YOUNG KENTUCK; or, THE RED LASSO.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON,
AUTHOR OF "THE LADY JAGUAR," ETC., ETC.

"HEAR ME, TEXANS, WHEN I SWEAR THAT EARTH NOR SEA SHALL HIDE THE ASSASSIN FROM MY ARM!"
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CHAPTER I.

THE FATAL LASSO.

"Too late!"
The terse exclamation fell from bloodless lips and a voice that was almost a groan, while he who had spoken stared straight ahead like a man who sees a ghost.

The voice was that of Kenway, at a time when the war between that country and the United States was at its height, and dark deeds were perpetrated along the boundary line.

It was a struggle marked by lawless acts, for the Mexicans, as a people, are not noted for great magnanimity, and their hatred for the "accursed invaders" was bitter in the extreme.

"Too late!"
The man who had thus spoken sat at the head of a party of horsemen numbering two score. A glance at their faces, and dress to see they were Texan Rangers, and a valiant looking band were they.

White foam clung thickly upon the sides and flanks of the horses they bestowed, for they had ridden fast and far—ridden thus, only to arrive too late.

They had come to succor a party of their own countrymen who sat at their head, and who had uttered the exclamation recorded, but though he seemed far more interested than any of his companions, he sat like a statue after that one word, looking at the building with a fixed stare.

"You are right, Maxwell; we have come too late.

The speaker sat just behind the guide and wore the dress of a Texan major. He was the commander of the troops.

Maxwell, the guide, seemed aroused to new life by this remark, for, suddenly throwing off his stupaface, he plunged his spurs into the sides of his horse, and spoke one word:

"Follow.

And with this terse command, he dashed madly toward the building, followed by the other men. The latter glanced at each other significantly as they rode, but Maxwell did not look at them.

"No wonder. He'n Luke Brastow were bosom friends, sir! Nate is a man who never does things by halves. Ef he likes a man, he'll like him a good deal; ef he don't, woe be to his enemy!"

"It may not be so bad, after all," added another, "another major may have escaped, or may be prisoner.

"We shall soon see.

The words were spoken as the command reached the building. It had once been a stout structure of its kind, but it had been abandoned for some time and must have made a poor fort for the handful of Texans who had taken refuge there from the Mexicans.

Maxwell, followed by his companions, had reached the gateway, and the former slid from his horse and entered.

An appalling sight met his gaze. No living person was visible, but upon the floor were dead bodies: men, women, and children stiff and stiffened forms. They lay for the most part at one side, where they were piled, one upon another, and all wore the dress of Texan Rangers.

"They were all that were left of the late defenders!"
The would-be rescuers gazed at them silently and almost motionless. The building was the last place of safety of the Mexicos.

Nathan Maxwell flashed eagerly about the place. He seemed looking for some one he did not see.

The building was divided into two rooms, and the guide strode through the doorway to the inner one.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold than he uttered a hoarse cry and his comrades hastily followed. A sight even more horrible than the first awaited them.

From the roof, five men, all Texans, swung slowly to and fro from the ends of lassos, and the victims, nude to the waist, were cut and slashed with knife-wounds until their bodies were like the web of a spider.

Upon one of the unfortunate, the gaze of Nathan Maxwell had become fixed, and with a few long strides he pressed to his side. Then, with a cry, he seized his knife and cut the lasso and caught the body as it fell.

The Rangers stood in silence as they saw him bend over the cold clay. Dead beyond recall, man surely was, but Maxwell laid his hand over the pulseless heart before he gave up all hope.

His comrades were cutting down the other bungled victims, but they spoke few words, their flashing eyes and compressed lips were eloquent in themselves. They laid the poor follows side by side, but they could do no more for them, and then, as one man, they turned toward Maxwell.

He still knelt beside the corpse, and his eyes were fixed with strange intensity upon the white face.

The Rangers looked on in a species of awe. Nathan Maxwell and Luke Brastow had been friends of an extraordinary type. For years they had hunted, scouted, slept and lived together, and the tie which had bound them had been of a remarkable nature.

Now, he stood alone, bent on the bare flagging and stared at the face of his dead friend with white wide eyes and haggard face.

Silence reigned in the place for several moments, and then the guide turned to the others.

"We cannot help them now," he kindly said.

Maxwell raised his head and looked at his superior with glassy eyes.

"Dead! dead!" he hoarsely muttered.

"They died like men."

"Ay, but who did they kill? Was this deed done as one enemy should do to another?"

The hot blood surged back into the guide's face and an ominous look crept into his eyes.

"It was bravely done, but answered the major.

"It was flimsily done."

"We are come too late for relief, but it may not be too late for vengeance. Let us lose no time, but hurry our dead and pursue their murderers."

A look of fury crossed Maxwell's face, and, arising, he tore down the lasso by which Brastow had been bound.

Then his companions looked in astonishment as he called the lasso and drew it again and again through the pool of blood under Brastow's body—though it was saturated, red and slippery.

The Texan watched in amazement. The act seemed like that of a madman, but there was that in his manner which dispelled the idea.

He held the scarlet thing aloft and spoke in a manner full of a fixed and relentless purpose:

"Comrades! he burstily said, "let us behold this lasso! It is the same by which Luke Brastow was hanged, and it is red with his blood. He was basely murdered, but he leaves behind one to wreak his death. With this piece of blood upon it, I will slay his brother. Let me be the President of Mexico!"

"Vengeance!" the bold men shouted, and their leader removed his hat and added his voice to theirs.

"Vengeance shall be yours and right speedily," he said. "Come, let us bury the dead, and then on to seek the enemy!"

Nathan Maxwell went outside and hung the crimsoned lasso in the sun, where it would dry, and then joined his hand to his hat. With the sun shining upon it, the murderer did not think of the dead. The Mexicans had taken away their own slain, so that when the Texans had been carri ced toward the building a mile or so, the guide sent for the signs of the massacre—the broken gate, the breached walls and the dark stains upon the floor.

A long, deep grave was made and the bodies laid in a row, Luke Brastow at the head, and then the earth was replaced and everything done to make the burial seem civil.

Not much time was required to inter the dead. The Mexicans had taken away their own slain, so that when the Texans had been carried toward the building a mile or so, the guide sent for the signs of the massacre—the broken gate, the breached walls and the dark stains upon the floor.

Nathan Maxwell did his part, but he did not once speak, and his terrible calmness touched the Rangers.

"He lives only for vengeance now," said one. "He will not live to obtain it unless it comes quickly. His brain is giving way under the shock, and you may look to see him become a madman."

"He is made of sterner stuff," added a third. "Just now he looks bad enough, but he will rally, and when he does—"

Some of them glanced at the red lasso, fast drying in the sun, and, hardened men that they were, they shuddered at the thought of the dead.

But Nathan Maxwell, when their work was done, calmly secured it, and, when they started on the trail, it hung coiled from his saddle pommel.

And the avengers swept away on the murderers' track with him at their head. The search for retribution was begun.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF VENGEANCE.

After finishing their work, the Texans rode away in a scattered direction, and the trail soon showed that they had gone at so much faster pace than before. The Texans' breasts that they might be overtaken.

Unless their less in the engagement with the murdered men had been greater than seemed probable, they still outnumbered the avengers, but not a thought was given to that fact. The latter were not men to count odds in such a case.

The discovery of the situation at the casa had been made in this way: The handful of Texans, with Maxwell and Brastow as members, had gone out on a scout with Nathan as guide, and running ahead when the detachment was come upon and forced to seek shelter in the adobe dwelling, and when he discovered their peril he had gone on at once to find them, with the result already told.

The prospect of overtaking the murderers acted like magic on the spirits of the purveyors,
Young Kentuck;
THE RED LASSO.

BY CAPT. MARK WILTON,
AUTHOR OF "LADY JAGUAR," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE FATAL LASSO.

"Too late!"

The terse exclamation fell from bloodless lips and a voice that was almost a groan, while he who had spoken stared straight ahead like a man who sees a ghost.

The man had seen a ghost, at a time when the war between that country and the United States was at its height, and dark deeds were perpetrated along the boundary line.

It was a struggle marked by lawless acts, for the Mexicans, as a people, are not noted for great magnanimity, and their hatred for the "accursed invaders" was blotted in the extreme.

"Too late!"

The man who had thus spoken sat at the head of a party of horsemen numbering two score. Yes, one glance at their faces, and dress to see they were Texan Rangers, and a valiant looking band were they.

White foam clung thickly upon the sides and flanks of the horses they bestowed, for they had ridden fast and far—ridden thus, only to arrive too late.

They had come to succor a party of their own countrymen who sat at their head, and who had uttered the exclamation recorded, but though he seemed far more interested than any of his companions, he sat like a statue after the adjutant left, looking at the building with a fixed stare.

"You are right, Maxwell; we have come too late."

The speaker sat just behind the guide and wore the dress of a Texan major. He was the commander of the troops.

Maxwell, the guide, seemed aroused to new life by this remark, for, suddenly throwing off his stufepassion, he plunged his spurs into the sides of his horse, and spoke one word:

"Follow!"

And with this terse command, he dashed madly toward the building, followed by the other men. The latter glanced at each other significantly as they rode.

"Poor Maxwell is hit hard," said one.

"No wonder. He an' Luke Brastow were bosom friends, an' Nate is a man who never does things by halves. Ef he likes a man, he likes him a good deal; ef he hates, woe be to his enemy!"

"It may not be so bad, after all," added another. "A man may have escaped, or may be prisoner."

"We shall soon see."

The words were spoken as the command reached the building. It had once been a stout structure of its kind, but it had been abandoned for some time and must have made a poor fort for the handful of Texans who had taken refuge there from the Mexicans.

Maxwell, followed by his companions, had reached the gateway, and the former slid from his horse and entered.

An appalling sight met his gaze.

No living person was visible, but upon the floor were dead men, mangled and stiffened forms. They lay for the most part at one side, where they were piled, one upon another, and all were dressed of Texan Rangers.

They were all that were left of the late defenders.

The would-be rescuers gazed at them silently and almost without breath of a sign, as Nathan Maxwell flashed eagerly about the place. He seemed looking for some one he did not find.

The building was divided into two rooms, and the guide strudged through the doorway to the inner one.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold than he uttered a hoarse cry and his comrades hastily followed. A sight even more horrible than the first awaited them.

From the roof, five men, all Texans, swung slowly to and fro from the ends of lassos, and the victims, nude to the waist, were cut and slashed with knife-wounds until their bodies were like the web of a spider.

Upon one of the unfortunate, the gaze of Nathan Maxwell had become fixed, and with a few long strides he pressed to his side. Then, with a blood-lust, he drew his sword and cut the lasso and caught the body as it fell.

The Rangers stood in silence as they saw him bend over the cold clay. Dead beyond recall, man surely was, but Maxwell laid his hand over the pulseless heart before he gave up all hope.

His comrades were cutting down the other bandmates; they spoke few words, their flashing eyes and compressed lips were eloquent in themselves. They laid the poor fellows side by side, but they could do no more for them, and, then, as one man, they turned toward Maxwell.

He still knelt beside the corpse, and his eyes were fixed with strange intenstnes upon the white face.

The Rangers looked on in a species of awe. Nathan Maxwell and Luke Brastow had been friends of an extraordinary type. For years they had hunted, scouted, slept and lived together, and the tie which had bound them had been of a remarkable nature.

Now, he and Luke sat side by side on the bare flagging and stared at the face of his dead friend with white wild eyes and haggard face.

Silence reigned in the place for several moments, and then the Rangers, one after another, dropped their rifles— for all these murdered Rangers had been their comrades-in-arms—they knew that Maxwell was the keenest sufferer; but the major at last advanced and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"We cannot help them now," he kindly said.

Maxwell raised his head and looked at his superior with glassy eyes.

"Dead! dead!" he hoarsely muttered.

"They died like men."

"Ay, but the devils that killed? Was this deed done as one enemy should do to another?"

The hot blood surged back into the guide's face and an ominous look crept into his eyes.

"It was hark! hark! answered the major.

"It was flendishly done."

"We are come too late for relief; but it may not be too late for vengeance. Let us lose no time, but hurry our dead and pursue their murderers."

A look of fury crossed Maxwell's face, and, arising, he tore down the lasso by which Brastow had been bound.

Then his companions looked in astonishment as he coiled the lasso and drew it again and again through the pool of blood under Brastow's body; it was not until it was saturated, red and slippery.

The Texan watched in amazement. The act seemed like that of a madman, but there was that in his manner which dispelled the idea.

He held the scarlet thing aloft and spoke in a manner full of a fixed and relentless purpose.

"Comrades!" he huskily said, "hold this lasso! It is the same by which Luke Brastow was hanged, and it is red with his blood. He was basely murdered, but he leaves behind one witness whose name he may know. With this blood upon it, I will strange him though he be the President of Mexico!"

His voice grew clearer as he preceded, and at the end ran out like a voice of fate.

His manner, too, was fixed as the peaks of Cerro Gordo.

A manifold deed went up from the Rangers.

Every man there sympathized with Maxwell, every one was eager to strike a blow at the murderers.

"Vengeance!" the bold men shouted, and their leader removed his hat and added his voice to theirs.

"Vengeance shall be yours and right speedily," he said. "Come, let us bury the dead, and then on to seek the enemy!"

Nathan Maxwell went outside and hung the crimsoned lasso in the sun, where it would dry, and then joined his hand to his. With the bonds of the dead, he left.

Not much time was required tointer the dead. The Mexicans had taken away their own slain, so that when the Texans had been carried to the building a careful search was made for the signs of the massacre—the broken gate, the breached walls and the dark stains upon the floor.

A long, deep grave was made and the bodies laid in a row, Luke Brastow at the head, and then the earth was replaced and everything done to make the burial seem civil.

Maxwell did his part, but he did not once speak, and his terrible calmness touched the Rangers.

"He lives only for vengeance now," said one.

"He will not live to obtain it unless it comes quickly. His brain is giving way under the shock, and you may look to see him become a madman."

"He is made of sterner stuff," added a third.

"Just now he looks bad enough, but he will rally, and when he does—"

Some of them glanced at the red lasso, fast drying in the sun, and, hardened men that they were, they shuddered at the thought of its weight on Maxwell's heart.

But Nathan Maxwell, when their work was done, calmly secured it, and, when they started on the trail, it hung coiled from his saddle pomander.

And the avengers swept away on the murderers' track with him at their head. The search for retribution was begun.

CHAPTER II.
THE BEGINNING OF VENGEANCE.

After finishing their work, the Texans rode away in a westerly direction, and the trail soon showed that they had gone at so much faster pace than the hurried burglars of the Texans' breaths that they might be overtaken.

Unless their less in the engagement with the murdered men had been greater than seemed probable, they still outnumbered the avengers, but a thought was not given to that fact. The latter were not men to count odds in such a case.

The discovery of the situation at the coza had been made in this way: The handful of Texans, with Maxwell and Brastow as members, had gone out on a scout with Nathan as chief. They had been on the plain some time when the detachment was come upon and forced to seek shelter in the adobe dwellings, and when he discovered their peril he had gone at once forward, with the result already told.

The prospect of overtaking the murderers acted like magic on the spirits of the pursuers,
An appalling sight met his gaze. No living person was visible, but upon the floor were dead, matted, and stiffened forms. They lay for the most part at one side, where they were piled, one upon another, and all were the dress of Texan Rangers. They were all that were left of the late defenders! The would-be rescuers gazed at them silently and almost hopelessly. To the last, Nathan Maxwell flashed eagerly about the place. He seemed looking for some one he did not see.

The building was divided into two rooms, and the guide strode through the doorway to the inner one. He had no sooner crossed the threshold than he uttered a hoarse cry and his comrades hastily followed. A sight even more horrible than the first awaited them. From the roof, live men, all Texans, swung slowly to and fro from the ends of lassos, and the victims, nude to the waist, were cut and slashed with knife-wounds until their bodies were like the web of a spider.

Upon one of the unfortunate, the gaze of Nathan Maxwell had become fixed, and with a few long strides he pressed to his side. Then, while one of his men cut the lasso and caught the body as it fell, the Rangers stood in silence as they saw him bend over the cold clay. Dead beyond recall man surely was, but Maxwell laid his hand over the pulseless heart before he gave up all hope.

His comrades were cutting down the other bằngues, but they spoke few words, their flashing eyes and compressed lips were eloquent in themselves. They laid the poor fellow side by side, but they could not do more for him, and, as one, they turned toward Maxwell.

He still knelt beside the corpse, and his eyes were fixed with strange intensity upon the white face.

The Rangers looked on in a species of awe. Nathan Maxwell and Luke Brastow had been friends of an extraordinary type. For years they had hunted, scouted, slept and lived together, and the tie which had bound them had been of a remarkable nature.

Now, however, the man was bent on the bare haggling and stared at the face of his dead friend with white wide eyes and haggard face. Silence reigned in the place for several moments. Their heads were in the lassos—for all these murdered Rangers had been their comrades-in-arms—they knew that Maxwell was the keenest sufferer; but the major at last arose and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"We cannot help them now," he kindly said.

Maxwell raised his head and looked at his superior with glassy eyes.

"Dead! dead!" he hoarsely muttered.

"They died like men.

"Ay, but who killed them? Was this deed done as one enemy should do to another?"

The hot blood surged back into the guide's face and an ominous look crept into his eyes.

"It was bandsmen," answered the major.

"It was fiendishly done.""

"We are come too late for relief, but it may not be too late for vengeance. Let us lose no time, but bury our dead and pursue their murderers." A look of fury crossed Maxwell's face, and, arising, he tore down the lasso by which Brastow had been bound.

Then his companions looked in astonishment as he called the lasso and drew it again and again through the pool of blood under Brastow's body until it was saturated, red and slippery.

The Texans watched in amusement. The act seemed like that of a madman, but there was that in his manner which dispelled the idea.

He held the scarlet thing aloft and spoke in a manner full of a fixed and relentless purpose:

"Comrades!" he huskily said, "behold this lasso! It is the same by which Luke Brastow was hanged, and it is red with his blood. He was basely murdered, but he leaves behind one with whom his death will never be forgotten! With this piece of blood upon it, I will strangle him though he be the President of Mexico!"

His voice grew clearer as he proceeded, and at the end ran out like a voice of fate. His manner, too, was fixed as the peaks of Cerro Gordo.

A low deafening cheer went up from the Rangers. Every man there sympathized with Maxwell, every one was eager to strike a blow at the murderers.

"Vengeance!" the bold men shouted, and their leader removed his hat and added his voice to theirs.

"Vengeance shall be yours and right speedily," he said. "Come, let us bury the dead, and then on to seek the enemy!"

Nathan Maxwell went outside and hung the crimsoned lasso in the sun, where it would dry, and then joined his hand to his lips. With thoughts of his dead friend, of the signs of the massacre—the broken gate, the breached walls and the dark stains upon the floor—of the long, deep grave that was made and the bodies laid in a row, Luke Brastow at the head, and then the earth was replaced and everything done to make the burial seem civil.

Maxwell did his part, but he did not once speak, and his terrible calmness touched the Rangers, and they thought of their dead comrade.

"He lives only for vengeance now," said one.

"He will not live to obtain it unless it comes quickly. His brain is giving way under the shock, and you may look to see him become a madman."

"He is made of sterner stuff," added a third.

"Just now he looks bad enough, but he will rally. He was a man of iron."

Some of them glanced at the red lasso, fast drying in the sun, and, hardened men that they were, they shuddered at the thought of the deed.

But Nathan Maxwell, when their work was done, calmly secured it, and, when they started on the trail, it hung coiled from his saddle pommel.

And the avengers swept away on the murderers' track with him at their head. The search for retribution was begun.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNING OF VENGEANCE.

After finishing their work, the Texans rode away in a westerly direction, and the trail soon showed that they had gone at so much greater a pace than that of the Mexicans that the latter were not men to count odds in such a case.

The discovery of the situation at the cosa had been made in this way: The handful of Texans, with Maxwell and Brastow as members, had gone up on a scout with Nathan as guide, and were soon aware that some mysterious calamity had been dealt upon the Mexicans. They had, therefore, run ahead when the detachment was come upon and forced to seek shelter in the adobe dwelling, and when they discovered their peril they had gone at once for aid, with the result already told.

The prospect of overtaking the murderers acted like magic on the spirits of the pursuers,
Young Kentuck;

OR

THE RED LASSO.

BY CAPT. MARC WILTON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY JAGUAR," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FATAL LASSO.

"Too late!"

The terror of the lasso fell from bloodless lips and voice that was almost a groan, while he who had spoken stared straight ahead like a man who sees a ghost.

The terrible order fell too late, at a time when the war between that country and the United States was at its height, and dark deeds were perpetrated along the boundary line.

It was a struggle marked by lawless acts, for the Mexicans, as a people, are not noted for great magnanimity, and their hatred for the "accursed invaders" was bitter in the extreme.

"Too late!"

The man who had thus spoken sat at the head of a party of horsemen numbering two score, and two, one glance at their faces, and dress to see they were Texan Rangers, and a vaunting look was on them.

White foam clung thickly upon the sides and flanks of the horses they bestowed, for they had ridden fast and far—ridden thus, only to arrive too late.

They had come to succor a party of their own comrades that they knew, and who, on glancing at their faces, were pleased upon a wretched hovel by a superior force of Mexicans, and, led by one who was deeply interested, they had ridden hastily until the advent dwelling appeared before them.

One glance at it, however, was enough to dash their hopes to the ground, for in the silent field around and at the broken walls and down-fallen gate of the building, they read a story as unavailing as it was comprehensible.

They had arrived too late to take part in the red drama, and they could foresee but one end which could have come to the affair.

The man who had guided them to the spot was the same man who sat at their head, and who had uttered the exclamation recorded, but though he seemed far more interested than any of his companions, he sat like a statue after that one word, "too late," hanging about these staring eyes.

The speaker sat just behind the guide and wore the dress of a Texan major. He was the commander of the troops.

Maxwell, the guide, seemed aroused to new life by this remark, for, suddenly throwing off his stupefaction, he plunged his spurs into the sides of his horse, and spoke one word:

"Follow!"

And with this terse command, he dashed madly toward the building, followed by the other men. The latter glanced at each other significantly as they rode.

"Poor Maxwell is hit hard," said one.

"No wonder. He an' Luke Brastow were bosom friends, an' Nate is a man who never does things by halves. Ef he likes a man, he likes him a good deal; ef he hates, he be to his enemy!"

"It may not be so bad, after all," added another. "Brastow may have escaped, or may be prisoner."

"We shall soon see.

The words were spoken as the command reached the building. It had once been a stout structure of its kind, but it had been abandoned for some time and must have made a poor fort for the handful of Texans who had taken refuge there from the Mexicans.

Maxwell, followed by his companions, had reached the gateway, and the former slid from his horse and entered.

An appalling sight met his gaze.

No living person was visible, but upon the floor were dead bodies, men, women, and children, all prostrate, wearing stereotyped forms. They lay for the most part at one side, where they were piled, one upon another, and all were dressed the cowboys of Texas Rangers.

They were all that were left of the late defenders.

The would-be rescuers gazed at them silently and almost without a sound; the eyes and stnalyzed faces of Nathaniel Maxwell flashed eagerly about the place. He seemed looking for some one he did not see.

The building was divided into two rooms, and the guide strode through the doorway to the inner one.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold than he uttered a hoarse cry and his comrades hastily followed. A sight even more horrible than the first awaited them.

From the roof, live men, all Texans, swung slowly to and fro from the ends of lassos, and the victims, nude to the waist, were cut and slashed with knife-wounds until their bodies were like the web of a spider.

Upon one of the unfortunate, the gaze of Nathaniel Maxwell had become fixed, and with a few long strides he pressed to his side. Then, with a sudden burst of emotion, he cut the lasso and caught the body as it fell.

The Rangers stood in silence as they saw him bend over the cold clay. Dead beyond recall, man surely was, but Maxwell laid his hand over the pulseless heart before he gave up all hope.

His comrades were cutting down the other hangmen in order, though they spoke few words, their flashing eyes and compressed lips were eloquent in themselves. They laid the poor fellows side by side, but they could do no more for them, and, as one man, they turned toward Maxwell.

He still knelt beside the corpse, and his eyes were fixed with strange intensity upon the white face.

The Rangers looked on in a species of awe. Nathaniel Maxwell and Luke Brastow had been friends of an extraordinary type. For years they had hunted, scouted, slept and lived together, and the tie which had bound them had been of a remarkable nature.

Now, he held and kissed on the bare flagging and stared at the face of his dead friend with white wild eyes and haggard face. Silence reigned in the place for several moments. Then the Texan major took his departure—sacred—that Maxwell was the keenest sufferer; but the major at that moment was taken by a wave of emotion, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"We cannot help them now," he kindled.

Maxwell raised his head and looked at his superior with glassy eyes.

"Dead? dead?" he hoarsely muttered.

"They died like men."

"Ay, but who is to say? Was that deed done as one enemy should do to another?"

The hot blood surged back into the guide's face and an ominous look crept into his eyes.

"It was done as the answer of the major."

"It was fiendishly done.

"We are come too late for relief, but it may not be too late for vengeance. Let us lose no time in avenging their deaths."

A look of fury crossed Maxwell's face, and, arising, he tore down the lasso by which Brastow had been bound.

Then his companions looked in astonishment as he called the lasso and drew it again and again through the pool of blood under Brastow's body until it was saturated, red and slippery.

