the Cowboy Chief, as they lifted Bill from the saddle and laid him on the grass near the brook.

"Find him way back y'know. Everybody much. A cook named Fred groaned, and, stooping over Hawkins, washed some blood from his face.

This seemed to revive the woodcutter, who opened his eyes, and their weary, painless expression changed instantly to one of joy on beholding Fred.

"Got that, Fred?" he said, with a ghastly smile.

"Don't talk, Bill! Try to rest a little," returned Fred. "You can tell us about it later.

It was more weakness from loss of blood than anything else that troubled Bill, and his iron constitution, aided by the Chahique sauce and the Chinaman's strengthening brood, enabled him, after two hours' rest, to relate what had happened.

"About an hour after ye left, we was attacked by a gang of greasers -'bout a hundred. They stampeded our horses, but we give 'em a good fight- killed more'n half of 'em, I reckon. Anyhow, jest as I dropped, the skunks rid off like ez if the devil wuz after 'em."

Bill paused, as if reluctant to proceed, and Fred added:

"And the rest of the boys, Bill?"

"Dead!" replied Bill, with a groan, and after a few minutes' sorrowful silence, continued:

"I crawled round when I come to myself, but couldn't find none of 'em. Then I flipped over ag'in, 'n' Chin-Chin come along 'n' found me. So we come along, 'n' I'm here!"

"Me velly good doctor!" added Chin Chin, regarding Bill complacently, at which the Cowboy Chief said "Sect!" and the poor Chinaman looked both frightened and hurt.

"Shall we send him home?" asked Fred.

"No! bring him along. He kin cook. anyhow, 'n' it if I don't m'elf futbin', he can help you."

So Chin Chin formed one of the rescuing party—and a very important one, too, although not consulted in the matter.

Fred killed a few rabbits and a bird, and while these were being cooked, and Fred was relating his story to Bill, the redskin went off toward the river.

Chin Chin had just finished cooking when the Indian returned, and, taking a seat on the others, began to talk.

"Found anything, Lightnin'?" asked Bill.

"Canoe?" was the response.

"Good boy! The very thing!" exclaimed Fred. "We can lead your horse, and you can ride against them on the other side. Wasn't it a lucky find, though?"

"I guess he didn't look much, eh, Lightnin'?" said Bill, with a grin.

The Indian grinned in return, but said nothing.

Fred having declared that he was strong enough, they proceeded to the river, where a large canoe with two paddles, was lying tied to a tree.

Fred and Lightnin paddled as fast as the swimming powers of Bill's horse would permit and they were soon standing on Mexican soil, waiting for the Indian to return from hiding the canoe.

Then they took the trail -Lightnin' leading at an easy gait.

They finally halted for the night, when Fred lightnin announced, and almost reached Morales' headquarters, and would have to go slowly and carefully on the morrow.

Early on the morrow they took up the march, and about noon the Indian called out:

"There is Morales!"

They had been traveling through a dense woods, and were about to enter an open though mountainous country, when Lightnin stopped the party with these words.

On the summit of a high, steep hill, about a quarter-mile away, was a large one-story wooden building, belonging about which were a number of Mexicans. Evidently a stronghold, which only a strong force could take.

"How the deuce are we going to get to that house, Bill?" asked Fred, looking from Hawkins to Lightnin.

"Try it at night," replied Bill; "but there's sure to be plenty of 'em eyes on watch, even then, I reckon.

Lightnin nodded assent.

Concealed among the trees, the rescuing party waited till the Mexicans, until about three o'clock. Then Hawkins suggested that Lightnin should try to get something.

Bill was beginning to feel like himself again, and his appetite was returning.

Taking only his bow and arrows, the Indian went away, returning in a short time with a couple of large rabbits, which he handed to Fred.

"Here, Chin Chin! Take these back a little farther and cook them!" ordered Fred.

"Make no smoke," added Chin Chin went back about fifty yards, where he built a small dry bush fire, and, having seen it properly started, he and the others resumed their watch on the Mexicans.

They had been thus engaged about fifteen minutes, when they were startled by hearing Chin Chin cry:

"Huhuh! Huhuh! Me got 'em!"

Turning quickly, they were amazed to see the little Chinaman engaged in a desperate struggle with a br;wny Mexican.

The two were rolling over and over around the fire-first one and then the other, who kept starting to reach his knife, and the Chinaman skillfully preventing him.

"Better Chin than would have been successful in doing this it is impossible to say, but on the appearance of Fred.
The Young Cowboy Captain

and the others the Mexican stopped struggling.

He seemed petrified with fear on beholding the Chinaman, and, Red Lightning's face wore a grin as sly as he noted the terror of the Greaser.

"Be he the next captain, was captain one time," the Indian informed the group.

"How can we find out if Morales is up there, Fred?"

Lightning repeated the question to the Mexican, who replied that Morales was in the house, and had brought home two female prisoners.

"Ask him how he himself got down here so soon seen," urged Fred, his suspicions aroused.

To this the Mexican replied that he had been out since morning, and was returning home when he accidentally stumbled across Chin Chin cooking.

"To him we'll! We'll have to keep him now, though I don't know what to do with him."

The Mexican seemed grateful to Fred for this order, and made no resistance when Bill securely bound his hands and feet.

Hardly had this been done when a dozen Mexicans left the house and came tearing down the hill at breakneck speed.

"Kick that fire out!" cried Bill, and cutting the cords about the prisoner's feet, hurled Morales into the woods and out of the probable path of the rapidly approaching bandits.

A road led through the wood to the river, and they had hardly got out of sight before the bandits went dashing by, yelling a challenge.

One cry from the prisoner would have brought him assistance, but he knew it would mean a death warrant, for Lightning stood beside him with a Bowie knife ready for use.

Without warning the bandits had passed there was a general sigh of relief from the little party, and they moved back to the house.

"How many more up there?" asked Fred.

"As many more as you have just seen," replied Manuel.

About ten o'clock that night, Lightning left them to see what he could learn about the prisoner.

There was no moon, and as the Indian disappeared in the darkness, Bill deposited it in the words of the rescue of the woman.

All lights had been extinguished in the structure before Lightning started. Solenn stillness wilted over all, and, sitting watching and listening, the silence became oppressive.

"I can't stand this any longer, Bill! I'm going to take a walk around and -"

There came the report of a gun, followed by several cries; lights flashed in and about the house, and by their light men could be seen running in various directions.

Lightning had carried no rifle, and Fred exclaimed.

"Are you being discovered? That shot was meant for me!"

"Fraid yer right, pard," returned Bill, and the others escaped into the woods. Chin Chin, meanwhile, slept, blissfully unconscious of any trouble, not five yards away behind the prisoner.

A half-hour passed, and both watchers became very restless. The Indians, however, were disheartened; everything was in darkness, and yet Red Lightning had not returned.

"He's been discovered! Bill" urged the young leader. "I'm going to take a look around."

"Yougoing on a wild one? I'll go, too. If we'll wait till I wake Chin!" rejoined Hawkins.

The Chinaman was awakened and informed of their purpose, after which they started, but, as soon as they began to proceed, they shouted, "Hands up!" and the Japanese fell into line and spread and go in different directions.