The Texans watched in amazement. The act seemed like that of a madman, but there was that in his manner which dispelled the idea.

He held the scarlet thing aloft and spoke in a manner full of a fixed and relentless purpose.

"Comrades!" he bluntly said, "behold this lasso! It is the same by which Luke Brastow was hanged, and it is red with his blood. He was basely murdered, but he leaves behind one wish—his last breath was for vengeance. With this blood upon it, I will strangle him, though he be the President of Mexico!"

His voice grew clearer as he proceeded, and at the end ran out like a voice of fate. His manner, too, was fixed as the peaks of Cerro Gordo.

A dinous cheer went up from the Rangers. Every man there sympathized with Maxwell, every man was eager to strike a blow at the murderers.

"Vengeance!" the bold men shouted, and their leader removed his hat and added his voice to theirs.

"Vengeance shall be yours, and right speedily," he said. "Come, let us bury the dead, and then on to seek the enemy!"

Nathaniel Maxwell went out and hung the crimsoned lasso in the sun, where it would dry, and then sealed his band and his lips. With that sign the avengers went about their business.

Not much time was required to inter the dead. The Mexicans had taken away their own slain, so that when the Texans had been carried to the building and the walls examined for signs of the massacre—the broken gate, the breached walls and the dark stains upon the floor.

A long, deep grave was made and the bodies laid in a row, Luke Brastow at the head, and then the earth was replaced and everything done to make the burial seem civil to the last.

Maxwell did his part, but he did not once speak, and his terrible calmness touched the Rangers to the quick.

"He lives only for vengeance now," said one. "He will not live to obtain it unless it comes quickly. His brain is giving way under the shock, and you may look to see him become a madman."

"He is made of sterner stuff," added a third. "Just now he looks bad enough, but he will rally, and then we'll be the sons of Texas!"

Some of them glanced at the red lasso, fast drying in the sun, and, hardened men that they were, they shuddered at the thought of vengeance.

But Nathaniel Maxwell, when his work was done, calmly secured it, and, when he started on the trail, it hung coiled from his saddle post in the sun.

And the avengers swept away on the murderers' track with him at their head. The search for retribution was begun.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF VENGEANCE.

After finishing their work, the Texans rode away in a quarter direction, and the trail soon showed that they had gone at so much faster pace, proving to the Texans' hearts that they might be overtaken. Unless their less in the engagement with the murdered men had been greater than seemed probable, they still outnumbered the avengers, but a thought was not given to that fact. The latter were not men to count odds in such a case.

The discovery of the situation at the casa had been made in this way: The handful of Texans, with Maxwell and Brastow as members, had gone out upon a scout with Nathaniel as leader. The horse they rode ran away ahead when the detachment was come upon and forced to seek shelter in the adobe dwelling, and when he discovered their peril he had gone on at once forward, with the result already told.

The prospect of overtaking the murderers acted like magic on the spirits of the pursuers,
Young Kentuck.

and they used toward their horses as fast as the character of the way would admit. At times the trees and underbrush were so thick that they could not pass at a walk, but when the way was more open they broke into a gallop.

In the big was a man whose major kept him, for his knowledge of the country was superior to that of any other

Young Ed Telbot was a Kentuckian by birth, but he had always led a roving life, and the two years previous to the opening of the war had been passed by him within a circle of fifteen miles about the very ground that he was now traversing. With the opening of hostilities, he had at once enlisted in the Texan ranks, and his acquaintanceship with the hostilities of the country had more than once served his cause well.

Major Palmer, having frequently offered him a position as his private scout and spy, but he had declined the invitation. Circumstances had led some of his associates to doubt his good faith, but the major believed in and trusted him in spite of it. When he was called to the front, and those who doubted him looked with troubled faces as they saw Palmer taking counsel of him as they rode along.

"I don't know of it," said a Texan whose name was John. "We are in a dangerous locality and few in number, and it would be very easy for him to lead us into a trap.

"As long as we follow the trail of the Greasers, I don't see how it makes any difference whether we are in the front or the rear," observed the man beside him.

"I know you have a soft spot for Young Kentuck, Jack Flumbee, but he is a traitor," said one of the boys.

"How do you make Ed Telbot a traitor? I don't see. Ain't he always as well as any of us when in a skirmish?" said the major.

Wrongfully, Abe Nelson, I sadly believe. The lad has got a good, honest face, an' I ralther take for him.

The subject of their conversation certainly did not discolor the honest-looking face, and it was one full of a resolution which, if rightly directed, would prove a tower of strength to the cause in which he engaged. As he rode beside the major, the boy had a true heart, but there are times when it is not wise to trust a man implicitly if appearances are against him.

"We are gaining rapidly on the dogs," said the major, looking keenly at the trail.

"They are carrying their dead," said Telbot.

"What is their purpose in that?"

"Probably they have some particular locality selected as a place of ambush in which they mean to start the Mex-icans journey under the circumstances; and all this is in our favor.

"If they pass, we a rable to come upon them by surprise."

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any danger of running into an ambush?"

He thought not. Probably they have no idea that we are near, and they will not dream of such speedy retribution."

You say our course is making us toward the enemy."

"Yes, sir. There are no villages in this direction, and if we keep straight on we shall soon reach a chaparral which covers more than a month's distance."

By that time the Mex-icans will be there, for it is a place little frequented by white men. There are some few Indians who make their living place there, and rumor has it that there are ruins of ancient dwellings in the interior, but the place is almost impenetrable and I have never explored it. Ah! Maxwell has paused; what is it now?"

The guide had halted and was waiting for his companion to join him. When they did, he addressed Talbot in a terse, metallic way:

"The Rio del Aguila is near at hand, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered the Kentuckian.

"It is a hard river to cross. Wont they be likely to turn south there?"

"Not unless there is a ford dead ahead, and if they wish to cross, there is nothing to prevent."

"That alters the case. We will go on."

"Watch," said Talbot.

"Thanks.""

"Will?"

"It occurs to me that they may stop to inspect their dead at the river bank. If they are anxious to avoid labor, it would be just the place."

"How far away is it?" asked the major.

"A mile or so."

"Then Maxwell and Talbot had rode well ahead and see that we do not run into an ambush. If you find the Greasers, return at once to me."

"This has been a sad day," he kindly said.

"The end is not yet," the chief somberly replied.

"A trust which shall be able to avenge our comrades."

"I can not answer for you, but I will have satisfaction if I follow the assurances to the man who has no idle boast. I made this lasso a mission to perform, and I will not rest until the blood of Luke Brastow is avenged."

"The life-hunter spoke with terrible earnestness, but Talbot knew his cause was just and would not reproach him."

"You will not be alone in your work," he said.

Maxwell fixed a keen gaze upon him.

"There are those who doubt your loyalty, Edwin Talbot," he said, but I can not believe you friendly to those insidious wretches."

"I know I have been suspected," said the other, with some embarrassment, "but I am hearts and hands with the Texans. I have lived among the Mexicans, but I have no love for them."

"I believe you," was the terse reply.

They galloped on until, knowing they were fast near the village, Talbot stood a trifle, his curiosity greater, and they rode on at a more moderate pace.

Breaking through a cluster of trees, anon, they saw the stream flowing before them, and they checked their horses at another sight which met their gaze.

Besides the river bed, some three score horses were collected in a group, and just beyond them as many men were engaged in some labor which a chance observer might at first glance have thought to be a cultural occupation.

The scouts, however, were not deceived; it was the Mexican band interring their dead on the river bank.

Maxwell's eyes flashed with sudden fire.

"We have them now," he said, eagerly.

"Ride back and hasten on our force. I will remain to watch them."

The major hesitated. He remembered the doubts many men had of Talbot's good faith. If he was of traitorous inclinations, he could warn and save the Mexicans while the avengers were caught napping.

"My horse is exhausted; you had better go," he awkwardly said.

Talbot's face flushed, for he understood the silent meaning of the simple reply he wheeled his horse and galloped away.

Maxwell backed his horse into the bushes, where he would not be by any mischance be seen, and silently watched the marked hand.

They numbered at least sixty men, but there were more horses and he knew the victims of the casas tragedy who had fought well for their lives. Indeed, there were many silent bodies in the river bank, but a long trench had been hollowed and all was ready for the disposal of the remains.

The face of the life-hunter was terrible in its expression as he watched them. He had never been a vindictive man, but all he had loved had gone from him by the agency of these men, not in fair battle, but in the teeth of the white man's laws, and the blood of his vanquished foe, and it is no wonder the blood of Nathan Maxwell burned at fever pitch.

He lifted the red lasso from his shoulders and leaped into the saddle with his intentions. The blood of his dead friend had colored it crimson, and undoubtedly he was repeating his vow.

The sound of hoof-strokes aroused him and he looked around to see the Texans advancing. He motioned them on and they silently gathered about him.

"They are there," he said, pointing to the river.

"And in our grasp," said Major Palmer, with subdued excitement. "They do not sus-
pect that we are near, and we will deal them a deadly blow."

"Let us lose no time," said Maxwell.

Palmer looked over his Hardy band and bade every man prepare for a dash. They answered by looking to their weapons and a grim fire of resolution settled on their faces. With the major's order, and they broke cover and started for the enemy.

The green saddle gave forth no sound of hoof-strokes, but the distance was short and the Mexicans could not hear the noise. They looked up from their work and saw the avengers sweeping down upon them.

In an instant the alarm was sounded and with a roar of excitement the enemy realized their danger and made a rush for their horses, but no time was given them for adequate preparation. The Texans had not far to go, and before the Greasers were in the saddle the shock came.

Palmer realized the importance of getting in the first blow, and, shrewdly calculating the time, he gave the word to fire just before the collision came.

Then a terrible volley swept the close ranks of the Mexicans, doing fearful execution, and, before the result of the first volley was known, most of the Texans were among their enemies.

Their rifles were empty, but swords and pistols were kept as a last resort. A man devoting himself to the bloody work before him.

What followed could scarcely be called a fight. The Mexicans were demoralized at the first volley, and when they had fired a few shots they were separated from their horses, and those who had rashness enough to stand their ground were obliged to meet on foot a mounted foe in every way better prepared for the struggle.

Many of the panic-stricken wretches ran away and others tried to, but they avenged their fallen comrades and were killed. The majority of them were separated from their horses, and those who had rashness enough to stand their ground were obliged to meet on foot a mounted foe in every way better prepared for the struggle.

CHAPTER III.

WANTED, A NAME.

In this unequal fight, there was one man who raged like a tiger, and who seemed to uneven the odds in favor of the dozen men. He galloped madly about, and his saber was wielded until the steel was red from end to end, and a gory trail marked the way he rode.

This man was Maxwell, and in his thirst for vengeance he had done great mischief to the enemy.

 узнав, at last, he could find no more oppo-

he paused and looked at his companions who had been watching him as people who would watch one they think mad.

"The Mexicans are all slain, Nathan," the major soothingly said.

The man brushed his head across his eye.
Young Kentuck.

and they urged forward their horses as fast as the character of the way would admit. At times the trees and underbrush were so thick that they were invisible at a walk, but when the way was more open they broke into a gallop.

In the bend was one man when the major knew him, for his knowledge of the country was superior to that of any other there.

Young Edwin Talbot was a Kentuckian by birth, but he had always led a roving life, and the two years previous to the opening of the war had been passed by him within a circle of fifteens, but not the very ground they were now traversing. With the opening of hostilities, he had at once enlisted in the Texan ranks, and his acquaintanceship with the hostile territory had more than once served his cause well.

Major Palmer had frequently offered him a position as his special scout and spy, but he had declined the invitation. Circumstances had led some of his associates to doubt his good faith, but the major believed in and trusted him in spite of that. As he was called to the front, and those who doubted him looked with troubled faces as the saw Palmer taking counsel of him as they rode along. He didn't look it, said a Texan whose name was Allen. We are in a dangerous locality and few in number, and it would be very easy for him to lead us into a trap.

"As long as we hold their trail the Greasers, I don't see it makes any difference whether we are on the front or the rear," observed the man beside him.

"I know you have a soft spot for Young Kentuck, Jack Plunkett, but one traitor in a band makes a bad band," said the major.

"How you make Ed Talbot cut a traitor I can't see. Ain't he always dis as well as any of us when in a skirmish?"

"I won't deny that, but you know there have been suspicious things about him. He ain't always around as he should be, and more than one of the boys have suspected him." We are gaining rapidly on the dogs," said the major, looking keenly at the trail.

"They are carrying their dead," said Talbot.

"What is their purpose in that?"

"Probably they have some particular locality selected as a place of burial, but it can not be a real place of burial, as they must make the journey under the circumstances, and all this is in our favor.

"If they pass, we are able to come upon them before it's too late." Yes, sir.

"Is there any safer way of running into an ambush?"

"Think not. Probably they have no idea that we are near, and they will not dream of such speedy retribution.

You say our course is taking us toward the rear. Yes, sir. There are no villages in this direction for miles, and if we keep straight on we shall soon reach a chasm which covers many square miles. Likely the Kentuckians will go there, for it is a place little frequented by white men. There are some few Indians who make their wintering place there, and rumor has it that there’s ruins of ancient dwellings in the interior, but the place is almost imperishable and I have never explored it. Ah! Maxwell has paused; what is it now?"

The guide had halted and was waiting for his companions to join him. When they did, he addressed Talbot in a terse, military way:

"The Rio del Agua is near at hand, isn’t it?"

"Yes," answered the Kentuckian.

"It is a hard river to cross. Won’t they be likely to turn south there?"

"No. There is a ford dead ahead, and if they wish to cross, there is nothing to prevent."

"That alters the case. We will go on."

"War," said Talbot.

"Well?"

"It occurs to me that they may stop to inter their dead at the river bank. If they are anxious to avoid labor, it would be just the place."

"How far away is it?" asked the major.

"A mile or so."

"Then I fear Maxwell has ridden on his companion’s saddle to his fixed想法."

"This has been a sad day," he kindly said.

"The end is not yet, the man somberly replied."

"I trust we shall be able to avenge our comrades."

"I cannot answer for you, but I will have satisfaction if I follow the assassins to their couch and put an end to their insolent boast. I have a mission to perform, and I will not rest until the blood of Luke Bristow is avenged."

The life-hunter spoke with terrible earnestness, but Talbot knew his cause was just and could not reproach him.

You will not be alone in your work," he said.

Maxwell fixed a keen gaze upon him.

"There are those who doubt your loyalty, Edwin Talbot," he said, "but I can not believe you friendly to those insidious wreaths."

"I know I have been suspected," said the other, with some embarrassment, "but I am hearts and hand with the Texans. I have lived among the Mexicans, but I have no love for them."

"I believe you," was the terse reply. They galloped on until, knowing they were fast near the river, Talbot urged greater caution, and they rode on at a more moderate pace.

Breaking through a cluster of trees, anon, they saw the stream flowing before them, and they checked their horses at another sight which met their gaze.

Beside the river some three score horses were collected in a group, and just beyond them as many men were engaged in some labor which a chance observer might at first glance have taken for the usual occupation.

The scouts, however, were not deceived; it was the Mexican band interring their dead on the river bank.

Maxwell was flashed with sudden fire.

"We have them now," he said, eagerly.

"Ride back and hasten on our force. I will remain to watch them."

The Texan hesitated. He remembered the doubts many men had of Talbot’s good faith. If he was of traitorish inclinations, he could warn and save the Mexicans while the avengers were cut down.

"My horse is exhausted; you had better go," he awkwardly said.

Talbot’s face flushed, for he understood the silent demand. Without a simple reply he wheeled his horse and galloped away.

Maxwell backed his horse into the bushes, where he would not by any mischance be seen, and silently watched the marked band.

They numbered at least sixty men, but there were more horses and he knew the victims of the casa tragedy had fought well for their lives. Indeed, there were many silent bodies in the river bank, but a long trench had been hollowed and all was ready for the disposal of the remains.

The face of the life-hunter was terrible in its expression as be watched them. He had never been a vindictive man, but all he had loved had gone from him by the agency of these men, not in fair battle, but in the teeth of the laws that he held his vanquished foe, and it is no wonder the blood of Nathan Maxwell burned at fever pitch. He lifted the red lasso from his saddle and looped it about the Agent’s intentions. The blood of his dead friend had colored it crimson, and undoubtedly he was repeating his vow.

The sound of hoof-strokes aroused him and he looked around to see the Texans advancing. He motioned them on and they silently gathers about him.

"They are there," he said, pointing to the river.

"And in our grasp," said Major Palmer, with subdued excitement. "They do not suspect that we are near, and we will deal them a deadly blow."

"Let us lose no time," said Maxwell. Palmer looked over his hardy band and bade every man prepare for a dash. They answered by looking to their weapons and a grim fire of resolution settled on their faces. The major gave the word, and they broke cover and started for the enemy.

The green sward gave forth no sound of hoof-strokes, but the distance was short and the Mexicans could not escape. They looked up from their work and saw the avengers sweeping down upon them.

In an instant the alarm was sounded and voices were heard of the men already being pursued. The enemy realized their danger and made a rush for their horses, but no time was given them for elaborate preparation. The Texans had not far to go, and before the Greasers were in the saddle the shock came.

Palmer realized the importance of getting in the first blow, and, shrewdly calculating the time, he gave the word to fire just before a collision came.

Then a terrible volley swept the close ranks of the Mexicans, doing fearful execution, and, before the result was known, the majority of the Mexcans were among their enemies.

Their rifles were empty, but swords and pistols were brandished in the cause. The man devoted himself to the bloody work before him.

What followed could scarcely be called a fight. The Mexicans were demoralized at the first volley and then lay down. The majority of them were separated from their horses, and those who had rashness enough to stand their ground were obliged to meet on foot a mounted foe in every way better prepared for the struggle.

Many of the panic-stricken wranglers ran away and others tried to, but the avengers gallantly throve on, and wherever they could find one of the hated enemy.

CHAPTER III

WANTED, A NAME.

In this unequal fight, there was one man who raged like a tiger, and who seemed to unlatch the gates of the unseen and drive a dozen men. He galloped madly about, and his saber was wielded until the steel was red from end to end, and a gory trail marked the way he had run.

This man was Maxwell, and in his thirst for vengeance he had done great mischief to the enemy.

At last, he could find no more opponents, he paused and looked at his companion who had been watching him as people will watch one they think mud.

"The Mexicans are all slain, Nathan," the major soothingly said.

The man brushed his head across his eye.
and they urged forward their horses as fast as the character of the way would admit. At times the trees and underbrush were so thick that the horsemen had to dismount and walk a way, but when the way was more open they broke into a gallop.

In the ben was one man whom the major knew well. He, for his knowledge of the country was superior to that of any other there.

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Major Palmer had frequently offered him a position as his special scout and spy, but he had declined the proposition. Circumstances had led some of his associates to doubt his good faith, but the major believed in and trusted him in spite of this.

As he was called to the front, and those who disdained him looked with troubled faces at the saw Palmer taking counsel of him as they rode along.

"We two and six others," said a Texan whose name was Bosh. "We are in a dangerous locality and few in number, and it would be very wise for him to lead us into a trap.

"As long as we can't see that the Greasers, I don't see that it makes any difference whether we ride fast or the front, or the rear," observed the man beside him.

"I know you have a soft side for Young Kentuck, Jack Flunder, but one traitor in a band means all the band," said Ed Talbot.

"I am not sure," said the major, "but you know there have been suspicious things about him. He ain't always around as he should be, and more than one of the boys have suspected him.

Wrongfully, Abe Nolan, I heartily believe. The lad has got a good, honest face, an' I rathyer take for him."

The subject of their conversation certainly did not strike the major as among the best. He could see a part of a resolution which, if rightly directed, would prove a tower of strength to the cause in which he engaged. As he rode beside the major, he felt that this was true, but there were times when it is not wise to trust a man implicitly if appearances are against him.

"We are gaining rapidly on the dogs," said the major, looking keen at the trail.

"They are carrying their dead," said Talbot.

"What is their purpose in that?"

"Probably they have some particular locality selected as a place of burial, but it can not be near, for they are a good deal of mischief.

"But this looks like a roving mission. It is part of a regular journey under the circumstances, and all this is in our favor."

"If they pause, we are able to come upon them without loss of time."

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any object of running into an ambush?"

"No, sir."

"I think not. Probably they have no idea that we are near, and they will not dream of such speedy retribution."

You say our course is taking us toward the enemy.

"Yes, sir. There are no villages in this direction for miles, and if we keep straight on we shall soon reach a camp on which we can make our way."

"The Mexicans will go there, for it is all little frequented by white men. There are some few Indians who make their wintering place there, and rumors have it that there are ruins of ancient dwellings in the interior, but the place is almost impenetrable and I have never explored it. Ah! Maxwell has paused; what is it now?"

The guide had halted and was waiting for his companions to join him. When they did, he addressed Talbot in a terse, metallic way:

"The Rio del Agua is near at hand, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered the Kentuckian.

"It is a hard river to cross. Won't they be likely to turn south there?"

"Not much. There is a ford dead ahead, and if they wish to cross, there is nothing to prevent."

"That alters the case. We will go on."

"Was, said Talbot.

"Well!"

"It occurs to me that they may stop to Inter their dead at the river bank. If they are anxious to avoid labor, it would be just the place."

"How far away is it? asked the major.

"A mile or so."

"Then I think Maxwell and Talbot had better ride well ahead and see that we do not run into an ambush. If you find the Greasers, return at once to me."

"This has been a sad day," he kindly said."

"The end is not yet," the major somberly replied.

"I trust we shall be able to avenge our comrades."

"I can not answer for you, but I will have satisfaction if I follow the assassins to the hounds."

"This lasso has a mission to perform, and I will not rest until the blood of Luke Braswot is avenged.

"The life-hunter spoke with terrible earnestness, but Talbot knew his cause was just and could not reproach him."

"You will not be alone in your work," he said.

Maxwell fixed a keen gaze upon him.

"There are those who doubt your loyalty, Edwin Talbot," he said, "but I can not believe you friendly to those insinuate wretches."

"I know have been suspected," said the other, with some embarrassment, "but I am hearts and hands with the Texans. I have lived among the Mexicans, but I have no love for them."

"I believe you," was the terse reply.

They galloped on until, knowing they were fast near the river, Talbot became more cautious, and they rode on at a more moderate pace.

Breaking through a cluster of trees, anon, they saw the stream flowing before them, and they checked their horses at another sight which met their gaze.

Besides the three, some score horses were collected in a group, and just beyond them as many men engaged in some labor which a chance observer might at first glance have thought to be a laborious occupation.

The scouts, however, were not deceived; it was the Mexican band interring their dead on the river bank.

Maxwell's face flushed with sudden fire.

"We have them now," he said, eagerly.

"Ride back and hasten on our force. I will remain to watch them."

The Texan hesitated. He remembered the doubts many men had of Talbot's good faith. If he was of traitorous inclinations, he could warm and save the Mexicans while the avengers were confused.

"My horse is exhausted; you had better go," he awkwardly said.

Talbot's face flushed, for he understood the silent message the general's words conveyed. He simply replied he wheeled his horse and galloped away.

Maxwell backed his horse into the bushes, where he would not by any mischance be seen, and silently watched the marked band.

They numbered at least sixty men, but there were more horses and he knew the victims of the casas tragedy had fought well for their lives. Indeed, there were many silent bodies in the river bank, but a long trench had been hollowed and all was ready for the disposal of the remains.

The face of the life-hunter was terrible in its expression as he watched them. He had never been a vindictive man, but all he had loved had gone from him by the agency of these men, not in fair battle, but in the teeth of that bright day; and his petted and cherished foe, and it is wonder the blood of Nathan Maxwell burned at fever pitch.

He lifted the red lasso from his saddle and left it bedecked with his lamentations. The blood of his dead friend had colored it crimson, and undoubtedly he was repeating his vow.

The sound of hoof-stroke aroused him and he looked around to see the Texans advancing. He motioned them on and they silently gathered about him.

"They are there," he said, pointing to the river.

"And in our grasp," said Major Palmer, with subdued excitement. "They do not suspect that we are near, and we will deal them a deadly blow."

"Let us lose no time," said Maxwell.

Palmer looked over his hardy band and bade every man prepare for a dash. They answered by looking to their weapons and a grim fire of resolution settled on their faces. The major nodded, and they broke cover and started for the enemy.

The green arrow gave forth no sound of hoof-strokes, but the distance was short and the enemy realized the danger and made a rush for their horses, but no time was given them for elaborate preparation. The Texans had not far to go, and before the Greasers were in the saddle the shock came.

Palmer realized the importance of getting in the first blow, and, skilfully calculating the time, he gave the word to fire just before the collision came.

Then a terrible volley swept the close ranks of the Mexicans, doing fearful execution, and, before the results could be thoroughly understood, the majority of the Texans were among their enemies.

Their rifles were empty, but swords and pistols were brandished, and the man devoured himself to the bloody work before him.

What followed could scarcely be called a fight. The Mexicans were demoralized at the first volley, and then they tried to break cover. The majority of them were separated from their horses, and those who had rashness enough to stand their ground were obliged to meet on foot a mounted foe in every way better prepared for the struggle.

Many of the panic-stricken wranglers ran away and others tried to, but he avenged gallantly and successfully. He sought out the sabers wherever they could find one of the hated enemy.

CHAPTER III

WANTED, A NAME.

In this unequal fight, there was one man who raged like a tiger, and who seemed to understand and seize the powers of a dozen men. He galloped madly about, and his saber was wielded until the steel was red from end to end, and a gory trail marked the way he had gone.

This man was Maxwell, and in his thirst for vengeance he had done great mischief to the enemy.

But, at last, he could find no more opponents, he paused and looked at his companions, and he was watching him as people would watch one they think mad.

"The Mexicans are all slain, Nathan," the major soothingly said.

The man brushed his head across his eye.
and they used toward their horses as fast as the character of the way would admit. At times the trees and underbrush were so thick that they could not make a straight line, but when the way was open they broke into a gallop.

In the west was one man whom the major knew and trusted him, for his knowledge of the country was superior to that of any other there.

Young Edwin Talbot was a Kentuckian by birth, but he had always led a roving life, and the two years previous to the opening of the war had been passed by him within a circle of fifteen miles. He knew the very ground that was now traversing. With the opening of hostilities, he had at once enlisted in the Texan ranks, and his acquainanceship with the hostilities of the country had more than once served his cause well.

Major Palmer had frequently offered him a position as his scout and spy, but he had declined the invitation. Circumstances had led some of his associates to doubt his good faith, but the major believed in and trusted him in spite of it.

As Talbot was called to the front, and those who doubted him looked with troubled faces as the saw Palmer taking counsel of him as they rode along.

"Easy, Ed," looks of it, said a Texan whose name was Johnson. "We are in a dangerous locality and few in number, and it would be very easy for him to lead us into a trap.

"As long as we hold the trail of the Greasers, I don’t see as it makes any difference who is at the head of the line, or front or the rear," observed the man beside him.

"I know you have a soft side for Young Kentuck, Jack Plunkett, but one traitor in a band makes it all right for the rest of us.

"How you make Ed Talbot out a traitor I don’t see. Ain’t he always fit as well as any of us in a skirmish?"

"I won’t deny that, but you know there have been suspicious things about him. He ain’t always around as he should be, and more than one of the boys have suspected him.

"Wrongfully, Abe Nelson, I sincerely believe. The lad has got a good, honest face, an’ I rathere take him for.

The subject of their conversation certainly did not indicate the honest-looking face, and it was one of a resolution which, if rightly directed, would prove a tower of strength to the cause in which he engaged. As he rode beside the major, Major Palmer noticed this truculent boy, but there are times when it is not wise to trust a man implicitly, for appearances are against him.

"We are gaining rapidly on the dogs," said the major, looking keenly at the trail.

"They are carrying their dead," said Talbot.

"What is their purpose in that?

"Probably they have some particular locality selected as a place of burial, but it can not be a place of much advantage to the Major, and the journey under the circumstances, and all this is in our favor."

"If they pause, we are able to come upon them by surprise,"

"Yes, sir.

"Is there any order of running into an ambush?"

"I think not. Probably they have no idea that we are near, and they will not dream of such speedy retribution."

"You say our course is taking us toward the south?

"Yes, sir. There are no villages in this direction for miles, and if we keep straight on we shall soon reach a camp or village which covers some of the old Mexican lines. The Mexicans will go there, for it is a little place frequented by white men. There are some few Indians who make their wintering place there, and rumor has it that there is a ruin of ancient dwellings in the interior, but the place is almost impenetrable and I have never explored it. Ah! Maxwell has paused; what is it now?"

The guide had halted and was waiting for his companions to join him. When they did, he addressed Talbot in a terse, military way;

"The Rio del Agua is near at hand, isn’t it?"

"Yes," answered the Kentuckian.

"It is a hard river to cross. Won’t they be likely to turn south there?"

"Not likely, sir. There is a ford ahead, and if they wish to cross, there is nothing to prevent."

"That alters the case. We will go on."

"Very good, sir."

"Well?"

"It occurs to me that they may stop to inter their dead at the river bank. If they are anxious to avoid labor, it would be just the place."

"How far away is it?" asked the major.

"A mile or so."

"Then we shall not have time to dismount. Maxwell and I had better ride well ahead and see that we do not run into an ambush. If you find the Greasers, return at once to me."

"This has been a sad day," he kindly said.

"The end is not yet," the major somberly replied.

"I trust we shall be able to avenge our comrades."

"I cannot answer for you, but I will have satisfaction if I follow the assassins to the death. I hold no idle boast. I made this lasso a mission to perform, and I will not rest until the blood of Luke Bratston is avenged."

"The life-hunter spoke with terrible earnestness, but Talbot knew his cause was just and could not reproach him."

"You will not be alone in your work," he said.

Maxwell fixed a keen gaze upon him.

"There are those who doubt your loyalty, Edwin Talbot," he said, "but I can not believe you friendly to those inhuman wretches."

"I know I have been suspected," said the other, with some embarrassment, "but I am heart and hand with the Texans. I have lived among the Mexicans, but I have no love for them."

"I believe you," was the terse reply.

They galloped on until, knowing they were fast near the spot, Talbot grew greater caution, and they rode on at a more moderate pace.

Breaking through a cluster of trees, anon, they saw the stream flowing before them, and they checked their horses at another sight which met their gaze.

Besides the three, some three score horses were collected in a group, and just beyond them as many men engaged in some labor which a chance observer might at first glance have thought to be a cultural occupation.

The scouts, however, were not deceived; it was the Mexican band interring their dead on the river bank.

Maxwell was flashed with sudden fire.

"We have them now," he said, eagerly.

"Ride back and hasten on our force. I will remain to watch them."

The Texans hesitated. He remembered the doubts many men had of Talbot’s good faith. If he was of traitorish inclinations, he could warm and save the Mexicans while the avengers were countenanced otherwise.

"My horse is exhausted; you had better go," he awkwardly said.

Talbot’s face flushed, for he understood the silent message which was in the simple reply he wheeled his horse and galloped away.

Maxwell backed his horse into the bushes, where he would not by any chance be seen, and silently watched the marked hand.

They numbered at least sixty men, but there were more horses and he knew the victims of the case. He considered that the avengers had fought well for their lives. Indeed, there were many silent bodies in the river bank, but a long trench had been hollowed and all was ready for the disposal of the remains.

The face of the life-hunter was terrible in its expression as he watched them. He had never been a vindictive man, but all he had loved had gone from him by the agency of these men, not in fair battle, but in the teeth of the law. He felt that his vanquished foe, and it is no wonder the blood of Nathan Maxwell burned at fever pitch.

He lifted the red lasso from his saddle and looked at it with some admiration. The blood of his dead friend had colored it crimson, and undoubtedly he was repeating his vow.

The sound of hoof-strokes aroused him and he looked around to see the Texans advancing. He motioned them on and they silently gathered about him.

"They are there," he said, pointing to the river.

"And in our grasps," said Major Palmer, with subdued excitement. "They do not suspect that we are near, and we will deal them a deadly blow."

"Let us lose no time," said Maxwell.

Palmer looked over his hardy band and bade every man prepare for a dash. They answered by looking to their weapons and a grim fire of resolution settled on their faces. The major nodded, and they broke cover and started for the enemy.

The green sward gave forth no sound of hoof-strokes, but the distance was short and the Mexicans could see the blue cross on his breast. They looked up from their work and saw the avengers sweeping down upon them.

In an instant the alarm was sound, and with their swords being flashed, the enemy realized their danger and made a rush for their horses, but no time was given them for elaborate preparation. The Texans had not far to go, and before the Greasers were in the saddle the shock came.

Palmer realized the importance of getting in the first blow, and, shrewdly calculating the time, he gave the word to fire just before the collision came.

Then a terrible volley swept the close ranks of the Mexicans, doing fearful execution, and, before the result was known, few of the most of the Texans were among their enemies.

Their rifles were empty, but swords and pistols were drawn and the man devoted himself to the bloody work before him.

What followed could scarcely be called a fight. The Mexicans were demoralized at the first volley, and then, as the Indians are, the majority of them were separated from their horses, and those who had rashness enough to stand their ground were obliged to meet on foot a mounted foe in every way better prepared for the struggle.

Many of thepanic-stricken wretches ran away and others tried to, but were avenged gallantly by the Mexicans, and not a soldier perished, wherever they could find one of the hated enemy.

CHAPTER III.

WANTED, A NAME.

In this unequal fight, there was one man who ranged like a tiger, and who seemed to understand the mechanics of a dozen men. He galloped madly about, and his saber was wielded until the steel was red from end to end, and a gory trail marked the way he went.

This man was Maxwell, and in his thirst for vengeance he had done great mischief to the enemy.

A moment, at last, he could find no more opponents, he paused and looked at his companions who had been watching him as people will watch one they think mad.

"The Mexicans are all slain, Nathan," the major soothingly said.

The man brushed his head across his eye.
"You do, and, by my life, you shall tell. Once more, who is your captain?"

"Senior, I have said that I knew it not. I do not lie, and I can say no more."

"You don't lie, do you?" declared the Texan.

"Here, men, who has a lasso! We will give this hound a lesson."

Some one pushed into the center of the group, and young Nac-Maxwell, standing with the red lasso in his hand. His lips were compressed, and as he held out the fatal coil, he spoke in an intense voice:

"Here is a lesson!"

"Good!" said the major, quickly. "It is fitting that this lasso, which is red with the blood of Luke Brastow, should bring his assassins to terms. Convey the dog to yonder trees."

The prisoner was dragged toward the edge of the forest. He struggled at first, but at last his strength was overcome, and he was led by the lasso, and the wretched man was secured.

"Now, Vasco Mora," cried Palmer, "you must speak if you desire to live! Take your choice!"

"I protest against this outrage," and the Mexican's eyes flashed with fury. "You are a pretty man to speak of outrage! Have you no common sense? I tell you, Vasco Mora, you shall hang unless you speak. Once more, who led your fiends on this raid? Do you know that I began the fell work, but Palmer cut his short with a stab of his foot. "Tighten the rope!" he commanded to his men.

The order was promptly obeyed, and Mora changed color as he felt the lasso's pressure. He began to realize that these men were in full earnest.

"Will you speak?" Palmer asked.

"I cannot tell what I do not know," was the dogged answer.

"Fool! You have no time to waste. Give him a taste of border justice, men!"

Willing hands pulled on the lasso, and for a moment the prisoner hung suspended in the air, struggling as only a straggling man would, but he was lowered at a motion from the major. He had grown red in the face, and he gasped two or three times, as though the air was trying to get out of him.

"Will you speak?" implacably asked Palmer. Mora uttered two or three Spanish oaths and then grew more thoughtful and calm.

"What is it?"

"In that case, the whole of Mexico is before you, and free, so far as we are concerned. You can go where you please, providing you tell all about your affair."

The prisoner was conquered. He had tried the mettle of his captors, and, knowing his life was at stake, he decided to save that article by telling all. "Well, boy," concluded Palmer, as he promptly did under Palmer's questioning.

The leader of the Mexicans proved to be a noted guerrilla, named Criepo Riberas, and those who were captured by the lasso died in their hand, and the men who had undermined their borders and the border, were all at not all surprised to learn that it was upon his head that lay the blame of the case."

"Mora, he who was set in motion, talked freely, and in a voice suspiciously tinged with exultation, told how, when thecause was discovered and taken, all the Texans had been captured, and that the twist that caught them was due to the misadventure that there was no danger of pursuit, had led the Mexicans to loiter so futilely in their retreat.

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHERS BY BAY.

The Texans had listened to Mora's narrative of the massacre with compressed lips and scowling faces. It was not enough that three-fourths of the murderers lay dead before them; they longed to get their hands upon the others, to make them suffer as the Texan martyrs had suffered.

Edwin Talbot stood near Maxwell during the conversation, and he saw that every limb of the stout borderman was shaker. It was indeed a tale of horror, and it was a wonder that the avenger, in his state of mind, could maintain his coolness.

His face worked convulsively, and Talbot expected to see him spring upon Mora and thrice--not thrice, but the truth thrice. When Major Palmer had heard all, he made no comment, but, looking at his men, simply said:

"Remove the rope."

Maxwell stepped quickly forward and cast off the noose; then, holding it before the eyes of the prisoner, said, while a terrible look crossed his face:

"Mexican, do you see this lasso?"

"Yes, " was the sullen reply.

"The stain you see upon it is the life-blood of one of the victims of the case. You did your part in that work, Vasco Mora, and some day I will strangle you with this same lasso."

Mora did not answer—he dared not—and Maxwell, having secured the red lasso, fell back and left the others to end the work.

"Prisoner," said Major Palmer, sternly, "you have been present here where you have been present here where you have been present here where you have been present here where you have been present here where you have been present here, and what have you told, and though you richly deserve death, the promise shall be sacredly kept. Turn your face toward the east and begin."

"I shall be shot, or hung if I do not speak the truth."

Mora was full of venom and brute courage, but he dared not trifle with such men as his captors. He was bound from the camp, plunged into the bushes, and was gone.

"To the saddle!" ordered Palmer, sharply, as the wretch disappeared. "Our quarry went on foot and cannot long evade us. Ford the river!"

There was a rush for the horses, each Ranger captured one or more of the Mexicans' steeds, and the lasso was passed out.

"If we ever get out of this," said the major, looking at the captured horses, "our new horse-shoe will not come amiss.

"We must get out of it speedily," answered Talbot. "That Mora is full of mischief, and in a few hours he will have two hundred guerrillas on our trail."

The major looked at him sharply. He remembered that the Kentuckian had secretly whisper to Mora, and to his suspicions it looked as though the whisper may have meant volumes.

The river was soon forded, and the way being favorable, they struck the trail of the escaped Mexicans and followed at a sharp pace. If the fugitives kept together, as they had started, they would soon be run down if no new foes appeared to oppose the avengers.

Maxwell rode near the van, as usual, his face still grimly set, and not a word passed between him and upon his saddle-pommel still hung the red lasso.

The way was sufficiently open for the horsemen, who pressed at a gallop, and only that they were incumbered by the extra horses, very good progress would have been made. Maxwell suggested that a dozen men be left in charge of the animals, but Palmer would not hear to dividing his small forces.

"What is ahead of us now?" he asked of Talbot.

"A series of haciendas, and, I suspect from the course of the fugitives, they are making for one of them. They know, of course, that they will be pursued, and it behoves them to get away and cover themselves."

"If they get inside a casa, our work will not be easy," said the major, thoughtfully.

"Very true, for they number a dozen, and they will rally the people around them," declared the Kentuckian.

"I hate to go back unsuccessful."

"We must not," interrupted Maxwell,
Young Kentucky.

He had been temporarily insane during the affray, but now he saw only dead Mexican about him.

"Have none escaped?" he hoarsely demanded.

"A dozen or more swim the river," said Edwin Talbot, turning from the scene of slaughter with a shudder.

"Let us call your brother, Maxwell, hotly.

"Wait," ordered the major. "Let me first see what we have here. Some of these men still breathe.

"Keep them!" cried Maxwell.

"No," returned Palmer, proudly, "I am a Texan, and I will not soil my hands with such work. I am no assassin, nor do I lead assassins. I am a soldier, and I have been beaten down by fair and foul, and, despite their sins, they shall receive fair treatment. We will leave them where they are and go on.

He then drew his dagger, but Jack Plunkett saw a man approaching which sent the weapon flying full twenty feet.

"Go slow, you 'tarnal Greaser!" snapped the major.

We all gazed in amazement at your head again, your heels if you don't. Consider yourself a prisoner of war an' be decent.

The captive, who was a small, very dark Mexican of middle age, stood still, but the scowl on his low brow and the unsubdued flash of his eyes told that he was far from frightened. He was like a caged panther.

Major Palmer pushed forward to the man's side.

"Senor Mexican," he blandly said, "you are our prisoner, and we have the power to do with you as we choose, but we are merciful men and have no desire to do you violence. If you will answer the questions I shall present to your notice, you shall be well treated."

"Are you the father confessor?" asked the prisoner, with an undignified sneer.

"What do you mean?" asked Palmer, curiously.

"My question was plain enough.

"And so, by Jove, shall my answer be," was the Texan's quick retort. "In this case, Sir Greaser, I am the father confessor, and you shall hear what I ask you.

"What would you know?"

"You were one of that gang. Why didn't you retreat with what escaped?"

"One of your men struck too heavily," and the fellow grinned as he rubbed his hand across his head.

"Who led you in?"

"Who led you there?"

"To the one who is chiefly represented there," retorted Palmer, pointing to the Mexican dead.

"Do not know, sir."

"You lie, sir! The idea that a soldier does not know the name of his leader!"

"Pardon, senor, but I am only a new soldier."

"I am a very few of my comrades, senor."

Jack Plunkett interjected an unbelonging grunt.

"What is your own name?"

"Sebastian Donates, senor."

"That is a lie," interrupted Edwin Talbot.

"He is named Vasco Mora. I've seen him before.

The prisoner flashed a threatening glance at the Kentuckian.

"Look you, fellow?" cried Palmer, angrily, "you are dealing with those who will bear no subterfuge. Tell me the name of your leader.

"I know not," was the solemn reply.

"You do, and, by my life, you shall tell. Once more, who is your captain?"

"Senor, I have said that I knew not. I do not lie, and I can say no more.

"You dare not lie, declared the Texan."

"Here, men, who has a lasso? We will give this hound a lesson.

Some one pushed into the center of the group, and a huge lasso thrown over the red lasso in his hand. His lips were compressed, and as he held out the fatal coil, he spoke in an intense voice.

"Here is the man who dares!"

"Good!" said the major, quickly. "It is fitting that this lasso, which is red with the blood of Luke Brastow, should bring his assassin to terms. Convey the dog to yonder tree.

The prisoner was dragged toward the edge of the forest. He struggled at first, but, rough usage of the Texans caused him to desist, and he stood stunned under the tree selected for the purpose.

The lasso was quickly noosed about his neck, one end was thrown over a limb and seized by the frowning men, and the wretch stood on precarious footing.

"Now, Vasco Mora," cried Palmer, "you must speak or die. Take your choice!"

"I protest against this outrage," and the Mexican's eyes flashed with fury.

"You are a pretty man for an outrage! Have you some of my own? I tell you, Vasco Mora, you shall hang unless you speak. Once more, who led your fiends on this raid?"

"I do not know—but I began the fellow, but Palmer cut him short with a stamp of his foot.

"Tighten the rope!" he commanded to his men.

The order was promptly obeyed, and Mora changed color as he felt the lasso's pressure. He began to realize that these men were in full earnest.

"Will you speak?" asked Palmer.

"I cannot tell what I do not know," was the dogged answer.

"POOH! Give me no time to waste. Give him a taste of border justice, men!"

Willing hands pulled on the lasso, and for a moment the prisoner hung suspended in the air, struggling as only a strong man will, but he was lowered at a motion from the major. He had grown red in the face, and he gasped two or three times, as though the air was trying to make him speak.

"Will you speak?" implacably asked Palmer. Mora uttered two or three Spanish oaths and then grew more thoughtful and calm.

"What is it?"

"In that case, the whole of Mexico is before you, and free, so far as we are concerned. You can go where you choose, providing you tell all about it.

The prisoner was conquered. He had tried the mettle of his captors, and, knowing his life was at stake, he decided to save that article by confessing the whole affair, though he promptly did under Palmer's questioning. The leader of the Mexicans proved to be a noted guerrilla, named Criapo Ribera, and those who had been killed or captured had camped along the border, were not at all surprised to learn that it was upon his head that lay the blame of the crime.

Vasco Mora, being set in motion, talked freely, and in a voice suspiciously tinged with exultation, told how, when the cowboys had been stormed and taken, all the Texans had been put to death, with the exception of Churubusco, and that the mistaken idea that there was no danger of pursuit, had led the Mexicans toIoiter so fatally in their retreat.

CHAPTER IV.

BRINGING SATIN.

The Texan had listened to Mora's narrative of the massacre with compressed lips and stony face. It was not enough that three-fourths of the murderers lay dead before them; they longed to get their hands upon the others, to make them suffer as the Texan martyrs had suffered.

Edwin Talbot stood near Maxwell during the trial and said he knew every limb of the stout borderman was shaking. It was indeed a tale of horror, and it was a wonder that the avenger, in his state of mind, could maintain any semblance of calm.

His face worked convulsively, and Talbot expected to see him spring upon Mora and throttle him, but, to the Texan's surprise, he restrained himself. When Major Palmer had heard all, he made no comment, but, looking at his men, simply said:

"Remove the rope.

Maxwell stepped quickly forward and cast off the noose; then, holding it before the eyes of the prisoner, said, while a terrible look crossed his once face:

"Mexican, do you see this lasso?"

"Yes," was the sullen reply.

"The stain you see upon it is the life-blood of one of the victims of the cowboys fight. You did your part in that work, Vasco Mora, and some day I will strangle you with this same lasso.

Mora did not answer—he dared not—and Maxwell, having secured the red lasso, fell back and left the others to end the work.

"Prisoner," said Major Palmer, sternly, "you have been presented with all that you have told, and though you richly deserve death, the promise shall be sacredly kept. Turn your face toward the east and be good. When your neck is broken, you shall be shot at sight, or hung if caught. Go!"

Mora was full of yenom and brute courage, but he dared not trifle with such men as his foes. He was driven from the camp, plunged into the bushes, and was gone.

"To the saddle!" ordered Palmer, sharply, as the wretch disappeared. "Our quarry went on foot and cannot long evade us. Ford the river!"

There was a rush for 42 horses, each Ranger captured one or more of the Mexicans' steeds, and the company was at the other side in an hour.

"If we ever get out of this," said the major, looking at the captured horses, our new horse-dash will not come amiss.

"We must get out of it speedily," answered Talbot. "That Mora is full of mischief, and in a few hours he will have two hundred guerrillas on our trail."

He had looked at him sharply. He remembered that the Kentuckian had secretly whispered to Mora, and to his suspicions mind it looked as though the whisper may have meant something.

The river was soon forded, and, the way being favorable, they struck the trail of the escaped Mexicans and followed at a sharp pace. If the fugitives kept together, as they had started, they would soon be run down if no new foes appeared to oppose the avengers.

Maxwell rode near the van, as usual, his face sternly set, but his eyes反映出 deep suppressed emotion upon his saddle-pomme1 still hung the red lasso.

The way was sufficiently open for the horses to gallop at a gallop, and it was only the two of them, riding on the same horse. They advanced, and without the superior speed of the extra horses, very good progress would have been made. Maxwell suggested that a dozen men be left in charge of the animals, but Palmer would not hear to dividing his small force.

"What is ahead of us now?" he asked Talbot.

"A series of haciendas," and, I suspect from the course of the fugitives, they are making for one of them. They know, of course, that they will be pursued, and it behoves them to give us a head start.

"If they get inside a casa, our work will not be easy," said the major, thoughtfully.

"Very true, for they number dozens, and they will rally the gents about them," declared the Kentuckian.

"I hate to go back unsuccessful."

"We must not," interrupted Maxwell,
Young Kentuck.

He had been temporarily insane during the affray, but now he saw only dead Mexican about him.

"Have done escaped?" he hoarsely demanded.

"A dozen or more swim the river," said Edwin Talbot, turning from the scene of slaughter with a shudder.

"Let me know," added Maxwel, hotly.

"Wait," ordered the major. "Let me first see what we have here. Some of these men still breathe.

"Keep in!" cried Maxwell.

"No," returned Palmer, proudly, "I am a Texan, and I will not soil my hands with such work. I am no assassin, nor do I lead assassins. Your men were beaten down by fair fight, and, despite their sins, they shall receive fair treatment. We will leave them where they are and go on.

"I will not go, " said Jack Plunkett. "Strikes me that is one chicken byar who ain't dangerously killed. "Pears ter me I see'd himquot; out o' the left corner o' his eye at us."

He walked toward the man who had attracted his attention, but the fellow instantly sprung to his feet and attempted to flee. Unluckily for him, he was in the midst of his escape, and before he had taken many paces, an intercepting foot tripped him and he was seized before he could flee.

He then drew his dagger, but Jack Plunkett swung his pistol and sent the weapon flying full twenty feet.

"Go slow, you 'tarnal Greaser!" snapped the Texan.

We caught it in your head again, your heels if you don't. Consider yourself a prisoner o' war an' be decent.

The captive, who was a small, very dark Mexican of middle age, stood still, but the scowl on his low brow and the unsubdued flash of his eyes told that he was far from frightened. He was like a caged panther.

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"Who told you to refer, senor?"

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"I do not know, senor."

"You lie, sir! The idea that a soldier does not know the name of his leader!"

"Pardon, senor, but I am only a new soldier on the few of my comrades, senor."

Jack Plunkett interpellating an unbelieving grunt.

"What is your own name?"

"Sebastian Donates, senor."

"That is, a lie," interrupted Edwin Talbot.

"He is named Vasco Mora. I've seen him before."

The prisoner flashed a threatening glance at the Kentuckians.

"Look you, fellow?" cried Palmer, angrily, "you are dealing with those who will bear no subterfuge. Tell me the name of your leader."

"I know not, was the solemn reply.

"You do and, by my life, you shall tell. Once more, who is your captain?"

"Senor, I have said that I know it not. I do not lie, and I can say no more."

"You may as well say all," declared the Texan.

"Here, men, who has a lasso? We will give this hound a lesson."

Some one pushed into the center of the group, and a thick lasso was thrown over the red lasso in his hand. His lips were compressed, and as he held out the fatal coil, he spoke in an intense voice:

"Here is the lasso of the major."