"I'll take the right and you the left," Bill said, "and we can meet at the house!"

They separated—each making a half-circle up the hill, while Fred reached the house in safety.

No guard was visible, and he crept around to the back to meet Hawkins, but just as he turned, he saw some plume into the hands of Morales himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE TORTURE SENTENCE

The encounter between the boy captain and Morales was so unexpected that for a moment neither made a movement, but the appearance of the two guards, marking the rounds in an opposite direction, roused Fred to a sense of his double danger, and he made a dash to pass Morales.

The latter carried in his hand a long, heavy club, and, as Fred passed him, he hurled this with such force and accuracy that it lodged itself in the feeling youth to the earth, senseless.

Fred recovered consciousness to find himself lying on the floor, surrounded by a crowd of as sinister looking scoundrels as ever lived.

"So, my little lad, I've got you again, and this time you won't get away. Get up!"

It was Morales who spoke, and Fred arose.

"Now, what have you to say for yourself? Speak quick! My men want revenge for the man you killed!"

A horrid murmur of approval was their answer, and for a moment Fred gave himself up as lost, but, suddenly, Manuel, the Mexican, appeared, and, putting on a bold front, he replied;

"You can kill me, if you wish, but what of your lieutenant, Manuel? My death means his death."

"Manuel?" exclaimed Morales, in surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say! As you treat me, so will Manuel be treated."

Then there was a hurried consultation among the bandits, and, feeling quite safe for the present, Fred simply smiled and shook his head. "Manuel asked:

"Where is Manuel?"

The consultation was resumed, and, a few minutes later, Manuel appeared.

"Put him with the woman, but bind him and the young one!"

And to Fred, as he was being led away:

"We will find Manuel before twenty-four hours, and then we will play the Indian with you."

With this significant reminder and threat, Fred was led away to a room at the rear of the house.

It was a large apartment, outside the door of which a scurry was stationed. It contained a rough-looking bed, upon which Fred was thrown, and beneath it was a small inner room from the Mexican who accompanied him.

Binding the young American's feet, the Mexican looked rather disappointedly around the room and then languidly toward a smaller inner chamber; after which he left the prisoner to his reflections.

Scarcely had he left, when Fred was startled to find Rita Young standing at his bedside.

The Mexican was forgotten, her orders, or, thinking her asleep, had not cared to disturb her. He was quite a young man, and had been struck by Rita's beauty.

"You were to have been bound,? began Manuel.

"Hush! There's a guard outside. If he hears us talking he will enter, and then I cannot help you. So listen, but do not speak.

"We heard the noise when you were coming, and I listened. I heard your conversation. I understand Spanish enough to know that they intend to hunt for Manuel, and then, if not found, they will torture you until you tell where he is. Then they will kill you. We know how they are hunting for Manuel, and if they find him before morning -"

"Then they will finish me at once, I suppose?"

Rita bowed, and continued:

"But you must not wait for morning. You must escape before daylight and get back warn your friends that you are alive. If you will turn us over, we will help you."

As Rita finished speaking and turned toward the inner room, the door was suddenly thrown open, and Morales stood on the threshold.

"Carajo! Why are you not bound?" he exclaimed, in angry surprise.

Striding over to the prisoner, and drawing a revolver as he approached the bed, Morales examined Fred's bonds.

He had evidently expected to find the prisoner wholly or partly bound, for, turning a suspicious look upon Rita, he said:

"You were about to release the prisoner."

"Had the thought occurred to me, I could have done so before Fred, Rita, sharply, as though angered by his suspicion.

"How is it you are here, then, and not bound, as I ordered?"

"I am not responsible for your orders," returned Rita. "How was I to know who was here?"

The girl acted her part well, and the sharp anger did much to allay the Mexican's suspicions.

"Keep your own room, and have nothing to do with the prisoner, for if he should escape it will be for you!

"With this Morales turned toward the door.

"Stop!" cried Rita, and as he turned in surprise, she continued:

"Either remove this man, or lock that door when I enter the room. I will not be held responsible for your prisoner!"

Looking at her keenly, he was about to turn away again, saying:

"No; I shall trust you."

But Rita insisted that the door should be locked. This was done, and Morales left the room.

The young American was greatly surprised at Rita's action, for he had had an explanation of her conduct.

Morales had gone a half hour, and Fred was about falling asleep, when he was suddenly roused by a sharp click, like the snapping of a bolt. Then he saw the door of Rita's room open cautiously, and the girl came forth, a knife in her hand.

Approaching Fred, she severed his bonds and then motioned him to follow her. Entering the inner room Fred saw Mrs. Chestham asleep in one corner, and directly facing him an open, unbarred window, sufficient to allow a clear conversation.

"There! Go as quick as possible?" whispered Rita, pointing to the window.

"But, Rita! He will wreak his vengeance on you!"

"Oh, no! The key is on the other side, and he will think he failed to close the door tight enough to prevent the bolt to catch."

"How did you open it?"

"With the knife. The lock is on this side, but, hurry away or he may come again! Don't to forget us!"

"I never shall while I live?" replied the young captive, and as she clung tightly through the window.

Hanging halfway out, Fred heard some
The Young Cowboy Captain.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

It was a case of the "devil or the deep sea." Surely enough, half a dozen yelling fiends, front and rear, and as many men with guns, seemed bent on finding them, and Fre d chose for Fred and Lightning.

"Shoot quick! You take right—I take left."

They were now close to the second party of Mexicans, and Fred began shooting, using the revolver which the Indian had taken from the Mexican guard.

Shots had been fired at the fugitives, but, as the two parties closed in, the fear of injuring their comrades compelled them to cease shooting.

Fred and Lightning were within twenty yards of the men, when they began firing,—each taking an outsider rider.

A man dropped at each end of the group, and they recovered from the sight of the fugitives had fired again, dispatching two more, and were doing the same, rushing down the hillside again, side by side.

The first party of bandits had almost ridden down the outlaws, and they lay that ensued gave Lightning time to reach the edge of the woods.

There were chief of Mexican guard in both parties, and, as Fred ran along, he said to Lightning:

"If we could get around to the back of the house now, we wouldn't find many to bother us!"

Just then a rifle shot rang out from behind, and Fred instantly declared it was Hawkins who fired.

"That's all right," exclaimed Fred. "We must go back and help him."

Fred came to a halt as he spoke, but Fred Lightning, catching his arm, urged him on again.

"Bill as fool," he said. "Not in camp, now. First, to bring some 'way from us. Go back to house. Safe there for while."

Another rifle shot rang out, followed a couple of minutes later by another, each from the same rifle, but in slightly different directions, as though the person firing was not yet sure of his aim.

Satisfied now that Lightning was right, Fred started off again.

They had skirted along the edge of the woods, while the Mexicans had lighted torches and were riding in among the trees, penetrating further and further into the forest.

Seeing the direction the chase was taking, Fred decided to follow, and proceeded more slowly, still in the shelter of the trees, toward the house.

They were opposite one end of the house, and only about three hundred yards away; but the last time I saw R the Young appeared in the doorway.

The moon shining brightly, Fred could see her plainly, looking about as if searching for some one.

Thinking it was for himself, the boy captain ran toward her, calling her name, while Lightning, with an angry exclamation, followed.

As soon as he noticed his approach she waved her hands, warning Fred back, and darted into the house.

It was the Indian, however, for, while Fred was standing, staring in surprise at her action, several Mexicans rushed to the doorway.

The instant the bandits appeared the Indian began firing, and thus covered his companion's escape. The latter had got a fair start; then he, too, turned and fled.

In his excitement Fred had started back in the same direction he had gone on escaping—which would bring him into the hands of the Guards again—when he did not realize until he was at the age of the woods and saw several horsemen riding toward him, so he had to make a running start and dodging at those men front and taking the chances of being shot from behind.

Suddenly, Lightning, who was running parallel with Fred to protect him, saw one of the horsemen raise his revolver to fire at the Indian, who had the man almost upon the fleeing youth.

Red Lightning firing at the rider and the Indian fell cold and lifeless, and he, prisoner forward, struck Fred, knocking him down.

Before he could regain his feet half a dozen of the bandits were upon him, and he heard Mexicans cry out:

"Carramba! You will not escape me now."

Looking up, Fred saw the Mexican leader leaning over from the saddle, pointing a pistol at him.

Fred's earthly career must then have ended, but before Mexicans could pull the trigger, Fred Lightning fired. A man had the group and knocked the Mexican leader from his saddle.

To appreciate his opportunity, Fred was on his feet instantly, and then ensued a terrible close-quarter battle—Fre d, Lightning, firing from both guns such terrific execution that the dismayed Mexicans turned to fly up the hill.

As they fled Fred noticed that among them was one horse to which a man was strapped, and the thought flashed across him:

"That's Bill!"

But it was too late, the bandits were already ahead.

Fred had received a bullet wound in the calf of the leg, while Lightning had been cut in the arm, but neither wound amounted to much. Binding them up, Fred and his red Mexican started for the camp—hurriedly, however, expecting to find any moment they appeared.

To their surprise, however, they found Chin Chin lying under a tree, with two men sitting beside his feet the moment they appeared.

"No chance! Me ababa!" he cried, pointing to his revolver.

"Where is Bill?" asked Fred, without ceremony.

"Him say help you—go way."

"Poor Bill! They've got him, sure enough, and it will be a tough job to save him. Some must be done at once! They may begin their devilish work of torture any time after daylight.

The Indian did not reply: he appeared to be buried in thought, and Fred was wondering what he meant.

"Me go get Bill! Him plesure?"

"Yes, he's a prisoner," replied Fred. "George Scott! They'd chew you up, Chin Chin!"

"No hurt him," interposed Lightning, adding, "Him go right in—we watch outs! Shoot every one come out! You one side—me other! Lightning scare him."

"And the prisoner?" asked Fred, too surprised to object.

The Indian arose and, after arousing Manuel, led the way to a spot directly behind and almost underneath the house, halting in front of a mass of rocks.

Against the face of the cliff was a massive bowlder, but when Lightning placed his hand on this it swung back, as if on a pivot, revealing a large hole, capable of sheltering several people.

The Indian then explained his scheme—to leave the prisoner there—to send the Chinaman out on his mission, while the other fighters took position to act as second best.

A little spring bubbled in one corner of the room, and after roasting the prisoner, Chin Chin started directly for the robber stronghold.

He hurried away, and shortly after—the latter having turned the stone into its original position—began to pour a shower of bullets on the Mexican bandit.

Several Mexicans were归纳about the door, who watched the approaching
The Young cowboy captain.

Chinaman with evident curiosity, and before the sun was up several more had been called from within.

The young cowboy chief could see the Chinaman, as he knew him, which, through his glasses, he saw was a humorous, joking one, and shortly after Chin Chin disregarded him.

On one side of the house Fred was stationed up in the fork of a tree, and on the other side of the house I could see a long black coach about two hundred yards from the house. Of the two, Fred was slightly the nearer. At last the Chinaman came out of the house and reached the bandit stronghold, a man was led out and bound to a post set in the ground about eight feet high.

It was, as Fred feared it would be, Bill Hawkins.

The prisoner was bound to the post and a small, low pile of brushwood was then thrown around at his feet.

One of the bandits stooped to light this brushwood, when—a rifle shot rang out and the bandit fell.

It was Lightning's shot.

A commotion ensued, but, in a minute, another of the bandits picked up the torch to light the fire.

"Fred's turn now, and, as the man lifted the torch, he dropped dead in the brush.

The thoroughly maddened Morales himself then seized the torch to wreak his vengeance, but hit, too, dropped it, though he was the red chief.

The fall of Morales created a panic, and while some of the bandits carried him, others Bill Hawkins and led him toward the house.

Lightning and Fred then began firing from the brushwood, exterminating the bandit chief, and, before they reached shelter, four of them had fallen.

Then the bandits, thinking they had the house, Fred and his red comrade came from their cover and hurried to the cave.

The bandits expected they could hide the bodies to make his work.

"Make fire now—no danger," he added, and in a few minutes he had a small pile of dry wood burning beside the big stone.

It was the light the Indians wanted; he wished to see the prisoner's face while talking to him, and, also, to be himself seen.

When the captive saw Lightning, he looked terror-stricken.

"How long you keep prisoner for tor- ture desired?" demanded the Indian.

"To-morrow morning," replied the Mexican.

"Then Morales unchinked?" asked Fred.

"Yes; his arm was shattered, but he will not delay for that, he is going to be mar- ried to-morrow morning." said Lightning.

"Phew!" whistled Fred, looking at Lightning; "what shall we do, chief?"

"We go now," said the Indian; "we must come out side, and then announced;" "We go now. Leave him here," and turning the stone against the entrance, they at once started for the house on the hilltop, but quickly paused on beholding first a man and then a woman coming out through the window by which Fred had escaped.

It was too dark to distinguish who they were. The light was quite close; then it was seen to be Chin Chin and Rita.

"Where is your sister?" demanded the Indian.

"She would not come," replied Rita, with a sob. "When I spoke of escape she became so lone hearted that she would not go herself. She is really insane, although Morales will not see it, and she is to marry Prince." was echoed Fred.

"Marry him?" exclaimed Fred.

"Yes; but he had better beware, for if the Chinaman see the scheme of revenge, returned the weeping girl. "I tried to warn him, but he only laughed at me, and in return said there would be two marriages instead of one—that he had promised me to Mamel, his half brother. That is why I was left behind!"

They all proceeded to the cavern, and the latter part of Rita's story was told in the hearing of the prisoner, who, when she finished, exclaimed angrily.

"What is the matter? That was why I was left behind!"

All turned in surprise, and looked at the prisoner.

"Yes," he continued. "I admired the young senorita, and Jose Morales prouder yet, for he gained her consent she should be my bride."

"And he tricked you?"

"Next day he will release me. I will help you, and thus be revenged upon him."

"What can you do?"

"I will report that you are still in the cavern or not, as you wish. Then, if I can get a chance, I will release your friend."

Lightning shook his head doubtfully; he put no faith in the Mexican, but Fred freely believed the fellow was eager to get even with Morales, so he decided to release him.

"Me go back too," said Chin Chin, as the Mexican started to depart.

"Back again? Why, they'll kill you!" exclaimed Fred, in a voice low but inaudible.