"Good!" said the major, quickly. "It is fitting that this lasso, which is red with the blood of Luke Brastow, should bring his assassin to terms. Convey the dog to yonder tree."

The prisoner was dragged toward the edge of the forest. He struggled at first, but, rough usage of the Texans caused him to desist, and he stood motionless beneath the tree selected for the purpose.

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"You are a pretty man to talk of outrage! Have you been punished? I tell you, Vasco Mora, you shall hang unless you speak. Once more, who led your fiends on this raid?"

"I do not know," began the fellow, but Palmer cut him short with a stamp of his foot.

"Tighten the rope!" he commanded to his men.

The order was promptly obeyed, and Mora changed color as he felt the lasso's pressure. He began to realize that these men were in full earnest.

"Will you speak?" asked Palmer.

"I cannot tell what I do not know," was the dogged answer.

"Poo! As if there were no time to waste. Give him a taste of border justice, men!"

Willing hands pulled on the lasso, and for a moment the prisoner hung suspended in the air, struggling as only a strong man will, but he was lowered at a motion from the major. He had grown red in the face, and he gasped two or three times, as though the air was trying to escape him.

"Will you speak?" impudently asked Palmer.

Mora uttered two or three Spanish oaths and then grew more thoughtful and calm.

"What is it?"

"In that case, the whole of Mexico is before you, and free, so far as we are concerned. You can go where you choose, providing you tell all about the man, the horse, and the weapons.

The prisoner was conquered. He had tried the mettle of his captors, and, knowing his life was at stake, he decided to save that article by giving away the name of the man who had directed the affair, and, as these men were the very members of the band that had committed the crime.

The leader of the Mexicans proved to be a noted guerrilla, named Cripio Riberas, and those who had been captured and killed by the general's orders had been handed over to the Mexican government. Subsequently, on second thought, the mistaken idea that there was no danger of pursuit, had led the Mexican to loiter so fatally in their retreat.

CHAPTER IV.
BROUGHT TO RAY.

The Texans had listened to Mora's narrative of the massacre with compressed lips and scowling faces. It was not enough that three-fourths of the murderers lay dead before them; they longed to get their hands upon the others, to make them suffer as the Texan martyrs had suffered.

Edwin Talbot stood near Maxwell during the affair and he saw that every limb of the stout borderman was shivering. It was indeed a tale of horror, and it was a wonder that the avenger, in his state of mind, could maintain any sort of composure.

His face worked convulsively, and Talbot expected to see him spring upon Mora and throttle, in the Texas style, every hair upon the man's head.

When Major Palmer had heard all, he made no comment, but, looking at him, simply said:

"Remove the rope."

Maxwell stepped quickly forward and cast off the noose; then, holding it before the eyes of the prisoner, said, while a terrible look crossed his pale face:

"Mexican, do you see this lasso?"

"Yes," was the sullen reply.

"The stain you see upon it is the life-blood of one of the victims of the case fight. You did your part in that work, Vasco Mora, and some day I will strangle you with this same lasso."

Mora did not answer—he dared not—and Maxwell, having secured the red lasso, fell back and left the others to end the work.

"Prisoner," said Major Palmer, sternly, "you have been punished for what you have told, and though you richly deserve death, the promise shall be sacutely kept. Turn your face toward the east and bow your head before the lasso. You shall be shot at sight, or hung if caught. Go!"

Mora was full of Yanom and brute courage, but he dared not trifle with such men as his captors. He bowed his head before the lasso, plunged into the bushes, and was gone.

"To the saddle!" ordered Palmer, sharply, as the wretch disappeared. "Our quarry went on foot and cannot outrun us. Ford the river!"

There was a rush for the horses, each Ranger captured one or more of the Mexicans' steeds, and the Kentuckians were hard put to keep up. "If we ever get out of this," said the major, looking at the captured horses, "our new horse-dash will not come amiss."

"We must get out of it speedily," answered Talbot. "That Mora is full of mischief, and in a few hours he will have two hundred gue- rillas on our trail."

He looked at him sharply. He remem- bered that the Kentuckian had secretly whis- pered to Mora, and to his suspense it looked as though the whisper may have meant worse.

The river was soon forded, and, the way being favorable, they struck the trail of the escaped Mexicanos and followed at a sharp pace. But the fugitives kept together, as they had started, they would soon be run down if no new foes appeared to oppose the avengers.

Maxwell rode near the van, as usual, his face supplied with a well-deserved expression, and upon his saddle-pommel still hung the red lasso.

The way was sufficiently open for the horsemen to be dressed at a gallop, and only that they were incumbered by the extra horses, very good progress would have been made. Max- well suggested that a dozen men be left in charge of the animals, but Palmer would not hear to dividing his small force.

"What is ahead of us now?" he asked of Talbot.

"Accidents of haisendas, and, I suspect from the course of the fugitives, they are making for one of them. They know, of course, that they will be pursued, and it behoves them to get across and cover.

"If they get inside a casa, our work will not be easy," said the major, thoughtfully.

"By true, for they number a dozen, and they will rally the peas about them," decla- red the Kentuckian.

"I hate to go back unsuccessful."

"We must not," interrupted Maxwell,
Young Kentuck.

He had been temporarily insane during the affray, but he now saw only dead Mexican about him.

“Have done escaped?” he hoarsely demanded.

“A dozen or more swim the river,” said Edwin Talbot, turning from the scene of slaughter with a shudder.

“Leave us,” cried Maxwell, hotly.

“Wait,” ordered the major. “Let me first see what we have here. Some of these men still breathe.

“Kidnap them!” cried Maxwell.

“No,” returned Palmer, proudly, “I am a Texan, and I will not soil my hands with such work. I am no assassin, nor do I lead assassins. These men have been beaten down by fair and, despite their sins, they shall receive fair treatment. We will leave them where they are and go on.”

He turned and began to walk out Jack Plunkett.

“Strike me that is one chicken byar who ain’t dangerously killed. Pears ter me I see’d him spittin’ out o’ left corner o’ his eye at us.”

He walked toward the man who had attracted his attention, but the fellow instantly sprung to his feet and attempted to flee. Unluckily for him, he was in the midst of his struggles, and before he had taken many paces, an intercepting foot tripped him and he was seized before he could make his escape.

He then drew his dagger, but Jack Plunkett swung around and with a yell which sent the weapon flying full twenty feet.

“Go slow, you ’tarnal Greaser!” snapped Plunkett, as he caught the fellow by the neck, his heel on your head again, his feet on you don’t. Consider yourself a prisoner o’ war an’ be decent.

The captive, who was a small, very dark Mexican of middle age, stood still, but the scowl on his low brow and the unshaved flash of his eyes told that he was far from frightened. He was like a caged panther.

Major Palmer pushed forward to the man’s side.

“Senor Mexican,” he blandly said, “you are our prisoner, and we have the power to do with you as we choose, but we are merciful men and have no desire to do you violence. If you will answer the questions I shall present to your notice, you shall be well treated.

“Do you here the major?” asked the prisoner, with an undisguised sneer.

“What do you mean?” asked Palmer, curiously.

“My question was plain enough.”

“Ah yes, by Jove, shall my answer be,” was the Texan’s quick retort. “In this case, Sir Greaser, I am the major, and you shall know what I ask.”

“What would you know?”

“You were one of that gang. Why didn’t you retreat with what escaped? One of your men struck too heavily!” and the fellow grinned as he rubbed his hand across his head.

“Who led ye out gang?”

“A stooge of old Don Sebastian, refer, senor?”

“To the one which is chiefly represented there,” retorted Palmer, pointing to the Mexican dead.

“Of course not, senor.”

“You lie, sir! The idea that a soldier does not know the name of his leader!”

Pardon, senor, but I am only a new soldier. I carry but too few of my comrades, senor.”

Jack Plunkett interjected an unbellying grunt.

“What is your own name?”

“Sebastian Donates, senor.”

“That is a lie,” interrupted Edwin Talbot.

“Has he been captured?”

He is named Vasco Mora. I’ve seen him before.

The prisoner flashed a threatening glance at the Kentuckians.

“Look you, fellow?” cried Palmer, angrily, “you are dealing with those who will bear no subterfuge. Tell me the name of your leader.”

“I know not,” was the sullen reply.

“You do and, by my life, you shall tell. Once more, who is your captain?”

“Senor, I have said that I knew it not. I do not lie, and I can say no more.”

“You dare not lie,” declared the Texan.

“Here, men, who has a lasso? We will give this hound a lesson.”

Some one pushed into the center of the group, which now included Plunkett standing with the red lasso in his hand. His lips were compressed, and as he held out the fatal cord, he spoke in an intense voice:

“Here is one lasso!”

“Good!” said the major, quickly. “It is fitting that this lasso, which is red with the blood of Luke Brastow, should bring his arms to terms. Convey the dog to yonder trees.”

The prisoner was dragged towards the edge of the forest. He struggled at first, but soon was over a limb and seized by the lowering men, and the wicket stood on precarious footing.

“Now, Vasco Mora,” cried Palmer, “you must speak or die. Take your choice!”

“I protest against this outrage,” and the Mexican’s eyes flashed with fury.

“You are a pretty man to talk of outrage! Have you seen my horses? I tell you, Vasco Mora, you shall hang unless you speak. Once more, who led your friends on this raid?”

“I do not know!” began the fellow, but Palmer cut him short with a stamp of his foot.

“Tighten the rope!” he commanded to his men.

The order was promptly obeyed, and Mora changed color as he felt the lasso’s pressure. He began to realize that these men were in full earnest.

“Will you speak?” Palmer asked.

“I cannot tell what I do not know,” was the dogged answer.

“Food! You have no time to waste. Give him a taste of border justice, men!”

Willing hands pulled on the lasso, and for a moment the prisoner hung suspended in the air, struggling as only a strong man will, but he was lowered at a motion from the major. He had grown red in the face, and he gasped two or three times, as though the air was trying to enter his lungs. He was tired, under the impelling strain.

“Will you speak?” implacably asked Palmer.

Mora uttered two or three Spanish oaths and then grew more thoughtful and calm.

“What led ye out gang?”

“In that case, the whole of Mexico is before you, and free, so far as we are concerned. You can go where you choose, providing you tell all about the gang.”

The prisoner was conquered. He had tried the mettle of his captors, and, knowing his life was at stake, he decided to save that article by an easy surrender, or a simple denial which he promptly did under Palmer’s questioning.

The leader of the Mexicans proved to be a noted guerrilla, named Criepo Ribera, and those who had escaped had been caught on the rapine along the border, were not at all surprised to learn that it was upon his head that lay the blame of the case tragedy.

Vasco Mora, beside being set in motion, talked freely, and in a voice suspiciously tinged with exultation, told how, when the casas had been stormed and taken, all the Texans had been put to the sword. But he had since been persuaded that the mistake idea that there was no danger of pursuit, had led the Mexicans to loiter so fatally in their retreat.

CHAPTER IV.

BROUGHAM BAY.

The Texans had listened to Mora’s narrative of the massacre with compressed lips and scowling faces. It was not enough that three-fourths of the murderers lay dead before them; they longed to get their hands upon the others, to make them suffer as the Texan martyrs had suffered.

Edwin Talbot stood near Maxwell during the discussion, and he saw that every limb of the stout borderman was shaking. It was indeed a tale of horror, and it was a wonder that the avenger, in his state of mind, could maintain any composure of mind.

His face worked convulsively, and Talbot expected to see him spring upon Mora and throttle him, the Texas sword ready.

While Major Palmer had heard all, he made no comment, but, looking at his men, simply said:

“Remove the rope.”

Maxwell stepped quickly forward and cast off the noose; then, holding it before the eyes of the prisoner, said, while a terrible look crossed his face:

“Mexican, do you see this lasso?”

“Yes,” was the sullen reply.

“The stain you see upon it is the life-blood of one of the victims of the casas fight. You did your part in that work, Vasco Mora, and some day I will strangle you with this same lasso.”

Mora did not answer—he dared not—and Maxwell, havingsecured the red lasso, fell back and left the others to end the work.

“Prisoner,” said Major Palmer, sternly, “you have been pressed for force and you have given what you have told, and though you richly deserve death, the promise shall be sacredly kept. Turn your face toward the east and be good, whether we hang you, or shall be shot at sight, or hung if caught.”

Mora was full of venem and brute courage, but he dared not trifle with such a man as his buccaneers. We plunged into the bushes, and was gone.

“To the saddle!” ordered Palmer, sharply, as the wretch disappeared. “Our quarry was on foot, and cannot long evade us. Ford the river!”

There was a rush for 14 horses, each Ranger captured one or more of the Mexicans’ steeds, and the party was soon in the river.

“If we ever get out of this,” said the major looking at the captured horses, “our new horse-deal will not come amiss.”

“We must get out of it speedily,” answered Talbot. “That Mora is full of mischief, and in a few hours he will have two hundred guerrillas on our trail.”

He looked at him sharply. He remembered that the Kentuckian had secretly whisper to Mora, and to his suspicions mind it looked as though the whisper may have meant very much.

The river was soon forded, and, the way being favorable, they struck the trail of the escaped Mexicans and followed at a sharp pace. As the fugitives kept together, as they had started, they would soon be run down if no new facts appeared to oppose the avengers.

Maxwell rode near the van, as usual, his face supplied with a look of suppressed fury, and his eyes fixed upon his saddle-pommel still hung the red lasso.

The way was sufficiently open for the horsemen to be spread at a gallop, and if any of them were incumbered by the extra horses, very good progress would have been made. Maxwell suggested that a dozen men be left in charge of the animals, but Palmer would not hear to dividing his small force.

“What is ahead of us now?” he asked Talbot.

“After a series of haciendas, and, I suspect from the course of the fugitives, they are making for one of them. They know, of course, that they will be pursued, and it behoves them to gain speed and cover.”

“If they get inside a casa, our work will not be easy,” said the major, thoughtfully.

“It’s very true, for they number a dozen, and they will rally the peasants about them,” declared the Kentuckian.

“I hate to go back unsuccessful.”

“We must not,” interrupted Maxwell.
sharply. "How can you harbor such a thought until our dead are avenged, sir?"

Palmer looked significantly at Talbot and tooted. "You know that moment the band swept into an open field and the conversation ceased as they saw a broad hacienda with the usual style of Mexican house, or casa, in the distance.

At the further side of the field, cattle and horses were seen grazing, but no human being was visible.

"Palmer's pantry is there," said Talbot, pointing to the house. "They have found friends, and, even in so short a time, the peons have called in, and the casa is quiet in order for defense.

Palmer looked thoughtfully at the dwelling. He was not a boastful man, and, though he had purloined his men upon their place in a determined assault, its stony appearance made him rather uncertain as to the result. He guessed so long as Maxwell grew impatient.

"Time is precious, major," said the avenger. "We will ride to the gate and see who is within," said the officer, arouses. "Follow me.

They crossed the field at a smart trot and rode unopposed to the gate. No sign had yet been seen of human beings, but a sharp pounding was soon brought an answer.

It came from above, and, looking upward, they saw a man standing on the top of the wall. He was a Mexican, and his appearance was somewhat imposing. He was plain, not handsome, but, with a large, white face, he gave a marked appearance.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he curtly demanded of Maxwell's group.

"Pardon our intrusions, senor," explained the avenger. "We are in haste, sir. We have not come as your enemies, but for information. We are seeking men who we think may be of service to us. You have seen farm,

"Will you allow me to enter and ask you questions?"

"No, not of your free will, I trust, senor."

"And why need?"

"Because he is not one whom you should shelter.

"And why should I not shelter a soldier of Mexico?"

"You would be justified in doing this, but I am not a soldier. He is an ex-outlaw, a guerrilla and a murderer. His own crimes have brought us to his heels, and he is deserving of no mercy.

"If you set upon him like cowards when he was burying his dead, instead of attacking like a soldier and a man!"

"You may be right, senor, but I have no time to explain.

"Don't you see an eye and a tooth to a tooth. Ask him how died the Texans in the lone casa? Brave men do not hang their prisoners!"

"We are Texans and all Texans are dogs," declared the haciendero.

An angry mummer went up from the Rangers and there was an ominous clicking of rifles. The situation was filled with the word from Palmer stayed the hands of his men.

The aged Mexican smiled coldly. "Senor," said the major, earnestly. "Let us take time to explain. We are butavengers, our comrades and we seek for vengeance.

Surely, you will not shelter the ex-outlaw from our hands?

"He is a soldier of Mexico and I shall shelter him," was the steady reply. "Then, by my life, we will tear down every stone of this house!" hotly cried the major.

"Begin at once," was the unmoveable answer. "Where is Ribera? Let me speak to him."

"I am spokesman here, Captain Ribera hears every word you say, but you must talk to me.

"Is he afraid to show his worthless head?"

"Speak not of the lion until he is dead. I tell you I am master of this case, and I am Don Eduardo del Rio y Savannah."

CHAPTER V.
THE ATTACK.

Perhaps the haciendero expected his imposing name to strike a chill to the hearts of the Texans, but they were made of stern material. Palmer was only calculating how he could best get at the guerrillas. If he could have secured them, he would have gone away from the casa without lifting a finger against the old don or his property, but trouble seemed inevitable.

"Senor," he continued, after a pause, "do you fully understand the circumstances of this case?"

"Captain Ribera has told me all," "And you refuse to surrender him?"

"Yes, senor."

"In that case, our quarrel becomes against you, all, outlaw, man and master."

"I am listening, senor."

"Are you blind to the fact that two-score soldiers are a joke compared to our sixty?"

"I care nothing for them. Fifteen soldiers and fifty peons are inside my gates, all well armed. On such terms we could whip you easily, and, with the stout walls about us, we laugh at your rage."

Palmer was somewhat startled, but he was not one to yield humbly. He knew it would be hard to storm the casa with such a force within, but it must be done or Ribera would escape his vengeance.

"Think not, Don Eduardo. We have not come as your enemies, and we mean you no harm, but we must capture the guerrillas. Think what harm we can do to you if you force us to be destructive.

He pointed to the horses and cattle grazing on the surrounding fields, and Edwin Talbot thought he saw a shade of annoyance cross the old man's face, but the answer came promptly enough:

"A patriot never counts his herds."

"There is no patriotism in sheltering a rufian like him, or in being found, in disgust, in ill-will, water, for instance, would hit us plum-center, and I don't banker ter become a l mocker."

"You are right, and we will fall back a little."

Watch the walls, boys, and if you see a rifle with a head above it, get in the first shot for the glory of the Lone Star."

The Rangers retreated a hundred yards, and Palmer gathered them together about him for consultation. How to get into the dwelling became the question, but ways and means seemed lacking. The gate could not be beaten down, nor could the old man be forced, and Don Eduardo seemed well justified in making his boast.

What could be done? Time with them was precious, for they were in the enemies' country and a superior force might at any time arrive. What was to be done must be done quickly.

"We will stand and gnaw his lips until the blood seemed on the point of bursting through. His hatred foe was within a few rods of him, but for the time he was safe from his vengeance, and the knowledge made it maddening.

"What shall we do?"

Palmer asked the question, looking at Talbot and the owner of the red beard, but they did not give a prompt answer. He is not as cunning as a Roman, despite his boast, to lose all self-control.

"How can we use them?"

"Drive every horse and horned creature near to the casa, and then slaughter them one by one until the gates are opened and Ribera is taken."

This project created a ripple among the Texans, and Talbot's doubts were somewhat staggered. The proposition was not one a trained man would naturally advance.

"Would it work?" questioned Palmer, half to himself.

Maxwell uttered an impatient exclamation. "Surely it cannot be done, half of Mexico would be howling at our heels. Our only hope is to storm the place," he declared.

"What is your plan for getting inside?"

Talbot asked the Kentuckian quickly.

Maxwell hesitated, or he had no feasible plan.

"If we only had ladders," said Palmer, slowly.

"We kin get over that snar," averted Jack Plunkett. "There is plenty of scrub-trees in the woods, an' with the limbs properly cut, it would be a poor coward that couldn't scale the wall. They would be nigh about as good as ladders.

"Bravo!" responded Palmer; "why didn't we think of it before? Take a dozen men, Jack, and go for the walls."

The detachment galloped toward the trees, but the major saw by a glance at Talbot's face that he did not see it very favorably. He was asked why he doubted.

"It may succeed," admitted the Kentuckian, "but I am to confess I fear a failure. That man Don Eduardo is a first rate man of pieces in side, besides the guerrillas—Don Eduardo put the combined force at sixty-five—and they will use every effort to repel us. They will haul down our ladders, and the moment our heads appear above the wall, they will become the target for bullet or club, according as our enemies are armed."

The major admitted Maxwell, impatiently, "but I trust we have no cowards here. We have dared too many things before to turn pale at this one."

The major redressed at this imputation of cowardly, but the major did not give him a chance to answer.

"It will be a hard fight, undoubtedly, but it looks to me as a chance between that and the abandoning of our work. What is the sentiment of our band?"

Smother the house if it takes a score of us. Nothing will be left to the enemy. All the Rangers added their voices to the cry.

Palmer looked pleased, but the suspicious eyes of the last speaker had seen that the Kentuckian did not take it kindly, to him. It seemed proof of worse than timidity.

"Why do you oppose the plan, Mister Talbot?" he pointedly asked.

"I do not oppose it, said the other, calmly. "I merely say I feared it would not succeed.
"How can you harbor such a thought until our dear are avenged, sir?"

"I am as eager for vengeance as any here, but I must not sacrifice this beloved home," the officer kindly. "I am such a man that moment the band swept into an open field and the conversation ceased as they saw a broad hacienda with the usual style of Mexican house, or casa, in the background.

At the further side of the field, cattle and horses were seen grazing, but no human being was visible.

"Páramo is there," said Talbot, pointing to the house. "They have found friends, and, even in so short a time, the peons have called, and the casa put in order for defense.

"Páramo thoughtfully at the dwelling. He was not a boastful man, and, though he pursed his lips upon his mouth in a deliberate way, his presence in the room made the visitor uncertain as to the result.

He gazed so long that Maxwell grew impatient."

"Time is precious, major," said the avenger. "We will ride to the gate and see who is within," said the officer, rising. "Follow me.

"They crossed the field at a smart trot and rode unopposed to the gate. No sign had yet been seen of human beings, but a sharp pounding of hoofs at the door brought an answer.

It came from above, and, looking upward, they saw a man standing on the top of the wall. He was a Mexican, and his appearance was somewhat impressive. He was plumply of nobility, and his rich dress, proud bearing, and long, white hair gave him a marked appearance.

"Who are you who dares this punging?" he curtly demanded on meeting Palmer's gaze.

"Fardon our impatience, señor," explained the Texan, politely, "but we are in haste. We have not come as your enemies, but for information. We are seeking men who we have taken refuge here, and I wish to know if you have seen them.

"Upon whom do you refer?" was the terse question.

"To the guerrilla, Ribera, and his men."

"Captain Ribera is within this casa," the man answered curtly.

"Not of your free will, I trust, señor."

"And why not?"

"Because he is not one whom you should shelter.

"And why should I not shelter a soldier of Mexico?"

"You would be justified in doing this, but Ribera is not a soldier. He is an ex-outlaw, a guerrilla and a murderer. His own crimes have brought us to his heels, and he is deserving of no mercy.

"Let me set him upon the world as an example of the way in which his errors may be disinterested."

"A patriot never counts his herds."

"There is no patriotism in sheltering a rufian like he is."

"Well, señor, if your business with me is done, I will retire," said the haciendero.

"It is only begun, but if you are resolved to play the part of a scoundrel, I give you one more chance to surrender the outlaw, and if you refuse, every stick and stone of this infernal ranch shall come down!"

"Begin when you see fit. Adios, señor."

And with this bland farewell, Don Eduardo del Rio y Savannah disappeared from view.

The Texans looked disappointed at each other, and Jack Talbot muttered a shot of disapproval.

"I don't like our quarters, major. Them prison creators kin do us a deal o' harm if we stay long."

"Let us have a word with Mr. Tifft about him for consultation. How to get into the dwelling became the question, but ways and means seemed lacking. The gate could not be broken down, nor could the door be opened, and Don Eduardo seemed well justified in making his boast.

What could be done? Time with them was precious, for they were in the enemies' country and a superior force might at any time arrive. What was to be done must be done quickly.

The night stood and gnawed his lips until the blood seemed on the point of bursting through. His hatred was within a few rods of him, but for the time he was safe from his vengeance, and the knowledge was soothing.

"What shall we do?"

Palmer asked the question, looking at Talbot and the owner of the red hoss, but they did not immediately promulgate an answer.

"We can not delay," continued the leader. "If we give them time to gain aid, they are saved and we may be annihilated.

"We must go on the run, out of here, hotly."

"We have been under its walls, but we saw not way to get further," was Palmer's reminder.

Talbot looked thoughtfully at the live stock of the hacienda.

"Can we gain a point by using them?" he asked. Don Eduardo was touched when he spoke of them; he was not made a Roman, despite his boast, to lose all selfishness.

"How can we use them?"

"Drive every horse and horned creature near to the casa, and then slaughter them one by one until the gates are opened and Ribera is swallowed."

This project created a ripple among the Texans, and Talbot's doubts were somewhat staggered. The proposition was not one a trained mind would naturally advance.

"Would it work?" questioned Palmer, half to himself.

Maxwell uttered an impatient exclamation. "It will not be done, half of Mexico would be howling at our heels. Our only hope is to storm the place," he declared.

"What is your plan for getting inside?" asked the Kentuckian quickly.

Maxwell hesitated, for he had no feasible plan.

"If we only had ladders," said Palmer, slowly.

"We kin get over that snag," avowed Jack Plunkett. "Thar is plenty o' scrub-trees in the woods, an' with the limbs properly cut, it would be a poor ladder that couldn't scale the wall. They would be nigh about as good as ladders."

"Bravo!" responded Palmer; "why didn't we think of it before? Take a dozen men, Jack, and go for the sculls."

The detachment galloped toward the trees, but the major saw by a glance at Talbot's face that he did not consider it a very favorable. He was asked why he doubted.

"It may succeed," admitted the Kentuckian, "but I am too much of a coward to fear a failure. There is no lack of courage on the part of people inside, besides the guerrillas—Don Eduardo put the combined force at sixty-five—and they will use every effort to repel us. They will haul down our ladders, and the moment our heads appear above the wall, they will become the target for bullet or club, according as our enemies are armed."

A moment's hesitation, "I permitted Maxwell, impatiently, "but I trust we have no cowards here. We have dared too many things to turn pale at this one."

The riders reddened at this imputation of cowardice, but the major did not give him a chance to answer.

"It will be a hard fight, undoubtedly, but it looks to me like a chance between that and the abandoning of our work. What is the sentiment of our band?"

"Storm the house if it takes a score of men. We will be all right, and the Rangers added their voices to the cry."

Palmer looked pleased, but the suspicious eyes of the last speaker had seen that the Kentuckian was busily making himself agreeable to him; it seemed proof of worse than timidity.

"Why do you oppose the plan, Mister Talbot?" he pointedly asked.

"I do not oppose it, said the other, calmly. "I merely say I feared it would not succeed."
sharpness. "How can you harbor such a thought until our dead are avenged, sir?"

"Then, by my life, we will tear down every stone of this house!" hotly cried the mayor.

"Begin at once," was the unmoved answer.

"Where is Ribera? Let me speak to him."

"I am spokesman here. Captain Ribera hears every word you say, but you must talk to me."

"He is afraid to show his worthless head!"

"Speak not of the lion until he is dead. I tell you I am master of this case, and I am Don Eduardo del Rio y Savannah.

CHAPTER V.

THE ATTACK.

Perhaps the hacendado expected his imposing name to strike a chill to the hearts of the Texans, but they were made of stern material. Palmer was doing all in his power to make it plain to the hacendado how he could best get at the guerrillas. If he could have secured them, he would have gone away from the case without lifting a finger against the old don or his property, but trouble seemed inevitable. "Senor," he continued, after a pause, "do you fully understand the circumstances of this case?"

"Captain Ribera has told me all."

"And you refuse to surrender him?"

"Yes."

"In that case, our quarrel becomes against you all, outlaw, man and master."

"I am listening, senor."

"Are you blind to the fact that two-score soldiers are at this moment in the woods, and that we are on the very verge of national disgrace?"

"I care nothing for them. Fifteen soldiers and fifty peons are inside my gates, all well armed. On your part, we can whip you easily, and, with the stout walls about us, we laugh at your rage."

Palmer was somewhat staggered, but he was not one to yield tamely. He knew it would be hard to storm the cases with such a force within, but it must be done or Ribera would escape his vengeance.

"Think again, Don Eduardo. We have not come as your enemies, and we mean you no harm, but we must capture the guerrillas. Think what harm we can do to you if you force us to do destructive service."

He pointed to the horses and cattle grazing on the surrounding fields, and Edwin Talbot thought he saw a shade of annoyance cross the old man's face, but the answer came promptly enough:

"A patriot never counts his herds."

"There is no patriotism in sheltering a rufian like him."

"Well, senor, if your business with me is done, I will retire," said the hacendado.

"It is only begun, but if you are resolved to play that game you choose. Give me one more chance to surrender the outlaws, and if you refuse, everything in stone and wood of this infernal ranch shall come down!"

"Begin when you see fit. Adios, senor."

And with this bluard farewell, Don Eduardo del Rio y Savannah disappeared from view.

The Texans looked disapprovingly at each other, and Jack Talbot uttered a snort of disapproval.

"I don't like our quarters, major. These prison cretins kin do us a deal o' harm if we stay long."

"Water, water, for instance, would hit us plumb-center, and I don'tanker ter become a lobster."

"You are right, and we will fall back a little. We will watch the walls, boys, and if you see a rifle with a head above it, get in the first shot for the glory of the Lone Star,"

The Rangers retreated a hundred yards, and Palmer gathered Talbot about him for consultation. How to get into the dwelling became the question, but ways and means seemed lacking. The gate could not be broken down, nor the wall, and Don Eduardo seemed well justified in making his boast.

What could be done? Time with them was precious, for they were in the enemies' country and a superior force might at any time arrive. What was to be done must be done quickly.

We stood still and gnawed his lips until the blood seemed on the point of bursting through. His hated foe was within a few rods of him, but for the time he was safe from his vengeance, and the knowledge was maddening.

"What shall we do?"

Palmer asked the question, looking at Talbot and the owner of the red hose, but they did not answer. A profound blush crept over the hot cheek, and the hot cheek, and the

"We can not delay," continued the leader."

"If we give them time to gain aid, they are saved and we may be annihilated."

"We should be on the road, but we saw no way to get further," was Palmer's reminder.

"Then Talbot looked thoughtfully at the live stock of the hacendado.

"Can we gain a point by using them?" he asked.

"Don Eduardo was touched when he spoke of them; he is not more of a Roman, despite his boast, to lose all selfishness."

"How can we use them?"

"Drive every horse and horned creature near to the coast, and then slaughter them one by one until the gates are opened and Ribera is overthrown," added the leader.

This project created a ripple among the Texans, and Talbot's doubters were somewhat staggered. The proposition was not one a trader would naturally advance.

"Would it work?" questioned Palmer, half to himself.

Maxwell uttered an impatient exclamation.

"If it could be done, half of Mexico would be bowling at our heels. Our only hope is to storm the place," he declared.

"What is your plan for getting inside?"

"The Kentuckian, quickly."

Maxwell hesitated, but he had no feahter-plan.

"If we only had ladders, said Palmer, slowly.

"We kin get over that snag," avouched Jack Plunkett. "There is plenty o' scrub-trees in the woods, and wit' the limbs properly cut, it would be a poor crane that couldn't scale the wall. They would be nigh about as good as ladders."

"Bravo!" responded Palmer; "why didn't we think of it before! Take a dozen men, Jack, and go for the snags.

The detachment galloped toward the trees, but the major saw by a glance at Talbot's face that he did not look very favorably. He was asked why he doubted.

"It may succeed," admitted the Kentuckian, "but I am sure to confess I fear a failure. The Texans are composed of peas in side, besides the guerrillas—Don Eduardo put the combined force at sixty-five—and they will use every effort to repel us. They will haul down our ladders, and the moment our heads appear above the wall, they will become the target for bullet or club, according as our enemies are armed.

"I am sure you omitted Maxwell, impatiently, but I trust we have no cowards here. We have dared too many things to turn pale at this one."

The major reddened at this imputation of cowar
dice, but the major did not give him a chance to answer.

"It will be a hard fight, undoubtedly, but it looks to me like a choice between that and the abandoning of our work. What is the sentiment of our band?"

"Storm the house if it takes a score of men to do it, but let us all the Rangers added their voices to the cry.

Palmer looked pleased, but his suspicious eyes of the last speaker had seen that the Ken
tuckian's manner was not that of a man who, to him, it seemed proof of worse than timidity.

"Why do you oppose the plan, Mister Talbot?" he pointedly asked.

"I do not oppose it, said the others, calmly.

"I merely said I feared it would not succeed."
Then, by my life, we will tear down every stone of this house!” hotly cried the major.

"Begin at once," was the unmoved answer.

"Where is Ribera? Let me speak to him." "I am spokesman here, Captain Ribera hears every word you say, but you must talk to me."

"Is he afraid to show his worthless head?"

"Speak not of the lion until he is dead. I tell you I am master of this ca
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"Senor," he continued, after a pause, "do you fully understand the circumstances of this case?"

"Captain Ribera has told me all."

"And you refuse to surrender him?"

"Yes."

"In that case, our quarrell becomes against you all, outlaw, man and master."

"I am listening, senor."

"Are you blind to the fact that two-score soldiers are a match for those you have against you?

"I care nothing for them. Fifteen soldiers and fifty peasants are inside my gates, all well armed. On occasion we could whip you easily, and, with the stout walls about us, we laugh at your rage."

Palmer was somewhat staggered, but he was not one to yield tamely. He knew it would be hard to storm the ca
e with such a force within, but it must be done or Ribera would escape their vengeance.

"Then the hours are dark, don Eduardo. We have not come as your enemies, and we mean you no harm, but we must capture the guerrillas. Think what harm we can do to you if you force us to be destructive."

He pointed to the horses and cattle grazing on the surrounding fields, and Edwin Talbot thought he saw a shade of annoyance cross the old man's face, but the answer came promptly enough:

"A patriot never counts his herds."

"There is no patriotism in sheltering a ruf

fian like him. If I have a cord of wood, I will use it against you."

"Well, senor, if your business with me is done, I will retire," said the hacendado.

"It is only begun, but if you are resolved to play the coward you will suffer in consequence. I give you one more chance to surrender the outlaws, and if you refuse, every stick and stone of this infernal ranch shall come down!"

"Begin when you see fit. Adios, senor."

And with this blaud farewell, Don Eduardo del Rio y Savannah disappeared from view.

The Texans looked disappointed at each other, and on Jack Funke hastened a sniff of disapproval.

"I don't like our quarters, major. Them prison creetors kin do us a deal o' harm ef we stay here.

"It's dry, o' course, water, for instance, would hit us plum' center, an' I don'tanker ter become a lobster."

"You are right, and we will fall back a little.

"Watch the walls, boys, and if you see a rifle with a head above it, get in the first shot for the glory of the Lone Star."

The Rangers retreated a hundred yards, and Palmer gathered his men together about him for consultation. How to get into the dwelling became the question, but ways and means seemed lacking. The gate could not be beaten down, nor could the hacienda be entered, and Don Eduardo seemed well justified in making his boast.

What could be done? Time with them was precious, for they were in the enemies' coun
try and a superior force might at any time ar
rive. What was to be done must be done quickly.

We all stood and gnawed his lips until the blood seemed on the point of bursting through. His hatred was within a few rods of him, but for the time he was safe from his vengeance, and the knowledge of impending danger.

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"If it can be done, half of Mexico would be howling at our heels. Our only hope is to storm the place," he declared.

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"Ask the Kentuckian, quickly."

Maxwell hesitated, as he had no feasibil

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"We kin get over that snag," averred Jack Plunkett. "There is plenty o' scrub-trees in the woods, an' with the limbs properly cut, it would be a poor critter that couldn't scale the wall. They would be nigh as good as good as ladders."

"Bravo!" responded Palmer; "why didn't we think of it before? Take a dozen men, Jack, and go for the snarls."

The detachment galloped toward the trees, but the major saw by a glance at Talbot's face that he did not put the plan very favorably. He was asked why he doubted.

"It may succeed," admitted the Kentuckian,

"but I am true to confess I fear a failure. Those nigger boys, an' the cowards, an' the cowards, in side, besides the guerrillas—Don Eduardo put the combined force at sixty-five—and they will use every effort to repel us. They will come at our flank and the other, and in a dash they heads appear above the wall, they will become the target for bullet or club, according as our enemies are armed."

"We acceded Maxwell, impatiently, "but I trust we have no cowards here. We have dared too many things to turn pale at this one."

The men reddened at this imputation of cow
ardice, but the major did not give him a chance to answer.

"It will be a hard fight, undoubtedly, but it looks to me like a choice between that and the abandoning of our work. What is the sentiment of our band?"

Storno the house if it takes a score of men, or what is it, Major, and all the Rangers added their voices to the cry.

Palmer looked pleased, but the suspicious eyes of the last speaker had seen that the Kentuckians' eyes were directed to him. It seemed proof of worse than timidity.

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bot?" be pointedly asked.

"I don't oppose it, said the other, calmly.

"I merely said I feared it would not succeed.
CHAPTER VI.

THE RESULT.

The improvised ladders had been well placed, and the Rangers went successfully up until their heads reached the top of the wall. Then, as they had expected, trouble began.

Like a flash the wall became lined with human beings, and it was made little resistance, while the besieged had every advantage. In some cases they seized the saplings and hurled them at the invaders, and in others their clubs descended with terrible force on the heads and arms of the Rangers.

Ordinary men would have turned and fled at once, but not so the Rangers; though they were made of stern stuff. They had come to conquer, and like tigers they endeavored to gain the wall.

Every one of the devoted band was a hard fighter. We might single out men like Maxwell, Finkler and Palmer and say they fought well, but they did not more than the rest. All were in the same battle shape; and, when men fell with the falling saplings, it was only to rush again to the attack.

Edwin Talbot, however, had said well when he shouted: "The wall is our fortress; we will not work for, gallantly as the Rangers tried, they found the resistance more than they could subdue.

Major Palmer saw that the battle was going against his command, and that they were losing men without doing the enemy any damage; and he ordered a撤退.

They went slowly and systematically, for there was no chance that the Mexicans would make a rally. This would have pleased the Rangers well, but the gates were not opened.

Every one of the fallen men were borne away, and a later examination showed four men killed, two with broken arms, and at least a dozen with scalp wounds of more or less severity.

"This is a bad business," said Palmer, sadly. "Do you order us back?" asked Maxwell, boldly.

"Because it was madness to continue the assault," answered the major, unheeding the wide respect shown his office.

"I don't know of anything more than to retreat."

"Would it have avenged our comrades if you had died?" was the calm answer.

"We would have gone over that wall sooner or later," persisted the avenger.

"It couldn't be, because the major was right in leaving!"

The end was not yet, said Palmer. "In an hour it will be dark, and a second attempt may succeed better than this."

"New ideas come in handy now," added Jack Plunkett. "And all of our boys saved!" asked the major.

"Count our force!"

This was easily done, but an investigation showed one man missing. Perhaps he had been left behind the wall.

"No," said Nelson, quickly. "There was nobody left. Perhaps the name of the absent man may give you an idea. Where is Mister Edwin Talbot?"

Those who heard the question looked around for the Kentuckian, but he was not to be seen. When the major had said Nelson, "for he ain't here. He is gone, and I'll bet my rifle he is inside the case."

"Er, he is," said another man, "he has deserted."

"You have hit the case plump-center," declared Nelson. "Talbot has gone to his home. Best of course it was very easy for him to crawl over the wall in the mists, when he had friends inside, and that is just what he has done!"

"I don't believe it," said Jack Plunkett.

"Er, he is a gentleman," persisted Nelson.

"There is a chance for a difference of opinion."

"Go slow," advised the veteran. "We all know he has deserted, Nelson, but I can't call him his friend, an' the man who says Ed Talbot is a traitor, until it is proved, has got ter fight me."

The bold speech of the bordermen could not be misunderstood, but Nelson, brave as he was, did not care to quarrel with the hardest fighter in the band. To the earth, went the major, to the rescue and calmed the disputants. He had regarded Edwin as a true man, and though appearances were decidedly against him, he would regard him as such until he was proven guilty.

In any case, there must be no quarrelling among the men of the band. Palmer proceeded to reduce the matter to a system. Guards were stationed at intervals along the edge of the hacienda to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements for the enemy; and the officers collected and proceeded to discuss ways and means of carrying out the puré proposition.

The shades of night were already falling, and after dark their movements would be concealed from the besieged, but victory was still likely to evade their grasp.

Maxwell stood apart from the others and leaned against a post as a thoughtless lock on his stern face. In all his wild life he had never been so anxious to accomplish a purpose and his fertile brain was busy.

During the lull in the battle, events of interest were transpiring inside the castle, and to that place we will now conduct the reader.

When Nelson charged Edwin Talbot with treachery, the Kentuckian had been on the lookout for the Mexican general in his present misfortune.

At one time in the assault, when he was fighting with remarkable energy, he saw an open space in the line of his enemies and succeeded in mounting to the top of the wall.

If he could have held the place for a moment it would have been a fine road for the Texans, but, just as he struck down a guerrilla, a stout peon seized him by the leg, and, after a brief struggle, both fell off the wall together amid the cheers of theHacienda.

The fall was a hard one, and only that the peon struck underwear, Talbot's career might have ended then and there, and, as it was, he was severely wounded.

When he regained consciousness several men were standing around him, one of whom was easily recognizable as Don Eduardo, while a second wore the dress of a Mexican officer. The latter was undoubtedly the noted Cripto Rincon. "He still lives," said the haciendero, "the Americans have been deceived." "Dash another bucket of water upon his head," he added. "Hold!" cried the Kentuckian. "There is no reason why you should plug me, I am well enough."

"Then let us fix our regard upon Captain Ribeiro."

The noted guerrilla was not a looking man. He had a muscular form a proof of his having made the dangers of war to a soldier.

"Well," said Don Eduardo, sarcastically, "do you comprise the force with which the Texans propose to subdue us?"

"I seem to be the only representative of the Kentuckian replied, rather lugubriously, "You are all that will come here."

"My Talbot did not answer.

"They still fight," said the haciendero, looking upward. "We may be wanted elsewhere. Captain. What shall we do with our prisoners?"

Ribeiro raised his hand in the air. "Dead men tell no tales," he coldly answered.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTIVITY.

The manner of the guerrilla was not calculated to please the prisoner, but it seemed not to have heard the reply. Ribeiro turned a thoughtful gaze from Talbot to the other prisoners.

"You will not have a future," he said, "for use for this fellow.

How so?"

"We will hold him prisoner, and, by it, to save ourselves."

He nodded, "the interval, the invader. Talbot to his feet and conducted him across the court. He knew therapeutically of resistance and went with them with repulse out of the door.

They crossed the court and entered the casement proper, where the prisoner was at once conducted to a room which had little likeness to almost anything that it was to be his prison quarters, was soon proved.

One of the peons went away and the others proceeded to bind his hands with a stout cord.

Amiable man, knowing the uselessness of a remonstrance, but a faint smile hovered for a moment on his face at what he thought the extreme caution of the slave. His situation was explained, however, soon proved.

The absent peon returned, and with him came three ladies, or, perhaps we might better say, two ladies and one female peon.

Evidently made familiar with what had been occurring, the ladies walked in, the men hastened away, and, when Talbot was left with more interesting guards, he was conducted to a room which had little likeness to almost anything that it was to be his prison quarters, was soon proved.

The absent peon returned, and with him came three ladies, or, perhaps we might better say, two ladies and one female peon.

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CHAPTER VI.
THE RESULT.

The improvised ladders had been well placed, and the Rangers went successfully up until their heads reached the top of the wall. Then, as they had expected, trouble began. Like a flash the wall became lined with human beings, and it was made little resistance, while the besieged had every advantage. In some cases they seized the saplings and hurled them at the attackers, and in others their clubs descended with terrible force on the heads and arms of the Rangers.

Ordinary men would have turned and fled at once, believing themselves outgunned; but the Texas was made of stern stuff. They had come to conquer, and like tigers they endeavored to gain the wall.

Every one in the devoted band was a hard fighter. We might single out men like Max- well, Pinker and Palmer and say they fought well, but they did no more than the rest. All were working as a barrier; and, when a man fell with the falling saplings, it was only to rush again to the attack. Edwin Talbot, however, had said well when he bade them do their best and place not less than gallant as the Rangers tried, they found the resistance more than they could subdue.

One of them had fallen dead or stunned to the ground below, and few remained who had not received a blow on the head or arm of suggestive force. Plainly the assault would not succeed.

Major Palmer saw that the battle was going against his command, and that they were losing men without doing the enemy any dam- age. He knew they could not hold the wall.

They went slowly and systematically, for there was no chance that the Mexicans would make a sally. This would have pleased the Rangers well, but the gates were not opened.

Every one of the fallen men were borne away, and a later examination showed four men killed, two with broken arms, and at least a dozen with scalp wounds of more or less se- rious.

"This is a bad business," said Palmer, sadly. "What did you order us back?" asked Maxwell, sharply.

"Because it was madness to continue the as- suault," answered the major, unleashing the weapon he possessed.

I were too late than to re- sist.

"Would it have avenged our comrades if you had died?" was the calm answer.

"We would have gone over that wall sooner or later," persisted the avenger.

"It couldn't be done," did Jack Plunkett, "an' the major was right in leaving!"

The end is not yet," said Palmer. "In an hour it will be dark, and a second attempt may succeed better than this."

"New ideas would come in handy now," added Jack to the Major, "and all of our boys saved?" asked the major.

"Count our force!"

This was easily done, but an investigation showed one man missing. Perhaps he had been left unnoticed.

"No," said Nelson, quickly, "There was nobody left. Perhaps the name of the absent man may mean something to you, an' the name is Edwin Talbot!"

Those who heard the question looked about for the Kentuckian, but he was not to be seen. In a moment the Major said: "There is another Edwin Talbot, 'for he ain't here. He is gone, and I'll bet my rifle he is inside the case."

"Oh, he is," said another man, "he has de- serted.

"You have hit the case plum-center," declared Nelson. "Talbot has gone to please his best. Of course it was very easy for him to crawl over the wall in the melee, when he had friends inside, and that is just what he has done!"

"I don't believe it," said Jack Plunkett. "If he has gone, it was by a desperate act."

"There is a chance for a difference of opinion.

"Go slow," advised the veteran. "We all know that he has deserted, Nelson, but I won't say it of my friend, an' the man who says Ed Talbot is a traitor, until it is proved, has got ter fight me."

The bold speech of the bordermen could not be misinterpreted, but Nelson, brave as he was did not care to quarrel with the hardest fighter in the band. Weakly, the major came to the rescue and calmed the disputants. He had regarded Edwin as a true man, and though appearances were decidedly against him, he would regard him, as such until he was proven guilty.

In any case, there must be no quarreling among the men of the band.

Palmer proceeded to reduce the matter to a system. Guards were stationed at intervals along the edge of the hacienda to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements for the Kentuckians and the other men collected and proceeded to discuss ways and means of carry- ing out this purpose.

The shades of night were already falling, and after dark their movements would be concealed from the besieged, but victory was still likely to evade their grasp.

Maxwell stood apart from the others and leaned on a post, still thinking, before his stony face. In all his wild life he had never been so anxious to accomplish a purpose and his fertile brain was busy. During the long in the battle, events of inter- est were transpiring inside the city, and to that place we will now conduct the reader.

When Nelson charged Edwin Talbot with treachery, the latter felt himself the Kentuckian's zeal which placed him in his pre- sent misfortune.

At one time in the assault, when he was fighting with remarkable energy, he saw an open space in the line of his enemies and suc- ceeded in mounting to the top of the wall.

If he could have held the place for a moment it would have been his road for the Texans, but, just as he struck down a guerrilla, a stout secon semed him by the leg, and, after a brief struggle, both fell off the wall together.”

The fall was a hard one, and only that the peak struck underfoot, Talbot’s career might have ended then and there, and, as it was, he was unconscious for several hours.

When he regained consciousness several men were standing around him, one of whom was easily recognizable as Don Edwardo, while a second wore the dress of a Mexican woman. It was undoubtedly the noted Crispo Ribe-

"He still lives," said the hacendado.

"Dash another bucket of water upon him, and let him live," was the command.

"Hold!" cried the Kentuckian.

"There is no reason why you should obey me. I am well enough." But the hacendado was not to be resisted, and he held the fighting along the wall, knew his commando.

They were still waging their useless fight.

There was little about the court or gate that fixed the Major as he fixed his regard upon Captain Ribe-

The noted guerrilla was not a remark-

A man to am. He had been a vagabond all his life until his country put him on condition that he would fight neither the invader nor any other man to a soldier.

"Well," said Don Eduardo, sarcastically, "Do you comprise the force with which the Texans propose to subdue us?"

"I seem to be the only representative of the Kentuckian replied, rather lugubriously,

"You are all that will come here."

Ribe-

"They still fight," said the hacendado, look- ing upward. "We may be wanted elsewhere.

"What shall we do with our prisoners?"

The Major answered: "I will order a man to the outlaws."

"Of course, Captain," he said, "we may have a future use for this fellow."

"How so?"

"We will hold him prisoner, and, by so doing, will be able to gain the advantage of the outlaws."

"Very improbable," and Ribe-

"Still, it may happen, and it is well to be prepared for an emergency."

"Have your own way, men, but if it works, let me to me, I will kid him at once," responded the latter, "I don't care what happens abroad."

"You may see more of it anon," retorted Ribe-

The cas-tle was next to the hacienda called form of the peons and they gave them some directions which were not audible to our hero, and then he and Ritter turned again to the wall. Maxwell, cut the man, seized Talbot to his feet and con- ducted him across the court. He knew there was no possibility of resistance and went with them with reluctance.

They crossed the court and entered the cas-tle, proper, where the prisoner was at once con- ducted to a room which had little likeness to anything that was to be his prison quarters, and was soon proved.

One of the peons went away and the others proceeded to bind his hands with a stout cord.

"I am an American," he said, "knowing the uselessness of a remonstrance, but a faint smile hover- ed for a moment on his face at what he thought the extreme caution of the slave.

His motive was then explained, however.