"No 'fraid," replied the Celestial, calmly, as he joined the Greaser; "Now, Lightning, what's the program?" asked Fred.

Stay here little while. Then go up for Bill Hawkins and see how much good fortune had which Fred had been carried while he was unconscious, and to that room he was to go.

Accordingly, on reaching the window, he jumped on Lightning's broad shoulders and peeped into the women's room.

The room was quite dark, lit only by a streak of light which came from the crack under the door of the next room.

"Ladies in the next room?" he called, in a low tone, but there was no re- ply, and after repeating several times, Fred concluded she, too, had been removed, perhaps to the next room.

He was quickly undeceived on this point, however, as he crawled out the window, for he had scarcely touched the floor when he was caught by the throat and pushed back to the wall.

He knew at once that he was in the grasp of the mad woman, and could catch the vision of Chin Chin in her hand as she raised it to strike him.

For an instant Fred was in the shadow of death, but the knife remained unsheathed, the fierce clench on his throat suddenly relaxed, and when the woman possessed of the unnatural strength peculiar to ma- niacs released him, he sank to the floor to avert her further notice.

Mrs. Chentham was given further attention.

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The Young Cowboy Captain.

Scarcely had he crossed the threshold, however, when, even before turning his head, Fred became aware that a man was standing in one of the doorways, close to the wall.

And that man held a revolver full at the young American's head.

CHAPTER IX.
A RESCUE AND A FLIGHT.

The young cowboy captain was paralyzed by the discovery, and the next instant Chin Chin greeted him with: "Me on guard; thought you Grecian man," he said, apologetically.

"On guard?" repeated Fred, in surprise.

"Alees same Melico man," replied the Chinaman, grinning, and then continued: "Bill outside. No can get him yet. Much lot bandits alees bound him.

This was bad news, and when Chin Chin led Fred to the doorway to get a peep at Bill, he saw it was only true, for Bill, bound hand and foot, was lying on the floor, surrounded by sleeping outlaws.

"Too bold! We gette Bill soon," Chin Chin confidently asserted. "Sale? Him longside Bill was plisoner at cave. Lilly while him, and him can go out like," and the Chinaman tipped across the room as lightly as a cat, but in a manner so comical that Fred smiled, despite his anxiety.

Just then one of the bandits beside Bill sat up and began feeling for something.

Fred was on his feet, while the Chinaman took flight, and with a look of annoyance he searched about him on the floor. And Fred had not time to حت to Chin Chin, and at the same time Fred recognized the Mexican he had allowed to go free. So the fellow looked up, and catching sight of Chin Chin, drew his forefinger across his throat.

Fred did not hear him, but the Chinaman did, and holding his knife, tapped across the floor in the same comical, quiet fashion.

Reaching over one of the sleepers, Chin Chin handed the knife to the Mexican, who immediately began cutting Bill's bonds.

At that moment, Fred, hearing some one moving stealthily behind him, turnedQuickening his arm's length, the neat woman should now appear and ruin everything, but to his intense relief saw the reappearance of his back.

Lightening smiled grimly when Fred pointed to the man cutting the cords, but at the same time drew a revolver and motioned Fred to do the same.

Suddenly Chin Chin went down a heap on the floor, and the Mexican, who had just finished freeing Hawkins, did the same, while the latter, cramped from being tied up, endeavored to arise.

He had gained a sitting position, but on seeing the others drop down, lay back again.

"It was too late, however, for Morales, who was restless from the pain of his wounded arm, had opened the door at the other end of the room just as Bill fell back.

He had seen the movement, and became suspicious that all was not right.

Stepping over the sleepers, Morales stooped to examine Bill's bonds, and as he drew back, saw the cords cut.

Bill had anticipated this, and, just as the bandit leader stooped he drew up his knife. Cutting between his foot with tremendous force, he sent Morales halfway across the room, where he lay, yelling and cursing, and gasping for breath.

Instantly Bill struck out from the hip.

Lightening began firing, and Fred followed suit.

For a few minutes pandemonium reigned supreme. The air was filled with bullets, smoke, yells and curses.

At the first shot, Chin Chin, Hawkins and the Mexican had freed him, joined Fred and Lightening.

"This way! This way!" cried the Mexican, when the bandits became frantic with smoke, and he led the way to the rear door.

In running off the heavy bar, he dashed into a smaller building.

It was a stable, and, a minute later, every one of the five was riding for the Rio Grande.

Hailing for an instant at the cavern, Fred turned back the stone, and, picking up Rita and Young, dashed off again after his companions.

He was none too quick, for some of the Mexicans were already in pursuit, although not enough as yet to be dangerous.

On the five flew, through the darkness, Lightening leading the way, and at daybreak the river was reached.

They had distanced their pursuers; at any rate, they were in sight, and the party halted a few minutes, while Lightening went to get his cano.

In a short time they were paddling along: Rita and Fred entered the canoe, and they started across the big stream.

It did not take long for all to reach the opposite shore. There they halted for rest and breakfast, the latter being easily and quickly procured from the river.

The fish was cooking. Fred and Hawkins held a consultation regarding Rita and Rodriguez, the Mexican, who had kept faith with the riff-raff.

They did not wish to be hampered with either in their search for the treasure. Fred felt confident was buried in that vicinity.

"Why don't you send the Mexican with her t' Chin Chin Hun," said Hawkins.

"I'm afraid she wouldn't get there," replied Fred, "the fellow likes her too well already to allow her where he might have to part with her."

"Well, send her along with you," suggested Hawkins.

"Oh, what good would he be?"

"Help! I mean it, too, Fred! He's good stuff. I don't know what else!"

Bill said this earnestly, Lightening nodded approval, and Fred agreed to the plan.

At breakfast, accordingly, he informed Rita that he intended sending her to San Antonio with Rodriguez and Chin Chín.

"And you are not going also?" asked Rita, growing pale and looking somewhat frightened.

Fred explained that they had some other work yet to do, and that it might be several days before they could return.

"But, I am in no hurry; I have no home now, and prefer to remain until we all go together."

Rita said this with a pitiful little smile that touched the heart, so it was settled that she should remain.

There still was Rodriguez to be got rid of, and Hawkins the air difficulty.

"Send him t' yer uncle," he said, "with a note, sayin' we're all right, an' 'll be back soon.

This was done, and the Mexican rode away, apparently pleased to get out of the neighborhood, but looking regretfully at Rita.

"Look out for Morales!" cautioned Rodriguez, as he rode off. "He's sure to follow just as soon as he can.

"We'll take care o' him," replied Hawkins.

Seeking a secluded spot in the woods, Rita was left there, while Chin Chín was sent to the river to watch for the outlaws, and Rodriguez was ordered to join his comrades.

"Better take this," said Fred, as he and the others were about to leave Rita on the deserted treasure quest.

"This" was a medium-sized revolver, which the girl accepted with a grateful smile.

Nothing was seen of the Mexicans during the day, and Chin Chín had procured a plentiful supply of food when Fred and his companions returned.

They had found not a trace of the treasure, but cheered up after eating a hearty breakfast after a long day of hard riding. The first guard at the bank of the river.

We must see them first, if they attempt to cross," he said, "and for all we know they may be on the other side now, waiting for darkness.