The absent peon returned, and with him came three ladies, or, perhaps we might better say, two ladies and one female peon.

Evidently matters had been seen ex- cellently arranged, for, as soon as the peons arrived, the men hastened away, and as Talbot was left with more interesting guards.

His situation was now decided novel. His life had been one of adventure and peril, but this was the first time he had been left to female jailers.

If he had known Mexican woman- las, he might have hoped something from the o
CHAPTER VI

THE RESULT.

The improvised ladders had been well placed, and the Rangers went successfully up until their heads reached the top of the wall. Then, as they had expected, trouble began. As they were climbing, and as their lances were not yet within reach of the defenders, a number of arrows were fired with deadly effect—the work of the guerillas—but the greater part of the defenders were not yet armed with guns, but the Rangers were made of sterner stuff. They had to come to a scuffle, and like tigers they endeavored to gain the wall.

Every one in the devoted band was a hard fighter. We might single out men like Maxwell, Plunkett and Palmer and say they fought well, but they did no more than the rest. All were about equally trained and armed; and, when men fell with the falling saplings, it was only to rush again to the attack. Edwin Talbot, however, had said well when he issued his order to keep up their line. They were not to give ground; for, gallantly as the Rangers tried, they found the resistance more than they could subdue.

Three of them had fallen dead or stunned to the ground below, and a few remained who had not received a blow on the head or arm of suggestive force. Plainly the assault would not succeed.

Major Palmer saw that the battle was going against his command, and that they were losing men without doing the enemy any damage.

"This is a bad business," said Palmer, sadly, "and as you order us back? asked Maxwell, boldly.

"Because it was madness to continue the as-aulny," answered the major, unheeding the warning he was giving.

"I shall report you, more than to re-erat.

"Would it have avenged our comrades if you had died?" was the calm answer.

"We would have gone over that wall sooner or later," persisted the avenger.

"It couldn't hev ben did," said Jack Plun-kett, "an' the major was right in leavin'!"

"The end is not yet," said Palmer. "An' in an hour it will be dark, and a second attempt may succeed better than this."

"New ideas would come in handy now," added Jack. "And we're all of our boys saved? asked the major. "Count our forces."

This was easily done, but an investigation showed one man missing. Perhaps he had been left behind the guns.

"No," said Nelson, quickly, "There was nobody left. Perhaps the name of the absent man may help you an idea. Where is Mister Edwin Talbot?"

Those who heard the question looked about, for the Kentuckian, but he was not to be seen. Palmedin spoke. "I am told Nelson, "for he ain't here. He is gone, and I'll bet my rifle he is inside the case."

"Ef he is," said another man, "he has de-serted."

"You have hit the case plun-center," declared Nelson. "Talbot has gone to those he loves best. Of course it was very easy for him to crawl over the wall in the melee, when he had friends inside, and that is just what he has done!"

"I don't believe it," said Jack Plunkett. "Ef he is, he is a pretty liar."

"There is a chance for a difference of opinion.

"Go slow," advised the veteran. "We can learn a lot by what he said Nelson, but I will hold his friend, an' the man who says Ed Talbot is a traitor, until it is proved, has got ter fight me."

The bold speech of the bordermen could not be misunderstood, but Nelson, brave as he was, did not care to quarrel with the hardest fighter in the band. Possibly, the major came to the rescue and calmed the disputants. He had regarded Edwin as a true man, and though appearances were decided against him, he would regard him, as such, until he was proven guilty.

In any case, there must be no quarreling among the men of the band.

Palmer proceeded to reduce the matter to a system. Guards were stationed at intervals along the edge of the hacienda to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements for the enemy. The wounded and the other men collected and proceeded to discuss ways and means of carrying out the purpose.

The shades of night were already falling, and after dark their movements would be concealed from the besieged, but victory was still likely to evade their grasp.

Maxwell stood apart from the others, leaning on his gun, and thought a long moment before he spoke.

"If we lose the battle, what will become of me?"

All his wild life he had never been so anxious to accomplish a purpose and his fertile brain was busy. During the pull in the battle, events of interest were transpiring inside the case, and to that place we will now conduct the reader.

When Nelson charged Edwin Talbot with treason, he had omitted to inform the Kentuckian's zeal which placed him in his present misfortune.

At one time in the assault, when he was firing with remarkable energy, he saw an open space in the line of his enemies and succeeded in mounting to the top of the wall. If he could have held the place for a moment it would have given him a head road for the Texas, but, just as he struck down a guerrilla, a stout peon sidestepped him by the leg; and, after a brief struggle, both fell off the wall together into the arms of the Kentuckian.

The fall was a hard one, and only that the peon struck underfoot, Talbot's career might have ended then and there, and, as it was, he was stunned but not killed.

When he regained consciousness several men were standing around him, one of whom was easily recognizable as Don Eduardo, while a second wore the dress of a Mexican lady. He had undoubtedly the noted Crispo Ribe-

"He still lives," said the hacendado.

"Dash another bucket of water upon him now, his leg is broken!"

"Hold!" cried the Kentuckian. "There is no reason why you should do this. I am well enough."

The men were still waging their useless fight.

There was little about the court or about the facade of the hacienda that did not appeal to the fighting along the wall, knew his commando, and they were fixed his regard upon Captain Ribe-

The noted guerrilla was not a remiss- looking man. He had a muscular form and a natural grace that made him a soldier to be feared. But he fixed his regard upon Captain Ribe-

"You are all that will come here," he said.

"Talbot did not answer."

"They still fight," said the hacendado, ris-

"We may be wanted elsewhere."

"Dead men tell no tales," he coldly sa-

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTIVITY.

The manner of the guerrilla was not cal-

The messenger of the guerrillas seemed not to have heard the reply. He threw down a thoughtless gaze from Talbot to the outlaws, and turned his eyes to the wall. When he saw Captain, he said, "we may have a future use for this fellow."

"How so?"

"We will hold him prisoner, and, by and by, show him to the outlaw and the invader, Talted Talbot to his feet and conducted him across the court. He knew there was no sign of resistance and went with them without an obstacle.

They crossed the court and entered the cassehole, where the prisoner was at once conducted to a room which had little likeness to almost any other, and it was that it was to be his prison word, to be brought, was soon proved.

One of the peons went away and the others proceeded to bind his hands with a stout cord. He was in no apparent want of knowledge of a remonstrance, but a faint smile hover-

But he saw nothing, in fact, but what he thought the extreme caution of the slave.

His situation was soon explained, however. He was the absent peon, and as he returned, came three ladies, or, perhaps we might better say, two ladies and one female peon.

Evidently meant to be sent to examination, he was arranged, for, as soon as he was made to understand, the men hastened away, and Talbot was left with more interesting guards. It was not long, indeed, before the situation of the prisoner had one of adventure and peril, and this was the first time he had been left to female jailers. If he had known Mexican woman-
"We would have gone over that wall sooner or later," persisted the averager.

"It couldn't be done," said Jack Plunkett.

"The end is not yet," said Palmer. "In an hour it will be dark, and a second attempt may succeed better than this."

"New ideas would come in handy now," added Jack.

"What's all of our boys saved?" asked the major.

"Count our force."

This was easily done, but an investigation showed one man missing. Perhaps he had been left behind the wall.

"No," said Nelson, quickly. "There was nobody left. Perhaps the name of the absent man is one of the things you'll find." Where is Mister Edwin Talbot?"

Those who heard the question looked about for the Kentuckian, but he was not to be seen.

"I don't believe it," said Jack Plunkett.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Nelson said.

"There is a chance for a difference of opinion."

"Go slow," advised the veteran. "We all know what Nelson has held him, Nelson, but I think his friend, an' the man who says Ed Talbot is a traitor, until it is proved, has got ter fight me."

The bold speech of the bordermen could not be misunderstood, but Nelson, brave as he was, did not dare to quarrel with the hardiest fighter in the band. He looked, the major came to the rescue and calmed the disputants. He had regarded Edwin as a true man, and though appearances were prejudicial against him, he would regard him, as such, until he was proven guilty.

In any case, there must be no quarrelling among the men of the band.

Palmer proceeded to reduce the matter to a system. Guards were stationed at intervals along the edge of the hacienda to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements for the Kentuckian, and the other men collected and proceeded to discuss ways and means of carrying out the purpose.

The shades of night were already falling, and after dark their movements would be concealed, but victory was still likely to evade their grasp.

Maxwell stood apart from the others and looked into the thoughtless lock on his stern face. In all his wild life he had never been so anxious to accomplish a purpose and his fertile brain was busy and his services were not yet over. In the fort the lull in the battle, events of interest were transpiring inside the casa, and to that place we will now conduct the reader.

When Nelson charged Edwin Talbot with treasonable intentions, the Kentuckian shot him and the Kentuckian's zeal which placed him in his present misfortune.

At one time in the assault, when he was falling with remarkable energy, he saw an open space in the line of his enemies and succeeded in mounting to the top of the wall. If he could have held the place for a moment it would have been an easy road for the Texans, but, just as he struck down a guerrilla, a stout peon seized him by the leg, and, after a brief struggle, both fell off the wall together alongside the Kentuckian's stallion in the court.

The fall was a hard one, and only that the peon struck underneath, Talbot's career might have ended there and then, and, as it was, he was nearly crushed to death.

When he regained consciousness several men were standing around him, one of whom was easily recognizable as Don Edwardo, while a second wore the dress of a Mexican woman. It was undoubtedly the noted Criollo R eros.

"He still lives," said the hacendado, and the two men fell upon their knees and began crying. "Hold!" cried the Kentuckian. "There is no reason why you should cry over me. I am well enough."

In a fit of exasperation, he began firing at the men who were standing beside them. The flying pieces were not useless in the fight, for the men were still waging their useless fight. There was little about the court or street that resembled the fearful scene. The men were occupied in finding their discharged friends and he fixed his regard upon Captain Riberas.

The noted guerrilla was not a reluctant looking man. He had a muscular form, a sallow, nervous face, a decided air of a man to admire. He had been a vanguard in brigand all his life until his country put him on condition that he would fight no more. He now looked more like a soldier than a soldier.

"Well," said Don Eduardo, sarcastically, "do you comprise the force with which the Texans propose to subdue us?"

I seem to be the only representative of the Kentuckian replied, rather lugubriously.

"You are all that will come here."

"By the river in the outlying corner, Captain," he said, "we may have a future use for this fellow."

"How so?"

"We will hold him prisoner, and, by all means, let him manage the court, and by this, or refrain from doing that, or your coast will suffer."

"Very improbable," said Riberas, "for Don Edwardo can talk to the men, and so forth."

"Still, it may happen, and it is well to be prepared for an emergency."

"Have your own way, senor, but if it were not left to me, I would kill him at once,"回答ed the Kentuckian, looking sternly at the outlay, and the officers.

"You may see more of an ascendant, re-" I am not the man to undertake this, or refrain from doing that, or your coast will suffer."

Riberas arose and the hacendado called from the peons and they gave him some directions which were not audible to the major, and then he and Riberas turned again to the women and the men, and the court was held, Talbot to his feet and conducted him across the court. He knew tremblingly of resistance and went with them with replies out of his mouth.

They crossed the court and entered the colonia opposite, and the prisoners were at once conducted to a room which had little likeness to anything but a jail, an indication that it was to be his prison was shortly proved.

One of the peons went away and the others proceeded to bind his hands with a stout cord. In a place of almost complete confinement, knowing the uselessness of a remonstrance, but a faint smile hovered for a moment on his face at what he thought the extreme caution of the slaves. His situation was explained, however,

The absent peon returned, and with him came three ladies, or, perhaps we might better say, two ladies and one femalepeon.

Evidently many of the things which have been explained were arranged, for, as soon as the women arrived, the men hastened away, and Don Edwardo was left with more interesting guards.

The situation was decided on the court.

His life had been one of adventure and peril, but this was the first time he had been left to female jailers. If he had known Mexican women, he might have hoped something from the
"I suppose the Texans were beaten?"
"They were, and with severe loss. We did not lose a man. They are still hovering near the house, but I do not anticipate another attack." Talbot remained silent.
"They are courting destruction by remaining here," answered the hacendado.
"It is the life of a soldier.
"If they should succeed in storming the casa, what would they do here?"
"Don't ask me! It may be that the cowards will be surprised at the resistance which I am capable of putting up."
"If Ribera and his men had been surrendered at the beginning, not a sick or stome of your casa would have been damaged."
"And what now?"
"Very likely, senor, their work would be gauged by the lives their conquest cost them."
"In other words, it is probable they would seek revenge on me?"
"Such is the way of men, but their leader is merciful. One thing is sure, whatever happens, your women and children are safe; the Texans do not war on them." Del Rio remained silent for some time, evidently in deep thought, but there was nothing to indicate that he repeated his course or wished to change it.
"At any rate, there is little to fear from them," he said at length.
"I am not so sure, senor; the name in the name of mercy to treat once more with them before it is too late, Don Eduardo. If you will release me and expel the guerrillas from your walls, I promise you they will never once more go their way and leave you unmolested."
"Carmamba! You must think me a poltroon, senor. You misjudge me. I am a Mexican by birth, and, by the virgin, Captain Ribera shall never suffer while my walls remain secure."
"Have your own way," said Talbot curtly, and turned away.
"Don Eduardo is a man of courage, but he is not at him fixedly for some time, and then he turned to Cenestenaza and asked her to step outside the door.
"The lady arose, and with a word of warning to Seremoro, left the hacendado beyond the Kentuckian's sight."

CHAPTER VIII
A STRANGE MEETING

TALBOT saw the brother and sister depart without great interest. Their consultation might concern him, but, as there was no evidence of it, he thought it well to ask Ribera.
"Yes, he was waging war, he saw no ground for hope."

The peon woman, who maintained her stiff position, was not an agreeable object to look at, as she was thin and retracted, and the slight figure in the corner of the curtains.

The latter had not moved while the hacendado was present, and, so far as Talbot knew, had not moved since the door opened.

Suddenly, however, he was surprised to see her turn abruptly, brush aside the curtains and advance toward the second window. A fluff lamp burned on a side table, giving a scanty light, but even then the prisoner could see that besides the gift of youth, she possessed a fine form and handsome face.

The Kentuckian, at the face, moved toward the window, which seemed familiar to, but handsome young women are common among Spaniards and their pure-blooded descendants.

Everything else, however, was lost to sight when he saw her swift advance to the peon woman and lay both hands upon her shoulders. The movement was accompanied by an eager look of feature, though intermingled with one of resolution, and then the girl spoke in a melodious voice.

"Brigida, you will not interfere!" she softly said.

The woman looked at her, scolded. The peon woman, most on her coarse face, but Edwin thought he saw a shade of anxiety behind it.

"Seremoro, Berta, what would you do?" the peon asked.

"Never mind, Brigida, querida, but you will not interfere! Promise your Berta." The fair creature clasped her arms around the woman's neck, and she perceptibly wavered.

"If your father may arrive, child," she expostulated.

"It is if so, so be it. Say nothing, Brigida, but be wise. Then the senoritas turned to Talbot, who was watching in silent wonder.

"Don Edwin," she hurriedly said, "have you forgotten me?"

It was the start. Somewhere in the past he had seen her face, but...

"Oh!" he cried, "I do remember! I have not forgotten the carriage accident on the mountains."

He extended his hands, bound as they were; clasped her own and pressed them to his lips.

"You saved my life then, when the frightened steed would have dashed me over the cliff but for your aid," she quickly continued, "and a Del Rio never forgets. I asked you then to come to the hacienda and, if you had done so, my father would have been your friend instead of your enemy to-day.

Now, it is too late to change his course, but a daughter of mine was never ungrateful. You saved my life, Don Edwin, and, by the help of the Virgin, I will now save yours."

Her impetuousity was proof of her sincerity, but Talbot was not sure she would not break and beg to be excused and to be allowed to return."

"Not a word, American," she interrupted.

"Brigida, listen at the door and tell me when the grims are coming."

The grim old woman glided to the door and the maiden again spoke hurriedly.

"I say you shall be saved, but I cannot now tell you. Do not go, child! I will come and take you and excusing my nurse, Brigida. Aunt Cenestena would betray me if I knew she had spoken to you, and ruin all, but Brigida is true to you, and to whom do you trust?"

"Cut my bonds and let me escape," said the Kentuckian. "But for yourself."

His face was pale, his eyes wide with excitement.

"The court is full of peons and soldiers. The moment you dropped from the window you would be seen and again secured."

"I could fight my way through," began the Ranger; but Berta shook her head.

"Impossible!" she expostulated. "When you go out, it must be by stealth. I must have time to think of a way. Do not despair, Don Edwin. You will be free."

"You will ruin yourself in trying."

"I will! Trust for once to a woman's wits!"

"Don Edwin, I repeat, I will save you! I will go myself and mark the returning morning!"

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Berta was back in her old place by the window, but Talbot was not with his mind."

The door opened, and Cenestenaza entered.

Seemingly, the scene had not changed since she went away. Each one of the trio was so intent on his own affairs that he would not have turned to look behind him had he been invited to visit her father's home, and only remembered her Christian name—Beata.

Now he was surprised at meeting her, but if he was surprised, he was not so much taken aback, for he would have been pleased at the hope of aid from her hands. Talbot, however, was not to look wholly to himself, and he feared that if the
The fair creature clasped her arms around the woman's neck, and she perceptibly wavered.

"Your father may arrive, child," she expostulated.

"If it is so, so be it. Say nothing, Brigida, but be wise. Then the senoritas turned to Talbot, who was watching in silent wonder.

"Don Edwin," she hurriedly said, "have you forgotten me?"

He started. Somewhere in the past he had seen her face, but...

"Ah!" he cried, "I do remember! I have not forgotten the carriage accident on the mountain, I have not forgotten you.

He extended his hands, bound as they were; clasped her own and pressed them to his lips.

"You saved my life then, when the frightened steeds would have dashed me over the cliff but for your aid," she quickly continued, "and a Del Rio never forgets. I asked you then to come to my father's hacienda. If you had done so, my father would have been your friend instead of your enemy to-day. Now, it is too late to change his course, but a daughter of my race was never ungrateful. You saved my life, Don Edwin, and, by the help of the Virgin, I will now save yours.

Her impetuosity was proof of her sincerity, but Talbot, without a word, thought how she would incur and began to remonstrate.

"Not a word, American," she interrupted.

"Brigida, listen at the door and tell me when the carriage comes near." The grim old woman glided to the door and the maiden again spoke hurriedly:

"I say you shall be saved, but I cannot now tell you otherwise. Run, then, and take me excepting my nurse, Brigida. Aunt Cestenza would betray me if she knew I had spoken to you, and ruin all, but Brigida is true to you to the last, and you can trust her."

"Cut my bonds and I can escape," said the Kentuckian. "But you forget yourself."

"The court is full of peons and soldiers. The moment you dropped from the window you would be seen and again secured."

"I could fight my way through," began the Ranger; but Berta shook her head.

"Impossible!" she expostulated. "When you go, it must be by stealth. I must have time to think of a way. Do not despair, Don Edwin; I will come.

"You will ruin yourself in trying."

"Ha! ha! Trust for once to a woman's wit! Don Edwin, I repeat; I will save you; you are returning, monsieur?" cried the peon, quickly.

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Berta was back in her old place by the window, but this time she was clad in a light muslin dress.

The door opened, and Cestenza entered. Obviously, the scene had not changed since she went away. Each one of the trio was smiling, but Cestenza's face was solemn and cold, roving glance, the austere lady returned to her former position, and Talbot breathed freer as he saw she suspected nothing.

She was feeling the pulse beating quicker than usual, for the moment had been a critical one; if the suspicions of Cestenza had been aroused, trouble would have come to more than him.

He kept his seat and looked steadily at vacancy, but his thoughts were busy. His meeting with Berta had been wholly unexpected. A few minutes before, while roving among the mountains, he had saved her from a peril brought about by a pair of fiery horses and an incompetent driver, but, though somewhat impressed by the face, he had not been invited to visit her father's home, and only remembered her Christian name—Berta.

Now he was surprised at meeting her, but if he had been told that he would have been pleased at the hope of aid from her hands. Talbot, however, was not one to look wholly to himself, and he feared that if the
"I suppose the Texans were beaten?"
"They were, and with severe loss. We did not lose a man. They are still hovering near the house, but I do not anticipate another attack."

Tarbox remained silent.

"They are courting destruction by remaining here," said the hacendado.

"It is the life of a soldier."" 

"If they should succeed in storming the casas, what would they do here?" asked Don Eduardo.

"If Ribera and his men had been surrendered at the beginning, not a sick or stome of your cases would have been damaged."

"And what now?"

"Very likely, senor, their work would be gauged by the lives their conquest cost them."

"In other words, it is probable they would seek revenge on me."

"Such is the way of men, but their leader is merciful. One thing is sure, whatever happens, your women and children are safe. Texans do not war on them." 

Del Rio remained silent for some time, evidently in deep thought, but there was nothing to indicate that he repeated his course or wished to change it.

"At any rate, there is little to fear from them," he said at length.

"And there is no chance of mercy to treat once more with before it is too late, Don Eduardo. If you will release me and expel the guerrillas from your walls, I promise that I shall never go your way and leave you un molested."

"Caramba! You must think me a poltroon, senor. You misjudge me. I am a Mexican and, by the virgin, Captain Ribera shall never suffer while my walls remain secure."

"Have your own way," said Tarbox curtly. 

"But you are mistaken. Let him fix you for some time, and then he turned to Costanza and asked her to step outside the room."

The lady arose, and with a word of warning to the hacendado backed the haciendero beyond the Kentuckian's sight.

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE MEETING.

TARBOX saw the brother and sister depart without great interest. Their consultation might concern him, but, as there was no evidence of it, he supposed it was nothing. Don Eduardo was waving, he saw no ground for hope.

The peon woman, who maintained her stiff position, was not an agreeable object to look at, and yet one could not say she was without beauty, and at times she appeared even more regarded Don Eduardo's sister, but her curt replies soon ended conversation, and he almost wished for something to break the monotony of the hour.

Something came at last in the shape of the hacendado, who walked firmly, made a quick survey of the room and then walked toward Tarbox and his watchman.

"Is all well, Sister Costanza?" he asked.

"All is well, brother," was the grave reply, and yet her voice was not your captivity, painful, senor," continued the hacendado, looking at Edwin.

Quite the contrary, Don Eduardo, answered the Kentuckian, who could see no sense in sulking.

"We might have made it far worse, for there are dungeons under the casas, but Mexico came and saved them."

Tarbox bowed low. He remembered the old man's advice that he be saved as a hostage against a time of possible danger, and corrected, why he was so easily used, but he answered only:

"A million thanks, senor," he said.

"I suppose you are anxious to know the end of the assault?"

"The fair creature clasped her arms around the woman's neck, and she perceptibly wavered.

"Our father may arrive, child," she expostulated.

"If it is so, be it. Say nothing, Brigida, but be wise. Then the senorita turned to Tarbox, who was watching in silent wonder.

"Don Edwin," she hurriedly said, "have you forgotten me yet?"

Tarbox started. Somewhere in the past he had seen her face, but...

"Ah!" he cried, "I do remember! I have not forgotten the carriage accident on the monuments. How are you now?"

He extended his hands, bound as they were; clasped her own and pressed them to his lips.

"You saved my life then, when the frightened steeds would have dashed me over the cliff but for your aid," she quickly continued, "and a Del Rio never forgets. I asked you then to come to the house as a guest. If you had done so, my father would have been your friend instead of your enemy to-day. Now, it is too late to change his course, but a daughter of my race was never ungrateful. You saved my life, Don Edwin, and, by the help of the Virgin, I will now save yours."

Her impetuousity was proof of her sincerity, but Tarbox, who had seen something in her which he feared, and began to become irresolute.

"Not a word, American," she interrupted.

"Brigida, listen at the door and tell me when they open it."

The grim old woman glided to the door and the maiden again spoke hurriedly:

"I say you shall be saved, but I cannot now tell you where or how, so come here and let me except my nurse, Brigida. Aunt Estenza would betray me if she knew I had spoken to you, and ruin all, but Brigida is true. She will come to you when you get free."

"Cut my bonds and I can escape," said the Kentuckian. "But you forget yourself."

"The court is full of peons and soldiers. The moment you dropped from the window you would be seen and again secured."

"I could fight my way through," began the Ranger; but Berta shook her head.

"Impossible!" she expostulated. "When you go, it must be by stealth. I must have time to think of a way. Do not despair, Don Eduardo."

"You will ruin yourself in trying."

"Ha! ha! Trust for once to a woman's wits; Don Edwin, I repeat, I will save you in this. I am returning, moritz!" cried the peon, quickly.

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Berta was back in her old place by the window, but without the especial millet candle.

The door opened, and Costanza entered. Naturally, the scene had not changed since she went away. Each one of the trio was saved, but Tarbox did not say anything. The anxious lady returned to her former position, and Tarbox breathed freely as he saw she suspected nothing.

Tarbox felt his pulse beating quicker than usual, for the moment had been a critical one; if the suspicions of Costanza had been aroused, trouble would have come to men like him. He kept his seat and looked steadily at vacancy, but his thoughts were busy. His meeting with Berta had been wholly unexpected. A few days before, while roaming among the mountains, he had saved her from a peril brought about by a pair of fiery horses and an incompetent driver, but, though somewhat impressed by her face and bearing, he had not been invited to visit her father's home, and only remembered her Christian name—Berta.