At the expiration of three hours Fred returned, and Lightening took his place.

The moon was up, and, feeling safe as well as tired, the young chief threw himself side by side with Hawkins and was soon sound asleep.

He had been asleep about ten minutes when a man crept out from behind a tree, carrying in his right hand a long, murderous weapon.

"This is the one! This is the one, and he must die!" he muttered, bending over Fred.

CHAPTER X.
A MADMAN, THE TREASURE LOCATED.

Fred was not destined to lie down there, however. Just as the old wretch was about to plunge the knife into the sleeping Fred, the snap of a revolver rang out, and the weapon was knocked out of his hand.

"Who fired?" cried Fred, jumping to his feet, and looking from Hawkins to Chin Chín, both of whom had, of course, been to sleep.

Neither knew anything of the shot, there was no trace of any one about, and Fred and Hawkins trembling had not the others declared they had heard it.

Suddenly Fred thought of Rita, and hurried to the little shelter of barks and boughs which they had built for her. And when he got there she was asleep, but quickly discovered the snap of the gun. She had fainted, and called for some water.

"What explains the shot?" said Fred, as he pointed to the revolver lying beside Rita.

"But not who fired it," returned Hawkins. "I wonder who it was?"

"We'll know that pretty soon," rejoined Fred. "See! She's coming to!"

When Rita reopened her eyes and saw Fred, an expression of joy overspread her countenance.

"You are safe? I did not miss?" she exclaimed.

"You have saved my life! How can I ever thank you? But what would have happened if another girl had fainted before firing?" exclaimed Fred.

"Reglar Jim Dandy" decided Hawkins.

"Muchee fine all," commented Chin Chín.

Rita was overawed by all this praise and murmured something about being accustomed to firearms, but it was no matter.

"I must go tell Old Lightnin' about it," said Hawkins. "It's near time to go on now.

After hearing the story Lightening examined the ground around where Fred had been lying, and in doing so found the knife.

It was indeed a murderous looking
The Young Cowboy Captain.

He looked at Ritta doubtfully, and then hurried away.

When Chin Chin returned he was surprised to find the old man gone, but did not worry about it, and when Ritta opened her eyes she found the Chinaman using her overcoat to cover some things.

Ritta thanked him so sweetly that the Chinaman went into ecstasies, and, as the hard man was not of Ritta's party, he insisted on her accompanying him to the river.

When the treasure hunters returned they were surprised and at first alarmed at Ritta's absence, but Lightening quickly discovered that she had gone with Chin Chin.

The Indian also discovered signs of the man's presence, and hurried to the river to ascertain if he had been seen.

When Ritta returned to camp and told her story it excited considerable alarm.

“Who is this fellow?” asked Fred of Lightening.

“I'm sure you know him!”

“Him no right here!” replied Lightening, raising his forehead significantly.

“Crazy!” exclaimed Hawkins and Fred in the same breath.

Lightening nodded assent and that they must not hurt the lunatic—only try to capture him.

Remember the great respect with which all Indians treat this class of unfortunate, the others agreed that the madman should not be harmed.

The party were at supper when this decision was arrived at, and up to this point it was too early to say regarding the old man's mutteredings.

The subject of the conversation had been once more the wild el Paso and carshot, and when he heard their decision, stole away with a satisfied smile on his face.

Scarcely had the madman gone when Fred asked:

“Did he say anything, Ritta?”

“No, he said he was Mad. You went and sought for what was under your feet!”

“Crazy as a bedbug!” laughed Hawkins.

“Nothing of the kind!” cried Fred, leaping to his feet. “The treasure's as good as found.”

Red Lightening nodded gravely—he suspected what Ritta was about to say. The others looked surprised.

“Yes.” continued Fred, “crazy or not, the fellow has a point. We've been searching all over for the treasure, while every day we've been walking over it, and every night, probably, sleeping over it!”

“What! Ye mean ter say it's here!”

“No, right here!” replied the boy captain.

“Old chap probably saw it buried, and that's why he wants to drive us off. He may be mad, but there's a method in his madness.”

Though a little after sunset, there was good light yet, and Fred would have commenced the search once had not Chin Chin rushed into the camp with the startling announcement:

“Mexican sentinal closing! Comin' straight to camp!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE MADMAN'S DEADLY WORK.

A hasty investigation proved Chin Chin's information to be only too true.

Mexicans to the number of fifty were crossing the river—indeed, some had already landed on the Mexican side and were, as the Chinaman said, heading straight for the camp.

“Come after us—come after treasure!”

This was Lightening's verdict after watching the Mexicans for a few minutes.

Hastily removing all traces of their presence, the little party retreated further into the wood—Lightening remaining behind wanting to know.

The treasure hunters halted about a quarter of a mile from their former camp, and Lightening joined them at the expiration of an hour.

It was as he had at first declared, the Indians had been waiting.

The Mexicans had come to remove the treasure, and had no suspicion, as yet, of their presence.

Fred was almost frantic at the idea of losing the treasure.

The Indians were in a secure place under the protecting care of Chin Chin, the trio reached the Mexican camp and halted near the little hut Ritta had occupied.

A small fire was burning, and stretched about it were fully fifty Mexicans, in various attitudes, and evidently without the slightest apprehension of danger, for only one man was on guard—seated, half asleep, at the butt of the tree from behind which the madman had each time made his appearance.

“Who's runnin' this?” he asked, angrily.

Instead of replying the Indian began some pocketing of his pockets and finally produced a slip of paper, which he handed to Fred.

Fred and Hawkins had watched the actions of the Indians with no little curiosity and surprise, but when Fred read the note which showed the regular detective of the road. "He's boss, now!"

Before Hawkins could speak the Indian interposed.

"No! You still captain, but, if you wait, see why no shoot now!"

Fred was rather pleased with this, while Hawkins was too surprised to say anything, and the three watched in silence.

Fully a half hour elapsed before anything occurred, and Fred was beginning to get restless, when he suddenly saw a man creeping from behind the tree against which the Mexican sentinel, now sleeping, was resting.

From the description, Fred recognized the man at once. It was the madman, and in his right hand Fred saw the knife which Lightening had handed him in some alarm, for when he had last seen it the knife was in the possession of Ritta, who had taken it in exchange for the revolver which the madman had carried off.

All right! All right!” whispered Lightning, seemingly to whom what he knew was
The Young Cowboy. 

Fred recognized the voice—it was that of Manuel Morales, and a moment later the speaker's face appeared around the bend of the madman's sleeping sentinel with an expression of indignant satisfaction on his countenance, and, almost before the last person could realize it, the madman had caught the Mexican by the throat with one hand and with the other he drew his infamous knife to the hilt in the sleeper's side.

"One!" exclaimed Lightning, in a low tone.

Fred shuddered, and, thinking of his own experience the previous night, said:

"Two!" returned the Indian, pressing his arm to be silent, and looking again.

Fred saw that the man sleeping nearest the dead sentinel had also been killed.

Lightning had no such scruples as Fred entertained. He would willingly have witnessed the killing of every one of the sleeping men, but it was explained that no more should be slaughtered that night.

As the madman arose from his second victim and faced the old Indian the first and he fell, and as he felt the other foot shot out, striking one of the sleepers on the face.