Now he was surprised at meeting her, but he felt that the woman and she would have been pleased at the hope of aid from her hands. Tarbox, however, was not one to look wholly to himself, and he feared that if the
"I suppose the Texans were beaten?"
"They were, and with severe loss. We did not lose a man. They are still hovering near the house, but I do not anticipate another attack."

Dallas remained silent.
"They are courting destruction by remaining here," said the hacendado.
"It is the life of a soldier."
"If they should succeed in storming the house, what would they do here?" asked Don Eduardo, in the presence of the bishop.
"If Ribera and his men had been surrendered at the beginning, not a stick or stone of your house would have been damaged."
"And how now?"
"Very likely, senor, their work would be gauged by the lives their conquest cost them."
"In other words, it is probable they would seek revenge on me."
"Such is the way of men, but their leader is merciless. One thing is sure, whatever happens, your women and children are safe; the Texans do not war on them."

Del Rio remained silent for some time, evidently in deep thought, but there was nothing to indicate that he repeated his course or wished to change it.
"At any rate, there is little to fear from them," he said at length.
"You speak, in the name of mercy, to treat once more with them before it is too late, Don Eduardo. If you will release me and expel the guerrillas from your walls, I promise that I will never once again go their way and leave you un molested."

"Caramba! You must think me a poltroon, senor. You misjudge me. I am a Mexican and, by the virgin, Captain Ribera shall never suffer while my walls remain secure."

"Have your own way," said Talbot curtly.

Ribera was not the sort of man to be fixed by the overtures of his enemies, and, therefore did not longer delay after Talbot had turned to Costenza and asked her to step outside the room.

The lady arose, and with a word of warning to her husband and the hacendado beyond the Kentuckian's sight.

CHAPTER VIII
A STRANGE MEETING.

Talbot saw the brother and sister depart without great interest. Their consultation might concern him, but, as there was no evidence to make him think so, he waved it aside and was wakening, he saw no ground for hope.

The peon woman, maintained her stiff position, was not an agreeable object to look at, and Talbot exchanged curiously the silent figure in the corner of the curtains.

The latter had not moved while the hacendado was present, and, so far as Talbot knew, in the absence of his brother, he had not moved at all.

Suddenly, however, he was surprised to see their turn abruptly, brush aside the curtains and advance toward the second window.

A filial lamp burned on a side table, giving a scanty light, but even then the prisoner could see that besides the gift of youth, she possessed a fine form and handsome face.

Talbot, was the face, however, which seemed familiar, but handsome young women are common among Spaniards and their pure-blooded descendents. Everything else, however, was lost to sight when he saw her swift advance to the peon woman and lay both hands upon her shoulders.

The movement was accompanied by an eager look of feature, though intermixed with one of resolution, and then the girl spoke in a melodious voice.

"Brigida, you will not interfere?" she softly asked.

"You will ruin yourself in trying."
"Ha! ha! Trust for once to a woman's wits; Don Edwin, I repeat, I will save you. There is a returning, moron!" cried the peon, quickly.

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Bertha was back in her old place by the window, but did not again touch the mouth.

The door opened, and Costenza entered.

Seemingly, the scene had not changed since she went away. Each one of the trio was seated at his accustomed post, the austere lady returned to her former position, and Talbot breathed freer as he saw she suspected nothing.

He felt his pulse beating quicker than usual, for the moment had been a critical one; if the suspicions of Costenza had been aroused, trouble would have come to more than him.

He kept his seat and looked steadily at vacancy, but his thoughts were busy. His meeting with Bertha had been wholly unexpected. A moment before, while roaming among the mountains, he had saved her from a peril brought about by a pair of fiery horses and an incompetent driver, but, though somewhat impressed by her beauty, she had declined his invitation to visit her father's home, and only remembered her Christian name—Beata.

Now he was surprised at meeting her, but he could not help feeling that he would have been pleased at the hope of aid from her hands. Talbot, however, was not one to look wholly to himself, and he feared that if the
Young Kentucky.

They will punish, perhaps kill you, for aiding me to escape.

"Whatever occurs, I am satisfied," she answered.

Her gaze was turned away from him, but her lips were drawn up into a smile, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"The hot blood rushed to Talbot's face as he realized that this glorious creature loved him.

He felt a pang at the moment that can not be described. Gladness, sorrow, surprise, confusion—all assailed him and he remained dumb.

Brigida glided to his side and spoke in a soft tone.

"What is done, must be done quickly. There is danger in delay," she announced.

Even at that moment a shuffling step was heard outside and a look of alarm crossed the slave's face.

"Santuc Maria! Some one comes!" she exclaimed.

The emergency cleared the walls of the Kentuckian. He raised the chair of the sleeping woman, carried it with its burden to the recess of the window and drew the curtains around it.

The movement concealed the spastic from view.

"Back to your chair!" Berta cried to the trembling girl.

A rap sounded at the door.

Talbot strode to the chair, drew the severed bonds about his wrists and sunk into his old position.

Berta swept her hand across her face, and then, as she opened the door was as calm as ever.

Captain Ribera stood in the passage, and though the room was dark, and he was but a shadow, she knew he was there.

The moment she looked at him she was upon him, and he could not read what was passing in her mind.

For the time, all sounds outside had ceased from raillery, and the picture was his alone.

"Why is he here?" she asked herself, and then she turned her eyes to the floor.

Costenza seemed to sleep. Her breathing was regular and heavy, and there was none of the sullen staring seen when people fall asleep from nature's weariness. The prisoner was affected by it, but he was not one to grow weakly nervous.

It was too late to remonstrate with the senorita; he would wait until the next day, and then talk to her.

Costenza looked up suddenly. She seemed as if she were not aware of the presence of the prisoner. She was not even aware of the presence of the prisoner.

"What is wanted?" Berta asked, with surprising calmness.

"Nothing in particular," replied Ribera, summoning all his will to talk distinctly.

"I was passing and thought I would drop in."

He entered the room and looked dully at Talbot.

"The Texan is still here," he added.

"Where else should he be?" Berta tersely asked.

"He ought to be in perdition," gloated the gaudy slave girl.

"Where's the old woman—I mean, where is Senorita Costenza?"

"My aunt is in her apartment," was the icy reply.

"So you are all alone with the terrible Texan? I'll sit down and help you watch him."

"Won't your nuns need your aid?" was the pointed question.

"Not so much as you do, and I like it better here."

The ex-outlaw, who had for years made his bed in the caves of the mountains and the thickets of the chaparral, settled himself into an easy-chair with a sigh of relief.

The senorita was not expected to hurt himself upon the drunken wretch, but Berta surveyed the scene calmly.

"You look fatigued, captain," she said, "I will relieve you.

"Pardon, senorita," said Ribera, quickly, "but I do not care for anything. I am very well as I am, and wine don't agree with me.

"Enough of this," said Talbot, "enough of this."

"Brigida, bring some of our best. I will drink with you, Captain Ribera, and you ought to taste our wine."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TOILS.

Brigida was promptly sent for, while Ribera stroked his beard in a mixture of complacency and anxiety. He knew he ought not to drink more, but had not the Senorita Berta asked..."
They will punish, perhaps kill you, for aiding me to escape."

"Whatever occurs, I am satisfied," she answered.

Her gaze was turned away from him, but her face was a mask of intense calm. The hot blood rushed to Talbot's face as he realized that this gorgeous creature loved him.

His feelings at that moment can not be described. Gladness, sorrow, surprise, confusion—all assailed him and he remained dumb. Brigida glided to his side and spoke in a low and almost inaudible tone:

"What is done, must be done quickly. There is danger in delay," she announced.

Even at that moment a shuffling step was heard outside, and a look of alarm crossed the slave's face.

"Sacra Maria! Some one comes!" she exclaimed.

The emergency cleared the walls of the Kentuckian. He raised the chair of the sleeping woman, carried it with its burden to the recess of the window and drew the curtain around it.

The movement concealed the spiaister from view.

"Back to your chair!" Berta cried to the trembling maid.

A rap sounded at the door.

Talbot strode to his chair, drew the severed bonds about his wrists and sunk into his old position.

Berta swept her hand across her face, and then, as she opened the door was as calm as ever. Captain Ribera stood in the passage, and thought the room not such a well-lit place as it was, when he saw he was alone. Don Eduardo's presence, just then, would have meant ruin, but the guerrilla might possibly be outwitted.

He stood in silence, his gaze roving around the room, but as Talbot marked the flash upon his face and a swaying of his powerful form, he was not slow in accounting for these facts.

The guerrilla was partially intoxicated.

"What is wanted?" Berta asked, with surprising calmness.

"Nothing in particular," replied Ribera, summoning all his will to talk slowly. "I was passing and thought I would drop in."

He entered the room and looked dully at Talbot.

"The Texan is still here," he added.

"Where else should he be?" Berta tersely asked.

"He ought to be in perdition," growled the guerrilla, changing his tactics.

"Where's the old woman—I mean, where is Senorita Costenza?"

"My aunt is in her apartment," was the icy reply.

"So you are all alone with the terrible Texan? I'll sit down and help you watch him."

"Won't your men need your aid?" was the pointed question.

"Not so much as you do, and I like it better here."" she said.

Berta looked about the room and saw the sign of a duel.

"Pardon, senorita," said Ribera, quickly, "but I do not care for anything. I am very well as I am, and wine don't agree with me." She added, "Take that, two, with a bit of cake, will refresh you, captain," was the unmoved reply.

"Brigida, bring some of our best. I will drink with you, Captain Ribera, and you ought to taste our wine.

CHAPTER X

IN THE TOOLS

Brigida proceeded to serve, while Ribera stroked his beard in a mixture of complacency and anxiety. He knew he ought not to drink more, but had not the Senorita Berta asked..."
The wine was finished and Brigida sat on the empty glasses on the waiter, and placed the whole on the floor. The worried Kentuckian was resolved to commence a drink.

Costenza yawned, crossed her hands over her rich dress and looked severely at vacancy. She had a very amiable looking dir. A man that thought the prisoner, with a sudden sense of the ludicrous side of the matter. "My situation is remarkable. Three women for a justice is a seldom welfare, but captive, I will try to bear the infliction." Costenza yawned again. The act was natural, for it was the hour when many people retire, but the ancient lady had a dulness not natural to them.

"She has been drugged, sure as fate," thought Talbot, feverishly, "and trouble will surely come to that, and she was not particularly hopeful.

Vestast, the chances were that they continued near the edge and the more superior forces of Mexico would soon appear, and their coming meant serious trouble if not ruin to the devoted band.

Talbot was of a philosophical nature, and the more he reflected on his situation, he almost hoped the Rangers would beat a retreat. They had already done much to avenge the massacre, and the horses secured made valuable spoil, and probably not enough to remunerate.

He thought of Maxwell, however, and felt sure that he would not abandon his trail of vengeance until the red lass had performed its redemptive work, and Crisp Riera would not be safe while he lived.

While he was reflecting thus, Donna Berta slowly arose and glided toward her aunt. She whispered a few words in the woman’s ear, and then left the apartment, while the older senorita kept her place and Brigida looked impassive as ever.

Talbot could not but think the act had a meaning. Perhaps he was fardly full of notions, but he was one to observe and draw conclusions.

Two minutes passed and the maiden returned. She bore in her hands a silver waiter upon which were three glasses, each of which was filled with some liquid which might have been wine.

She handed one to Costenza, a second to the poor woman, and with the third she then retreaded to the cover of the curtains; but the Ranger was not easily dissuaded from her resolution that she could watch all in the apartment.

This done, the three women began to slowly sip the cherry-brandy liquid.

CHAPTER IX
THE WORK OF THE WINE.

What had thus far occurred would not, under ordinary circumstances, have been worthy of second thought, but, somehow, Talbot felt that the air was full of great events, and he was strangely nervous.

The women drank their wine, if wine it was, slowly, and they closely watched Costenza. She was not the least of the women, and she noticed that the eyes of Brigida frequently wandered to Berta, and they expressed a good deal.

But it is only the work of a drug agent Costenza often takes to gain rest at night. I put a quantity in her wine and she is sound asleep, but when she awakens, a few hours hence, she will feel no thing.

Talbot muttered another apology.

"A Del Rio could never stoop to a crime," said Berta, proudly, "and I love Costenza well." The Ranger wondered at the madness which had made him suspect her, but she stooped and cut his bonds with a jeweled dagger.

"There is no time to lose for discovery means ruin to you," she said quickly, but calmly.

"Aunt Costenza must be conveyed to her apartment, and then you must assume the dress of a gentleman and court and watch your chance to pass the wall."

"But you, senorita, what of your?"

"I do not understand, Don Elven." "They will punish, perhaps kill you, for aiding me to escape."

"Whatever occurs, I am satisfied," she answered.

Her gaze was turned away from him, but her heart and mandate mingled with the hot blood rushed to Talbot’s face as he realized that this glorious creature loved him.

He felt that at that moment can not be described. Gladness, sorrow, surprise, confusion—all assailed him and he remained dumb. Brigida glided to his side and spoke in a ground voice.

"What is done, must be done quickly. There is danger in delay," she announced.

Even at that moment a shuffling step was heard on the floor and a look of alarm crossed the slave’s face.

"Santamaría! Some one comes!" she exclaimed.

The emergency cleared the walls of the Kentuckian. He raised the chair of the sleeping woman, carried it with its burden to the recess of the window and drew the curtains around it.

The movement concealed the splicer from view.

"Back to your chair!" Berta cried to the young man.

A rap sounded at the door.

Talbot strode to his chair, drew the secured bonds about his wrists and sunk into his old position.

Berta swept her hand across her face, and then, as she opened the door was as calm as ever.

Captain Riera stood in the passage, and though the room was not large enough for his person, he saw he was alone. Don Eduardo’s presence, just then, would have meant ruin, but the guerilla might possibly be outwitted.

He stood in silence, his gaze roving around the room, but as Talbot marked the flush upon his face and a swaying of his powerful form, he was not slow in accounting for these facts. The guerilla was partially intoxicated.

"What is wanted?" Berta asked, with surprising calmness.

"Nothing in particular," replied Riera, summoning all his wills to talk steadily. "I was passing and thought I would drop in."

He entered the room and looked dully at Talbot.

"The Texan is still here," he added.

"Where else should he be?" Berta tersely asked.

"He ought to be in perdición," growled the guerilla, his irritation heightened.

"Where’s the old woman—I mean, where is Senorita Costenza?"

"My aunt is in her apartment," was the icy reply.

"So you are all alone with the terrible Texan? I’ll sit down and help you watch him."

"Won’t your men need your aid?" was the pointed question.

"Not so much as you do, and I like it better here."

"You look fattigued, captain," she said.

"I will redress the balance," said Riera, quickly, "but I do not care for anything. I am very well as I am, and wine don’t agree with me."

Talbot handed a glass, two, with a bit of cake, will refresh you, captain," was the unmoved reply.

"Brigida, bring some of our best. I will drink with you, Captain Riera, and you ought to taste our wine."

CHAPTER X
IN THE TOILS.

Brigida promptly obeyed, while Riberro stroked his beard in a mixture of complacency and anxiety. He knew he ought not to drink more, but had not the Senorita Berta asked
a slip of wine, taken to keep them awake, and then Donna Berta very properly think only of her own safety.

The wine was finished and Brigida sat the empty glasses on the waiter, and placed the whole on the table for their consumption. Costenza yawned, crossed her hands over her rich dress and looked severely at vacancy.

"I thought the prisoner, with a sudden sense of the ludicrous side of the matter. "My situation is remarkable. Three women for a bachelor is a situation very seldom witnessed, but I will try to bear the infliction."

Costenza yawned again. The act was natural, for it was the hour for many people to retire, but the ancient lady had a dulness not natural to them.

"She has been drugged, sure as fate," thought Talbot, feebly, "and trouble will surely come to her. She glared dully, and he knew that, drugged or not, she was fast falling asleep.

She yawned again and leaned her head against the wall. A moment she looked dully at the ceiling, and then her eyes closed.

Talbot looked at Berta, but her face was still gazing towards the wall, not upon him, and he could not read what was passing in her mind.

For the time, all sounds outside had ceased and silence was oppressive. The prisoner was affected by it, but he was not one to grow weakly nervous. It was too late to remonstrate with the senorita; he would wait and see what would happen.

Costenza seemed to sleep. Her breathing was regular and heavy, and there was none of the fitful starting seen when people fall asleep from nervousness, post of duty. Plainly, she was a drugged slumber.

Berta arose and glided to the spinner's side. She spoke her name and touched her on the arm, but there was neither answer nor movement.

The drug had done its work.

Then Berta glided to the side of the Kentuckian.

"Don Edwin," she softly said, "you are on the road to freedom."

"I know what you have done," he asked, struck by a sudden fear, as he noticed the pallor of Costenza's face.

The maiden looked surprised, and then her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Madre de Dios!" she faintly said, "you do not think I am one to commit a crime!"

Her tears and her anguish had their effect, and the Kentuckian mentally cursed his folly.

"Forgive me," he humbly said, "I was hasty, but this sleep seemed so heavy, so unnatural-"

It is only the work of a drug Aunt Costenza often takes to gain rest at night. I put a quantity in her wine and she is sound asleep, but when she awakens, a few hours hence, she will feel no harm done.

Talbot muttered another apology.

"A Del Rio could never stoop to a crime," said Berta, proudly, and I love Costenza well."

The Ranger wondered at the madness which had made him suspect her, but she stooped and cut his bonds with a jeweled dagger.

"There is no time to lose for discovery means ruin to you," she said quickly, but calmly.

"Aunt Costenza must be conveyed to her apartment, and then you must assume the dress of a negro and court and watch your chance to pass the wall."

"But you, senorita, what of your-"

"I do not understand, Don Edwin."

"They will punish, perhaps kill you, for aiding me to escape."

"Whatever occurs, I am satisfied," she answered.

Her gaze was turned away from him, her head bent in that manner he loved, and some of the blood rushed to Talbot's face as he realized that this glorious creature loved him.

His feelings at that moment can not be described. Gladness, sorrow, surprise, confusion—all assailed him and he remained dumb. Brigida glided to her side and spoke in a low voice and looked at her name on the list, all the way. "What is done, must be done quickly. There is danger in delay," she announced.

Even at that moment a shuffling step was heard outside, and a look of alarm crossed the slave's face.

"Suna Maria! Some one comes!" she exclaimed.

The emergency cleared the wits of the Kentuckian. He raised the chair of the sleeping woman, carried it with its burden to the recess of the window and drew the curtains around it.

The movement concealed the spatter from view.

"Back to your chair!" Berta cried to the room-service boy.

A rap sounded at the door.

Talbot strode to his chair, drew the severed bonds about his wrists and sunk into his old position.

Berta swept her hand across her face, and then, as she opened the door was as calm as ever.

Captain Ribera stood in the passage, and thought the room was quite vacant. He saw that the senorita was completely gone.

He stood in silence, his gaze roving around the room, but as Talbot marked the flash upon his face and a swaying of his powerful form, he was not slow in accounting for these facts. The guerilla was partially intoxicated.

"What is wanted?" Berta asked, with surprising calmness.

"Nothing in particular," replied Ribera, summoning all his will to talk strongly, "I was passing and thought I would drop in."

He entered the room and looked dully at Talbot.

"The Texan is still here," he added, "Where else should he be?" Berta tersely asked.

"He ought to be in perdition," growled the guerilla, who was almost drunk.

"Where's the old woman—I mean, where is Senorita Costenza?"

"My aunt is in her apartment," was the icy reply.

"So you are all alone with the terrible Texan? I'll sit down and help you watch him."

"Won't your men need your aid?" was the pointed question.

"Not so much as you do, and I like it better here.

"You look fatigued, captain," she said, "I will redress you shortly."

"Pardon, senorita," said Ribera, quickly, "but I do not care for anything. I am very well as I am, and wine don't agree with me."

"I'll have a choice of two, with a bit of cake, will refresh you, captain," was the unmoved reply.

"Brigida, bring some of our best. I will drink with you, Captain Ribera, and you ought to taste our wines."

CHAPTER X

IN THE TOOLS.

Brigida promptly obeyed, while Ribera stroked his beard in a mixture of complacency and anxiety. He knew he ought not to drink more, but had not the Senorita Berta asked...
Young Kentucky

"You give me credit for supernatural powers, Captain Ribera," he interrupted, "but I am pained to say, my bond is lamentably strong. If you will lose them a tribe, you will gain more.

He held out his hands, with the cords still upon them, and Berta, seeing that he had an idea, made no further objection. Ribera growled, and shot at the man, and the accursed invader and advanced to his side.

Of course, for him to touch the cords meant euro discovery, and the Kentuckian bruised himself to the bone to know that the guerrilla would not lose his bonds—so, indeed, they did not require—and he only awaited the proper moment to take matters into his own hands.

Ribera bent down to touch the cords, but at that instant, Talbot moved. Quick as a flash he threw one arm about the guerrilla's neck, and dragging him while his head was clasped over his beard and nostrils.

Before Captain Crisgo had time to realize the situation, he was lying flat on his back and the "invader" was kneeling on his breast. The mask was thrown off and Talbot was for a while master of the situation.

Berta whispered to Brigida, who hurried away, and pulling the two men who were scowling at each other with far different emotions. Talbot was cool, confident and active, while Ribera was confused, weak and stupid.

"Is still?" said the victor, sharply. "If you behave well you shall not be harmed, but if you try to raise an alarm, the consequences will be on your own head."

The dismayed outlaw tried to speak and say that he yielded, but Talbot's hand was over his mouth and only a hollow gurgle sounded.

The Kentuckian looked at the donna, but at that moment Brigida re-entered the apartment, turned to the two men and said:

"Keep your place, senor," she said, to Talbot. "I will bind him."

And then, without waiting for an answer, she proceeded to do so.

Meanwhile, Talbot was busily thinking. He knew the turn of affairs had revealed all to Ribera, and he comprehended that the secret would not be safe with him. He would betray Berta and the woman to Don Eduardo, and there was no knowing what the haciendado would do in his wrath.

A terrible suspicion assailed the Ranger. One stroke of a keen knife and the secret would be safe, Luke Bratow and his fellow martyrs would he avenged and the world ridded of the cords. No wonder Talbot, accustomed as he was to bloodshed, seriously considered the matter for a moment.

Then the true man arose within him. Bad as the situation was, he gave him no right to murder a defenseless man, and he resolved to make the best of it.

In a short time the guerrilla was bound and gagged, and Talbot was ready to go. A sudden thought occurred to him that he had not assumed the dress of a peon and made your escape.

In a short time the guerrilla was bound and gagged, and Talbot was ready to go. A sudden thought occurred to him that he had not assumed the dress of a peon and made your escape.

"I am ready for the venture," Talbot promptly replied, "but what of you, senorita? What will your father say when he discovers what you have done?"

"Do not fear, senor, Don Edwin," she said, "I must contend with you. It is cowardly for me to leave you to face such a peril alone."

His manly utterance plainly pleased the girl, for her fair face grew softer.

"I give you life for life, senor," she said. "I know, and may all blessings be yours, but in saving you have placed yourself in fresh peril and it is cowardly for me to leave you to face it. Donna Berta, there is no safety for you. Will you leave with me and trust yourself to my care?"

CHAPTER XI

A CRISIS IN EVENTS.

Five minutes before, Talbot had not the slightest foreboding of what the future held in store for him, but as the chances of his escape seemed to increase, the full realization of what Donna Berta must encounter came to him, and he could see but one course open to her.

A sudden light, which was like a flood of joy, brightened the girl's face, but it speedily faded. In her heart she loved the brave Ran- ger of the plains, and she would wait for him to make his escape, but as she realized that it merely proceeded from her manliness of heart and not from responsive love, she turned aside from temptation.

"I thank you, Don Edwin, but it can not be. Your band of Texans are in the field and a woman would be a burden upon you. My place is with my people and I must stay."

He pleaded his cause earnestly, but she was firm. They spoke rapidly for several minutes, but, when the Kentuckian saw that she could not be moved, he began ones more to think of himself.

Brigida had quietly left the room and returned with the dress of a peon, and when this had been changed the Kentuckian's appearance was not such as to attract suspicion in the night time.

It was arranged that Berta should avoid the window, and was and Brigida guide him to the court, and the time for farewell had come.

Talbot was deeply moved. He realized all that the senorita had done and was daring for him, and he read very well the light in her splendid eyes. She loved him and he was going away, perhaps never to see her again.

The thought gave him pain, and in that supreme moment he felt a new emotion and resolved that he would see her again if he had to swim seas of blood to accomplish it.

They went out in a man's life's time which comes to but few, and when even cool-headed men become methodically mad—perhaps over a passion which is not even love, and which they forget in their calmer moments, when a man feels an intensity of feeling and purpose which defies description.

What Edwin Talbot said he could not have told anyone. He heard the words and solemn vows into ears which eagerly listened, and in some way the farewell was said.

Brigida and the Ranger departed and Donna Berta was left alone with the prisoners by the window—alone, but not unhappy. The gal- lant Kentuckian, her hero, had promised to return to her if he lived, and in her warm heart there was not a doubt.

Meanwhile, the peon woman had led our hero to a door which opened into the court.

He threw open the door, and as he gave his hand in farewell, he could not but remember how the last hour had changed his opinion of her.