With an oath the man jumped up in time to see the madman, who fled past Fred, near enough for the latter to touch him.

In a moment the whole camp was astir, and the fact of their comrades being killed was quickly ascertained.

"Run! Quick!" exclaimed Lightning, who had now passed and, turning himself, set the example.

It was too late, too. For the Mexican was not a coward, and he pointed out the direction in which the madman had gone, and the entire band started in pursuit.

The two companions were only a short distance ahead of their pursuers, and the noise they made while running was evidently heard by the Mexicans, whose cries redounded when they found themselves so close to their prey.

After running a few miles, Lightning turned suddenly to the right and ran rather slowly, but very cautiously, for about a quarter of a mile, when he turned again and ran back towards the Mexican camp.

As they doubled back, Fred could hear the Mexicans passing them, and laughed at the easy way in which the Indian had duped them.

Singing from across the camp they ran, Lightning leading the way, and for three or four miles the Indian kept right along, until he led when he reached the stony hill where he had lost the trail of the madman.

Running around the base of the hill, the Indian led the way into a cave on the northern side, first removing some broken wood which hid the entrance.

Inside, Fred found Rita and Chin Chin, and scarcely had he done so when he heard a noise and was able to get Lightning and Hawkins into the cave.

This was scarcely done before the Mexicans could hear approaching. They had discovered Lightning and Fred and were now on the verge of beating it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TERRIBLE BOX.

When the Mexicans halted in front of the cave, those within prepared to make a desperate resistance, seeing that if their retreat had been discovered, they were quickly relieved on that point.

"I don't see going any further until daylight. We might ride over them in this infernal darkness."
The Young Cowboy Captain.

"All in front now. Fire low—quick!" four men ranged themselves in line and Fred gave the word:

"Be as fast as you can. Now then fire!"

Four reports rang out simultaneously, and the men, who had proved that some had taken effect. For two or three minutes a constant fire was kept up, in the hope of chasing the Mexicans fleeing in various directions to escape the leaden hail from the rascal's guns.

"Thank God! Now we're safe!" cried Fred. As the smoke began to clear down, Fred could see several Mexicans lying motionless, evidently dead, while several more were trying to crawl away, and these latter would, also, have soon been rendered motionless but for his interference.

Both Hawkins and Lightning wished to fire on them, but Fred prevailed on them to allow the wounded men a chance.

And now, I suppose it would be well for all of you to get some rest. I'll stand first watch, and then the rest of you can take turn.

The programme was carried out without interruption until about four o'clock, when the Chinaman came on guard and sounded the roll of the big stones forming a corner of the fort.

The moon was fading away, and the gray clouds rolling away, leaving a slight mist, but it was warm. There was plenty of light, and everything around was distinctly visible, yet the Chinaman was impossible to see ten yards on either side.

"If they come now it's all up, I'm with you," remarked Hawkins, in a kind of a Job's comforter style, adding: "We'll never see 'em till the' ronzon!'"

It was now a little later, and Fred wished that Rita had been sent to San Antonio, but regrets were useless; they must make the best of it.

A half-hour elapsed, and yet the expected attack was not made. What could be delaying them?

In a little while their anxiety on this point was relieved by hearing the noise of the bandits approaching, this time, apparently, approaching solidly in front—at least, the noise was all in that direction, but Lightning suspected some "tri-kow," and haste the others keep guard at the 59, and sides.

For a few minutes the suspense was great, but once again the madman folded the bandits.

Suddenly a scream of agony rent the air, and as Fred came from the quiet side of the fort, it revealed the presence of the bandits there.

Quick to appreciate the value of this information, Fred fired in the direction of the cry, and, as his shot brought forth another cry, Hawkins and Fred also fired, and with like result, proving that the Mexicans must be pretty thick on that side.

After some time the bandits began to separate, and Fred pursued one, passing around the hill to the rear of the fort, where they were not to be under fire until they reached the plateau at the summit, and once there in any number, the besieged had little hope of escape.

Fred realized this fully, and when he saw the bandits moving to the rear he began to despair, for now that ammunition was so low, he could afford to waste no shots on a double line they were actually on the plateau of the fort.

The bandits in front, scattered all over the face of the hill, moved rapidly, though carefully, taking advantage of every stone or inequality in the surface to knock under cover.

"It will never do to let them come together," said Fred, turning to Lightning.

"You and me can watch for the others; Bill and I will begin on these.

Raising his rifle, Fred added:

"Take only sure shots, Bill, for there's only seventy-one cartridges among four of us, while there are seventy-five Mexicans around the hill!"

As he finished speaking Bill fired, and sent a bullet through his hat, much to the disgust of the bandits. Fred fired, and, in this case, destroyed two bandits, with a shout of triumph over his peculiar cry, evidently a signal, came from the rear of the fort, and with a wild hurrah the bandits charged.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Final Struggle.

"It's neck 'n' nuthin' now!" exclaimed Hawkins, firing at the leading bandit.

"Never say die!" responded Fred.

He had scarcely spoken, when firing from the rear announced the arrival of the second party of bandits.

"But how long will it last?" thought Fred. He was already wounded twice and had but six cartridges left. Bill could take no more, and he, too, had been wounded.

The noise from Lightning's side had been something terrific, and, although the number engaged, and, during a momentary pause in the front assault, Fred shot a bullet to the rear.

By the light of the now brightly shining moon he saw the madman wielding a lighted dynamite-torch, such as are used on railroad spikes. His back was against the wall of the little fort, and, flanked on either side by Lightning and Chin Chin, he was a tower of strength to the besieged.

The Mexicans in front soon learned what was going on, and, as their default was meant only to cover that in the rear, they began to move around to assist their comrades, leaving a half-dozen to engage the attention of Fred and Hawkins.

Fully aware of their purpose, Fred went to the other side, saying:

"I guess you can take care of these fellows, Bill. I'll be wanted over there pretty soon."

And he was—sooner than he expected.

Just as Fred joined Lightning, the madman returned from dealing rushes, and stood leaning against the wall facing the bandits.

"Order was given in Spanish, which was:

"Aim all at the hammer-man! Fire!"

Guessing the meaning of the order, Fred tried to save him by slipping him on the shoulder, at the same time shouting:

"Down!"

It was too late, however, and as Fred sank behind the stone wall, the madman, pierced by many bullets, fell in front.

When the madman fell the bandits cheered and came forward with a mighty rush, only to be scattered in all direc-

The madman was not killed, and as they came forward he sprang up and rushed to attack them. For one moment he stood the terrible hammer, shooting and striking at the madman, but when Lightning shot him as another thunderbolt, they turned their attention on Fred.

As the last one of the bandits disappeared down the hill, the madman reeled and fell against the wall of the fort.

Fred caught him and held him up until the breathing came, when he murmured:

"Poor Phil! Poor Phil!"

At the sound of his name the dying man opened his eyes

"Starlight! Starlight!" he muttered. Then his eyes lighted up and he continued in gasps:
CHAPTER XV.

RESCUE OF RITA.

A hasty search only served to confirm the young captain's fears. Rita was gone, and with them all. He knew whether her disappearance was voluntary or otherwise.

Lightning, who had received several severe wounds, and could not attempt any great exertion for the present, believed she had been driven down the hillside during the final struggle, and had fallen into the hands of the Mexicans. "You will find a man here to guard," he said. "Then go quick with rest. Mobebe ketch them before they get back." This advice was adopted, and, leaving Lightning and a half-dozen cowboys to search and guard the treasure, Fred started early that morning on the trail of the bandits.

The boy captain remained in command of the field of riders, which included Hawkins and Chin Chin, and numbered twelve in all.

There had been much riding to and fro that the trail was not easily found, for, at Captain Jim's suggestion, Fred decided not to follow the Rio Grande at all. The Mexicans had gone directly home, and the value of this suggestion was seen when, after the trail was discovered, the discovery was made that they had not crossed the Rio Grande at all.

It was after riding a little to one side of the others, who made the discovery. The Mexican had entered the river, and, after swimming their horses a hundred yards down stream, had landed again on the American shore!

"Pretty likely we might have worked if you were a little greener, Fred," commented Hart.

"We must warn Lightning," said Fred, passing over the compliment. "These fellows are going back for the treasure, and as soon as it's dug up they'll try to seize and sell it." "Right you are! There's enough of 'em, too, to do it. Suppose we send Bill back? He's got the best horse, and we will watch them while they watch the others. The girl is safe enough for the present, if you had been a little farther back to get her back until everything is ready." Although anything but pleasant at the idea of being exposed to the enemy, Fred and his companions followed the trail through the river for several miles, until it turned inland.

Up to this they had moved rapidly, for the road ahead was pretty clear, but now it was in order to expect and prepare for an ambush, the forest being very dense.

"Better dismount, boys, and let three follow with the horses," advised Fred. Captain Jim nodded approval of this idea, and, when it was carried out, the party moved forward cautiously.

Very shortly the party was brought to a halt by Jim, a little in advance of the others, who held up his hand warningly. "Greatest mistake," he said, on turning, and, sending back the men in charge of the horses, Fred, with the others, crept close up to the bandit camp — so close that they could hear the conversation being carried on, for Maudell evidently felt secure regarding the success of his trick.

The Mexicans, with no guard posted, were lying on a bed of trees, and Fred was surprised to see that there were still thirty or more of them.

"Juan is not the man sufficient to watch the Mexicans!" was the first information gathered by the listeners.

Manuel Morales, the speaker, was sitting underneath a tree quite close to Fred, and his next words relieved the young captain's anxiety regarding the girl.

"The four who crossed below here with the girl will not hurry much, I suppose, and they will be back in ten minutes, or less, if the sliver is dug up to-day." "Which is very unlikely, after last night's fighting," exclaimed the man to whom he was talking.

Fred signaled Jim to withdraw, and, when at a safe distance, announced his intention of pursuing those in charge of Rita.

"You and I will be enough," he said, "Chin Chin can carry a light load. Lightning not to raise the treasure until we return. The others can remain here — Hawkins can guard the horses, and save the others. By staying here, out of sight, these fellows will be led to believe we are off on a wild goose chase!"

Fred's plan suited Jim, and after dispatching Chin Chin with a note to Lightning acquainting him of the situation and of their proposed journey after Rita, the two departed, mounted on the stolen seminovas. Besides, Fred became very anxious.

Having no idea of being pursued, the Mexicans, in their fancied security, moved slowly and carelessly, anxious only for the return of their comrades with the treasure.

Creepling close up to where the others had stopped, Fred and his comrades waited upon the former for the first time holding Rita, who was sitting a little apart from the Mexicans, pale and melancholy.

"What they saw and heard made it apparent to the woman that her spirited approval of rescuing the girl while the Mexicans slept would have to be abandoned. "There's mischief afoot," she whispered. "The horses were nearer," whispered Fred. "Keep your eye peeled, and I'll get them back safe and sound," he promised.

"So it is," said Pedro. "Keep your eye peeled, and I'll get them back safe and soundly, if you save me!"

"Save me! save me!" she cried, on seeing Fred. "Run right ahead!" he answered, and, stepping aside, waited for her pursuer.

During his time among the cowboys, Fred learned some of their maxims, one of which was: "If you are going to hit a man, make no bluff about it. Hit him hard and hit him down!" And he followed it to the letter, as the Mexican staggered past him.

When the Mexican dropped like a log from a straight right-hand punch, the car of his half-drunk comrades, thinking that he had been tripped by the undergrowth, only laughed, but when he recovered, rescued the haversack of the woman, fell into a homeward journey, Fred carrying Rita before him, while Captain Jim acted as rear guard.

It was not until next morning that the Mexicans got any cue to what had happened to their lass, and too late to be dangerous to Fred and his companions, who recrossed the Rio Grande in safety.

"Hark!" Fred stood with his hand uplifted.

There was no reply—the coasts were there but the girl was gone.
CHAPTER XVI
A WHIRLWIND CHASE.

"Take that fellow to the right!"

"All right, captain!"

The two rifles cracked and the two bandits fell. Poor Chin fell.

"Same again, Jim."

"Right!"

The two nearest of the pursuers fell, dead or wounded, but this time the shots of Fred and Jim were followed by a number of others from various points.

These last brought the Mexicans to a halt, and a few more shots, now centering on Fred and Jim, caused them to retreat to the shelter of the trees.

"Get back under cover, Fred! Where the devil is the Chinaman?"

"Back of us, somewhere, I guess," replied Fred, turning back to where the shooting had come from, they found Chin and a half-dozen of the cow- boys lying there.

The little Chinaman was a pitiful looking object, but Fred did not wait to hear his story. Rita was still riding away from him, and, keeping under cover, he started after her.

He was agreeably surprised to find her only a few rods away, riding back to the scene of the fight.

"Because when the shooting ceased," she explained, "I knew you must have beaten them."

Fred could not forbear smiling at this sublime confidence, but pressed on, the smile called up a faint blush and some embarrassment, but this was quickly relieved by the appearance of Captain Jim and the others.

I suppose we had better lie down, Jim," said Fred, on meeting Jim, but the latter informed him that the Mexicans were now between the two parties.

And as there's only nine of us—or rather eight, poor Chin's all broke up, it wouldn't be wise to try to force our way—continued they.

"Very well. Some hint that reminds me of Hawkins—why didn't he come and take charge of this end?"

"His express," said the messenger, poor Chin, was captured by the Greasers. The poor devil swallowed your note to Bill and I've most infernally tried to find out what it contained, but 'me 'n' sweboz was all they got out of him. He was shot up like hell, broke loose onto this morning, and managed by a sudden dash to cut him loose just as we got near."

"Poor fellow! He must have had a tough time of it!" exclaimed Fred, sympathetically.

"I should say he had! They were going to give him a baptism of fire to-day, though I can't understand why they were so anxious about the note."

Toward evening Fred took out to "get a squat at the Greasers," returning shortly to say that half of the bandits were moving toward Lightning's camp, while the other half were posted in a semi-circle around their own camp.

"I managed to slip through," continued Jim, "but I had to pass the crowd through without a fight. Still, some one must give the boys a hint of the intended move, as they were waiting for the appearance of the bandits as to its whereabouts.

Something impelled Fred to enter the little hut, and on striking a light at the entrance he found that his precaution had saved him from falling into a deep hole.

The silver had been dug up!

CHAPTER XVII
NO TREASURE—NO TRAIL.

"What's the matter with you, cap- tain?"

"Yes, let's hurry on!"

"Yes, and suppose you are the best man to do it," replied Fred.

Accordingly Captain Jim departed.

He had been gone about fifteen minutes when Fred heard the report of his rifle, still at a safe distance of doing, and this was renewed at intervals of two or three minutes for a half hour; then Jim suddenly appeared among them, coming from towards the river.

"Get out of here, quick," he exclaimed.

"What's up?" demanded Fred.

"Never mind now! Get down toward the river as quiet and quick as you can! You know where it's moving toward—" repeated Fred, somewhat angry, although hastening to obey Jim's orders.

"Yes, but there's nobody to warn! So I took 'em away and kept 'em from coming down on you."

"Nothing."

"That's it exactly. There ain't any of 'em left alive, or they've vamoosed already! The Greasers have got them now for revenge. I've found out they don't know the exact location of the treasure. Morales—Jesse, was the only one who knew where they were, and now they're so hot after the contents of the let- ter—thinking that would give them a hint."

They had, during this conversation, moved down to the bank of the river and, riding up and down by the Greasers, they asked the soldiers where the treasure was.

Fred asked what was their next move. He hardly knew! replied Jim, thought- fully, adding, "I think Spencer could look out for things here as good as any of us. Then I would say we'd better put Fred and Jim lead and the rest of the Greasers up the river while they—our folks, of course—could sail back to the place where the Chinaman was located."

Fred quickly decided to adopt this advice, and, after advising the others to get into a position to protect themselves. "Here's a crowd of 'em!" exclaimed Jim, when, after they had gone a short distance, they met a number of Mexicans going toward the river.

"Keep shooting whether ye see 'em or not, and run between every shot! They won't know whether we're one or a dozen!" counseled Jim, setting the example as he spoke.

Fred had heard of "fire and fall back," but this was "fire and fall fire!"

Darting hither and thither, but always to the rear of the battle was continued for two hours—the bandits being steadily led away from their prey, and fully believing that the remainder of their band was before them.

They were approaching a long, narrow gully, and before they entered an idea occurred to Fred and he communicated it to Jim.

"We will rush across the open and then wheel and empty everything we've got. I'll run up and down on the upper half, and you will hold to the lower."

"When we're empty we can slip into the river and down stream again. That will settle their following our trail for some time, anyhow!"

Except that they remained nearly stationary until their nags were emptied, this plan was carried out, and before the Mexicans recovered from the surprise Fred and Jim were floating down the river.

Fred thus traveled a quarter of a mile in this way, Jim declaring it was safe to land, and they hurried through the woods to the hut where the silver was buried, where they found their friends awaiting them.

A consultation was held, and it was decided to start now as there was sufficient daylight to enable them to follow the trail of Lighting's party, trusting to the memory of the巢 and the courage of the bandits to the entrance of the bandits as to its whereabouts.

Nothing impelled Fred to enter the little hut, and on striking a light at the entrance he found that his precaution had saved him from falling into a deep hole.

The silver had been dug up!
may have to follow you soon—so hurry up.

'Chin Chin nodded and hurried away to notify Rita. A few minutes later both went off toward the fort.

Relieved of any feeling of danger to the girl, Fred returned to his usual calm, quiet, thoughtful manner and determined than ever before, and gave orders that the men should conceal themselves behind the outer side of the opening, thus blocking the direct path to the fort on the hill.

Thereupon they moved slowly hidden from sight, when Manuel and his men entered the opening.

"What the devil must have got away with the silver, for they certainly are looking for it and not us!" whispered Fred.

"Sure—Look—there goes Manuel into the hut!"

Jim had barely uttered the words when a yell of rage and disappointment came from Manuel, causing the bandits to click around their infuriated leader, who cried:

"Look—See the hole! There was the silver which you stole from us!"

"Find the trail—we can catch them yet!"

"Let's, sharp now, boys! They'll find our trail and then pick your men before it's too late!"

The Mexicans, on finding the trail, began to follow it, but to the amazement of those in hiding, the bandits started off a little east of them, and passed out of the opening.

"They must be after Rita and Chin Chin! I thought we were right in the way! Come! We must follow and stop them!"

As Fred spoke he was moving after the bandits, reappear spring up behind him, and caught him by the arm, saying:

"Hold up, Fred! We are covering the trail of Jim and the Chinese man. The Greasers have struck something else—so don't get excited. Let's go to where that Greaser made all the row about finding the trail."

The spot Jim referred to was in the extreme northwestern corner of the opening, and there they found the trail the bandits were following.

It was badly cut up by the pursuers, but, after a careful examination, Jim ascertained it to be that of Lightning's party.

"This is no mystery, but we've been losing time all morning by searching too near the hut. Now look—we'll pick up the horses and go after 'em."

In a short time the horses, abandoned the pursuit of the bandits, began to follow the course of the pursuers began.

Two miles were quickly covered before it occurred to Fred that the trail was leading them to the fort on the hill, and in a more direct line than the course taken by Rita and Chin Chin.

He was about to communicate his discovery to Jim, when the entire party came to a standstill at a motion from the latter, and then all could hear the noise of firearms from the northeast.

"Forward! Quick, or we'll be too late!" he cried, and springing from the mustang, dashed ahead as fast as the density of the wood permitted.

Nothing could have been more evident of the fact, Fred noticed that the firing was less frequent and more scattered, and, bringing his horse to a walk, quickly moved away from the edge of the trees skirting around the hill.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FIGHT AT THE CAVE.

Almost opposite where the cowboys halted beside their captain, was the madman's cave, across the mouth of which was a pile of stones and logs, while above it were a number of Mexicans gathering and pillaging.

"Lightning's in there and they're going to smoke him out!" Fred explained.

"I'll go and have a look," answered Jim, with a grim smile, adding:

"Disarmant, and be careful how you approach him, for he is a reckless man, and determined than ever before, and gave orders that the men should conceal themselves behind the outer side of the opening, thus blocking the direct path to the fort on the hill.

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In a short time the horses, abandoned the pursuit of the bandits, began to follow the course of the pursuers began.

Two miles were quickly covered before it occurred to Fred that the trail was leading them to the fort on the hill, and in a more direct line than the course taken by Rita and Chin Chin.

He was about to communicate his discovery to Jim, when the entire party came to a standstill at a motion from the latter, and then all could hear the noise of firearms from the northeast.

"Forward! Quick, or we'll be too late!" he cried, and springing from the mustang, dashed ahead as fast as the density of the wood permitted.

Nothing could have been more evident of the fact, Fred noticed that the firing was less frequent and more scattered, and, bringing his horse to a walk, quickly moved away from the edge of the trees skirting around the hill.

Almost opposite where the cowboys halted beside their captain, was the madman's cave, across the mouth of which was a pile of stones and logs, while above it were a number of Mexicans gathering and pillaging.

"Lightning's in there and they're going to smoke him out!" Fred explained.

"I'll go and have a look," answered Jim, with a grim smile, adding:

"Disarmant, and be careful how you approach him, for he is a reckless man, and