Her face was firm and masculine, and at first he had thought her cruel and merciless, but, under the guiding hand of her beloved mistress, she had utterly reversed his judgment.

The door closed behind him and he looked keenly around. The night was dark and that immediate part of the court nearly deserted. The two men remained on their feet, but if they saw Talbot, they gave no sign.

Time was precious, and he walked quickly to the tall. Once at the top he could easily drop to the plantation and all would be well.

He was about to ascend when he heard a sound above, and, looking up, saw a man on the top of the house.

He stood motionless and waited for him to move on, but, instead, he turned and dropped lightly beside the Kentuckian.
**You give me credit for supernatural powers, Captain Ribera,** he interrupted, "but, I am pained to say, my bonds are lamentably strong. If you loosen them a trifle, you will gain much more.

He held out his hands, with the cords still upon them, and Berta, seeing that he had an idea, made no further objection. Ribera growled, and then he threw his arm around an accursed invader** and advanced to his side.

Of course, for him to touch the cords meant sure discovery, and the Kentuckian braced himself. But the Captain, Berta knew, well that the guerrilla would not loosen his bonds—and, indeed, they did not require—and he only awaited the proper moment to make his matter.**

Ribera bent down to touch the cords, but at that instant, Talbot moved. Quick as a flash he threw one arm about the guerrilla's neck, while the other was clasped over his beard and nostrils.

Before Captain Crispio had time to realize the situation, he was lying flat on his back and the 'invader' was kneeling on his breast. The mask was thrown off and Talbot was for a while master of the situation.

Berta whispered to Brigida, who hurried away, and as she passed the two men who were scowling at each other with far different emotions. Talbot was cool, confident and active, while Ribera was confused, weak and stupendous.

"Lies still?" said the victor, sharply. "If you behave well you shall not be harmed, but if you make a noise, the consequences may be on your own head."

The dismained outlaw tried to speak and say that he yielded, but Talbot's hand was over his mouth and only a hollow gurgling sounded.

The Kentuckian looked at the donna, but at that moment Brigida re-entered the apartment, and the Kentuckian's appearance was not such as to attract suspicion in the night time.

It was arranged that Berta should come within reach and be shown to Brigida guide to the court, and the time for farewell had come. Talbot was deeply moved. He realized all that the senorita had done and was admiring for him, and he read very well the life in her splendid eyes. She loved him and he was going away, perhaps never to see her again.

She gave him pain, but in that supreme moment he felt a new emotion and resolved that he would see her again if he had to swim seas of blood to accomplish it.

That time in a man's life, a time which comes to but few, and when even cool-headed men become methodically mad—perhaps over a passion which is not even love, and which they forget in their calmer moments when a man feels an intensity of feeling and purpose which defies description.

What Edwin Talbot said he could not have told her, because he was too bewildered with words and solemn vows into ears which eagerly listened, and in some way the farewell was said.

Brigida and the Ranger departed and Donna Berta was left alone with the prisoners by the window—alone, but not unhappy. The gallant Kentuckian, her hero, had promised to return to her if he lived, and in her warm heart there was not a doubt.

Meanwhile, the peon woman had led our hero to a door which opened into the court. She put one hand on his shoulder and as he gave her his hand in farewell, he could not but remember how the last hour had changed his opinion of her.

Her face was frank and masculine, and at first he had thought her cruel and merciless, but, under the guiding hand of her beloved mistress, she had utterly reversed her judgment.

The door closed behind him and he looked keenly around. The night was dark and that immediate part of the court nearly deserted. He trusted to his little men on their best, but if they saw Talbot, they gave no sign.

Time was precious, and he walked hurriedly to the wall. Once at the top he could easily drop to the prison and then all would be well. He was about to ascend when he heard a sound above, and, looking up, saw a man on the wall. He stood as if he were frightened, but waited for him to move on, but, instead, he turned and dropped lightly beside the Kentuckian.
You give me credit for supernatural powers, Captain Ribera," he interrupted, "but I, I am paid to say, my bonds are lamentably strong. If you loosen them a trifle, you will grow men of the earth in the service of the state. The guerrilla was not a man of lofty ideas. If a woman swayed him, he was ready to go wrong as right, and just then he was ready to prove the wisdom of the decision which cost him so much and the guerilla on the terms on which he was ready to be the more or less concerned Talbot. That was beyond the limit of his yielding. All this the Kentuckian read, and he would have been ready to sell his soul for a proper end. The guerrilla was not a man of lofty ideas. If a woman swayed him, he was ready to go wrong as right, and just then he was ready to prove the wisdom of the decision which cost him so much and the guerilla on the terms on which he was ready to be the more or less concerned Talbot. That was beyond the limit of his yielding. All this the Kentuckian read, and he would have been ready to sell his soul for a proper end. The guerrilla was not a man of lofty ideas. If a woman swayed him, he was ready to go wrong as right, and just then he was ready to prove the wisdom of the decision which cost him so much and the guerilla on the terms on which he was ready to be the more or less concerned Talbot. That was beyond the limit of his yielding. All this the Kentuckian read, and he would have been ready to sell his soul for a proper end. The guerrilla was not a man of lofty ideas. If a woman swayed him, he was ready to go wrong as right, and just then he was ready to prove the wisdom of the decision which cost him so much and the guerilla on the terms on which he was ready to be the more or less concerned Talbot. That was beyond the limit of his yielding. All this the Kentuckian read, and he would have been ready to sell his soul for a proper end. The guerrilla was not a man of lofty ideas. If a woman swayed him, he was ready to go wrong as right, and just then he was ready to prove the wisdom of the decision which cost him so much and the guerilla on the terms on which he was ready to be the more or less concerned Talbot. That was beyond the limit of his yielding. All this the Kentuckian read, and he would have been ready to sell his soul for a proper end. The guerrilla was not a man of lofty ideas. If a woman swayed him, he was ready to go wrong as right, and just then he was ready to prove the wisdom of the decision which cost him so much and the guerilla on the terms on which he was ready to be the more or less concerned Talbot. That was beyond the limit of his yielding. All this the Kentuckian read, and he would have been ready to sell his soul for a proper end.
Young Kentucky

"You give me credit for supernatural powers, Captain Rivers," he interrupted, "but I am paid to say, my bonds are lamentably strong. If you will loosen them a trifle, you will gain good results.

He held out his hands, with the cords still upon them, and Berta, seeing that he had an idea, made no further objection. Rivers grew bolder, and the bonds were loosened. He then led, as it were, concealed, to his side.

Of course, for him to touch the cords meant euro discovery, and the Kentuckian braced himself for the knowledge that he knew too well that the guerrilla would not loosen his bonds—as, indeed, they did not require—and he only awaited the proper moment to take matters in hand."

Rivers bent down to touch the cords, but at that instant, Talbot moved. Quick as a flash, he threw one arm about the guerrilla's neck, and the other under the man's, clasped over his beard, and nostrils.

Before Captain Crosby had time to realize the situation, he was lying flat on his back and the "invader" was kneading on his breast. The mask was thrown off and Talbot was for a while master of the situation.

Berta whispered to Brigida, who hurried away, and in a few minutes two men who were scowling at each other with far different emotions. Talbot was cool, confident and active, while Rivers was confused, weak and stupid.

"Lies still?" said the victor, sharply. "If you behave well you shall not be harmed, but if you dare to raise an alarm, the consequences be on your own head.

The dismayed outlaw tried to speak and said that he yielded, but Talbot's hand was over his mouth and only a hollow gurgle sounded.

The Kentuckian looked at the donna, but at that moment Brigida re-entered the apartment, her face was lightly flushed and her performance was such as not to attract suspicion in the night time.

It was arranged that Berta should keep watch outside and Brigida guide him to the court, and the time for farewell had come.

Talbot was deeply moved. He realized that all the sorrows she had done and was enduring for him, and he read very well the light in her splendid eyes. She loved him and he was going away, perhaps never to see her again.

The thought gave him pain, and in that supreme moment he felt a new emotion and resolved that he would see her again, if he could not swim seas of blood to accomplish it.

Talbot and Brigida and the Ranger departed and Donna Berta was left alone with the prisoners by the window—alone, but not unhappy. The gallant Kentuckian, her hero, had promised to return to her if he lived, and in her warm heart there was not a doubt.

Meanwhile, the beautiful woman had led our hero to a door which opened into the court, and unseen by the prisoners, it was closed. He and as he gave her his hand in farewell, he could not but remember how the last hour had changed his opinion of her.

Her face was lighted masculine, and at first he had thought her cruel and merciless, but, under the guiding hand of her beloved mistress, she had utterly reversed his judgment.

The door closed behind him and he looked keenly around. The night was dark and that immediate part of the court nearly deserted. Some horsemen were passing like men on their beat, but if they saw Talbot, they gave no sign.

Time was precious, and he walked daintily to the wall. Once at the top he could easily drop to the prairie and then all would be well.

He was about to ascend when he heard a sound above, and, looking up, saw a man on the wall. He knew it was waiting for him to move on, but, instead, he turned and dropped lightly beside the Kentuckian.

CHAPTER XI.

A CRISIS IN EVENTS.

Five minutes before, Talbot had not the slightest idea of what was going to happen, but as the chances of his escape seemed to increase, the full realization of what Donna Berta must encounter came to him, and he could see but one way to save her.

A sudden light, which was like a flood of joy, brightened the girl's face, but it speedily faded. In her heart she loved the brave Kentuckian and was willing to give her life for him, but as she realized that it merely proceeded from her manliness of heart and not from responsive love, she turned aside from temptation.

"I thank you, Don Edwin, but it can not be. Your band of Texans are in the field and a woman would be a burden upon you. My place is with my people and I must stay."

He pleaded his case earnestly, but she was firm. They spoke rapidly for several minutes, but, when the Kentuckian saw that she could not be moved, he began ones more to think of himself.

Brigida had quietly left the room and returned with the dress of a princess, and when this was shown to Donna Berta, her appearance was such as not to attract suspicion.

It was arranged that Berta should keep watch outside and Brigida guide him to the court, and the time for farewell had come.
The greater part of the Texans paid their first attention to the court, and they found there pecos who had been peacefully sleeping but scarcely one of them lifted a hand in opposition, and, by Palmer's order, they were treated with mercy.

Here and there a man was met who fought out of pure necessity. And such a man, by reason of his black suit, old frock coat, was seen to be wearing the uniform of River's guerrillas. To such pity was shown.

Edwin Talbot had at once made a rush for the last tree of the grove, but as he was forced to leave Berta and save her from harm and a strange catamite had taken possession of his previous interest.

But men follow at his heels, fellow Rangers, but he paid no heed to them. He rushed toward the room where he had last seen the seconrata, and flung open the door.

Berta was not in the room, or seemed to be.

There was no sign of Berta.

He turned back into the corridor, but, by this time, those who had followed him had made a hasty search, and a cry arose from them.

"The azotea!" shouted the mad Rangers.

"We shall find them there!"

Talbot caught at the idea and made a rush to be at the head. A huge guerrilla arose, however, from a recess, and, catching the Kentuckian, attempted to hurl him to the foot of the azotea.

They fell together, and Talbot was half-stunned for a moment, but, recovering his footing, he saw the guerrilla flint upon the floor with the edge of his saber, and then turn to avoid a charge of a dozen men.

The former struggled in vain in the grasp of the life-hunter, and Talbot saw that he was deliberately strangling him with the red 4ass. The Kentuckian turned from the life-hunter and dashed right and left and behind and up the sides of the azotea.

As the reader already knows, all, or nearly all, Mexican houses have flat tops, and there was one at this moment within a few feet of the top of the azotea, which the Kentuckian surrounded by the perfume of the many rare flowering plants standing around in pots.

Such was the case, but it was not a pleasant scene upon which Edwin Talbot entered as he reached the roof.

A dozen females had instinctively retreated to the bare earth. One, in full dress, Donna Berta, and the better women, who were the most injured, took the whole band, had imprisoned them and were demanding kisses from mere mischief.

Blood-boiled at this disregard of Major Palmer's orders, the Kentuckian, straggling in the arms of a stout scoundrel, he stepped forward and dealt him a blow which dashed him half-dead against the parapet.

In a moment more, the Kentuckian had drawn the really frightened seconrata to one side, where he could defend her.

"Have no fear, dear lady," he said. "These ruffians shall only touch you by passing over my body."

"Oh! you will ruin yourself, Don Edwin!"

"I will protect you or die!" he boldly answered.

The fallen man had regained his feet, and the Rangers, sobered as they were, as he strode toward the Kentuckian. They had not intended to harm the women, but a blow had been given, and, among them, such things were not the order of the day.

"Ed Talbot," hissed the man, "I'll have your life for that act!"

"Come on, and make no words about it," retorted the hero, holding his saber in a vise-like grasp.

In a minute more the clash of steel would have sounded on the azotea, but at that moment the voice of Major Palmer and a dozen men appeared on the scene.

"Hold there!" he commanded, as soon as he discovered the state of affairs in the dim light.

"What quarrel is this?"
Side by side the pair stalked toward the gate. In that critical hour luck seemed to have utterly forsaken the Mexicans, for not a man appeared to bar their way.

TheTER and with skillful hands the owner of the red lasso began to undo the fastenings.

Talbot stood by in silence, but he was in mortal anguish. Feri's death seemed very near to fair Berta then.

The last fastening gave way, and Maxwell pulled the gateajar.

The way was open to the Texans!

CHAPTER XIII

A SCARMA OF BLOOD

"There is no time to lose," said Maxwell, quickly. "Do you go at once to Major Palmer and tell him to make a dash for the gate?"

It was a far-fetched and disloyal plan. His reputation was at stake, and for him to be backward then would ineffaceably brand him a traitor. A true man values his honor above all things earthly, and for a time the memory of Berta grew dim.

With a simple reassurance to Maxwell, he clung through the gate, and crawling low, hurried toward where the Ranger had said the band was to be found.

As he went he half-expected to receive a shot from the wall, but all remained silent. He reached the camp of the Maderas, and at once he knew that the gate was open enough to bring every man upon his feet.

Major Palmer became aware in an instant. He ordered immediate advance, directing the Rangers to advance silently until discovered, and then make a dash.

Edwin Talbot had a duty to perform, and he planted himself in the road. Where have you been all this while?" asked Palmer.

The Kentuckian briefly related how he had been charged with imposture, and finally freed by the hacienda's daughter.

"What will you do when inside the walls?"

"I will try to get across in accordance as he behaves when we attack."

"There are women there, major," said one of them.

"They may say life, and I would save them from harm," replied Talbot, uneasily.

"Rest easy, sir, for we are Texans. You may well rely on me for a year, Edwin Talbot. Did you ever, in that time, know me to countenance war upon, or severity toward, one of their sex?"

"I am not your major, nor, was, heartily answered, a great load lifting from his heart. "I confess I feared for them, but I was mad." By this time they were too near the gate for conversation, however, it seemed a wonder that they had not already been discovered.

Palmer began to suspect a trap, and, of course, if there was one, Talbot was at the bottom of it. He resolved to test the matter. Giving the word to his men, they made a rapid dash for the gate.

Only a few rods intervened between them and the wall, and when a challenge was discharged on the wall—the tardy warning of a worthless sentry.

There was an instant hush of voices inside the fort, and as the climax was reached and gained, the Rangers were at the opening. A hoarse shout sounded from Maxwell, proving that all was well, and then the gallant band went through the open gate.

Men were rushing to and fro in the court, but there was nothing which looked like armed opposition. Plainly the enemy were taken at a decided disadvantage.

The greater part of the Texans paid their first attention to the court, and they found there pecos who had been peacefully sleeping but scarcely one of them lifted a hand in opposition, and, by Palmer's order, they were treated with mercy.

Here and there a man was met who fought only a part of the fight. The others they had blown and were driven toward the wall. One by one he was seen to wear the uniform of Riberia's guerrillas. To such pity was shown.

Edwin Talbot had at once made a rush for the喜欢 of the trapped. He turned to the wall, and saw her from behind and a strange calmness had taken possession of his previous excitement. The men follow at his heels, follow Rangers, but he paid no heed to them. He rushed toward the room where he had last seen the senorita, and flung open the door.

But Berta was not there, or seemed to be. There was no sign of Berta.

He turned back into the corridor, but, by this time, those who had followed him had made a hasty search, and a cry arose from them.

"The azotea!" shouted the mad Rangers.

"We shall find them there!"

Talbot caught at the idea and made a rush to be at the head. A huge guerrilla arose, however, from a recess, and, catching the Kentuckian, attempted to hurl him to the feet of the smiling band.

They fell together, and Talbot was half-stunned for a moment, but, recovering his footing, he saw the guerrillas fall flat upon the floor with Palmer and some others. The former struggled in vain in the grasp of the life-hunter, and Talbot saw that he was deliberately strangling him with the red lasso. The Kentuckian turned from the offside right and bounded up the steps of the azotea.

As the reader already knows, all, or nearly all, Mexican houses have flat tops, and there is plenty of room on these for care on their fields. A parapet runs around the edge, and there, in the cool of the evening, the proud don or the warm-hearted lovers may recline in comfort, which is heightened by the perfume of the many rare flowering plants standing around in pots. Such is no further peace, but it was not a pleasant scene upon which Edwin Talbot entered as he reached the roof.

A dozen females had instinctively retreated to the bare esparto, Donna Berta, and the Texan women who were the most reached by the whole band, had imprisoned them and were demanding kisses from mere mischief.

Blood boiled at this disregard of Major Palmer's saved her, and a Kentuckian struggling in the arms of a stout scoundrel, he stepped forward and dealt him a blow which dashed him half against the parapet. In a moment more, Talbot saw that the Kentuckian had drawn the truly frightened senorita on to one side, where he could defend her.

"Have no further fear, dear lady," he said. "These ruffians shall only touch you by passing over my body."

"Oh! you will ruin yourself, Don Edwin!"

"I will protect you or die!" he boldly answered.

The fallen man had regained his feet, and the Rangers, soberly quartered, followed him as he strode toward the Kentuckian. They had not intended to harm the women, but a blow had been given, and, among them, such things are not to be endured.

"Ed Talbot," hissed the man, "I'll have your life for that act!"

"Come on, and make no words about it," retorted the hero, holding his saber in a vise-like grasp.

In a minute more the clash of steel would have sounded on the azotea, but at that moment a voice was heard, and, as was to be expected, Major Palmer and a dozen men appeared on the scene.

"Hold there!" he commanded, as soon as he discovered the state of affairs in the dim light.

"What quarrel is this?"
The greater part of the Texans paid their first attention to the court, and they found there pecos who had been peacefully sleeping in their flagging, but scarcely one of them lifted a hand in opposition, and, by Palmer's order, they were treated with mercy.

Here and there a man was met who sought of the latter, and when he was found he was forced to wear the uniform of Ribera's guerrillas. To such pity was shown.

Edwin Talbot had at once made a rush for the house of the doctor, and when he found that Berta and save her from harm and a strange caution had taken possession of his current.

If men follow at his heels, fellow Rangers, but he paid no heed to them. He rushed toward the room where he had last seen the sentinels, and flung open the door.

There was no sign of Berta.

He turned back into the corridor, but, by this time, those who had followed him had made a hasty search, and a cry arose from them.

"The ozeea!" shouted the mad Rangers.

"We shall find them there!"

Talbot caught at the idea and made a rush to be at the head. A huge guerrilla arose, however, from a recess, and, catching the Kentuckian, attempted to hurl him to the foot of the stairs.

They fell together, and Talbot was halted for a moment, but, recovering his footing, he saw the guerrillas fall upon the floor with their hands to their heads, which the Kentuckian turned from the life-right and bounded up the steps of the ozeea.

As the reader already knows, all, or nearly all, Mexican houses have flat tops, and there placed traps to the visitors as they saw upon their fields. A parapet runs around the edges, and, there, in the cool of the evening, the proud don or the warm-hearted lovers may recline in silence, which is broken only by the perfume of the many rare flowering plants standing around in pots.

Such was the further peace, but it was not a pleasant scene upon which Edwin Talbot entered as he reached the roof.

A dozen females had instinctively retreated to the bare earth, and, as the donata Berta, and the Texas women, who the most herded the whole body, had imprisoned them and were demanding kisses from mere mischief.

Blood-boiled at this disregard of Major Palmer's, said the Kentuckian, who had struggled in the arms of a stout scoundrel, he stepped forward and dealt him a blow which dashed the life of his head against the parapet.

In a moment more the Kentuckian had drawn the truly frightened sentinels to one side, where he could defend her.

"Have no further fear, dear lady," he said.

These ruffians shall only touch you by passing over my body."

"Oh! you will ruin yourself, Don Edwin?"

"I will protect you or die!" he boldly answered.

The fallen man had regained his feet, and the Kentuckian, who formed the most part of them, had imprisoned them and were demanding kisses from mere mischief.

"Ed Talbot," hissed the man, "I'll have your life for that act!"

"Come on, and make no words about it," re- torcatingly, he held, having his saber in a vise-like grasp.

In a minute more the clash of steel would have sounded on the ozeea, but that moment the voice of the donata Berta, and a dozen men approached the scene.

"Hold there!" he commanded, as soon as he discovered the state of affairs in the dim light.

"What quarrel is this?"
Side by side the pair stalked toward the gate. In that critical hour luck seemed to have utterly forsaken the Mexicans, for not a man appeared to bar their way.

The two Kentuckians, with skillful hands the owner of the red lasso began to undo the fastenings.

Talbot stood by in silence, but he was in mental agitation. Peril and death seemed very near to fair Berta then.

The last fastening gave way, and Maxwell pulled the gate ajar. The way was open to the Texans.

**CHAPTER XII**

**A DAZMA OF BLOOD**

**There is no time to lose,** said Maxwell, quickly. **Do you go at once to Major Palmer and tell him to make a dash for the gate.**

**If you do not oblige me, death will be your fate.**

Berta was still not doubts. His reputation was at stake, and for him to be backward then would inexpressably brand him a traitor. A true man values his honor above all things earthly, and for a time the memory of Berta grew dim.

With a simple reassurance to Maxwell, he glided through the gate, and crouching low, hurried toward where the Ranger had said the band was to be found.

As he went he half-expected to receive a shot from the wall, but all remained silent. He even wondered if he had been mistaken; when suddenly he had become a target for the guerrillas' rifles.

He reached the camp of the Texans, and a word was enough to announce him as a friend, while the men, he knew that the gate was not opened enough to bring every man up on his feet.

Major Palmer became aware in an instant. He ordered immediate advance, directing the Rangers to advance silently until discovered, and then to make a dash.

Edwin Talbot had a duty to perform, and he placed his trust in the unseen eye. He was determined to see the Ranger and Palmer and in the direction of the guerilla the sight and bounded up the sights of the azeota.

As the reader already knows, all, or nearly all, Mexican houses have flat tops, and there placed tapers. It was about eight o'clock, the flower standing around in their fields. A parapet runs around the edge, and there, in the cool of the evening, the proud don or the warm-hearted lovers may recline in comfort, which is why he dedicated the perfume of the men rare flowering plants standing around in pots.

Such is no further peace, but it was not a pleasant scene upon which Edwin Talbot entered as he reached the roof.

A dozen females had instinctively retreated to the ears, all, except Donna Berta, and the Texan who was the most skilled of them, the whole band, had imprisoned them and were demanding kisses from mere mischief.

Blood boiled at this disregard of Major Palmer's, so, after a few moments of some sort, he stepped forward and dealt him a blow which descended, as he turned his head against the parapet. In a moment more, Berta had drawn the really frightened senorita to one side, where he could defend her.

"I have no further fear, dear lady," he said.

"These ruffians shall only touch you by passing over my body,"

"Oh! you will ruin yourself, Don Edwin!" she continued.

"I will protect you or die," he boldly answered.

The fallen man had regained his feet, and the Ranger, cocking his gun, as he strode toward the Kentuckian. They had not intended to harm the women, but a blow had been given, and, among them, such things were not forgotten.

"Ed Talbot," hissed the man, "I'll have your life for that act!"

"Come on, and make no words about it," retorted the hero, holding his saber in a vise-like grasp.

In a minute more the clash of steel would have sounded on the azeota, but at that moment another voice attracted Major Palmer and a dozen men appeared on the scene.

"Hold there!" he commanded, as soon as he discovered the state of affairs in the dim light.

"What quarrel is this?"
"Talbot has turned traitor and raised his hand against our own boys," answered one, quickly.

"He struck me to the floor," added the man who had been assailed, and his voice was husky with pain.

"So I did," promptly admitted Talbot, "but I found him assailing this lady and I only gave him what he served up in turn.

"I'll swear it's in fun," protested the man.

"Did you assault the lady?" asked Palmer, sharply.

"I thought she was in arms, for sport.

"Then you deserve all you received. Did I not order you to let the women alone?"

"I did wrong," said the man Neilson, "but I would have been a fool to take my chance. It was a case of self-defense, plain and simple."

Then we will settle the matter anon. At present, I do not see wherein Talbot is to blame.

At this moment a man bounded upon the cleared and stood breathless beside the major.

He was one of the guards set to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements, and his manner was enough to alarm the Texans.

"What is it? What is it?"

"More Greasers are coming! They number at least a hundred and are riding pell-mell toward the cause. They will be here in five minutes."

"Retreat is our watchword then," said the major, with surprising calmness. "Every man to his horse and all ride like hell for safer soil!"

"Why not make a fortress of the house?" asked one man.

"There are a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours. No, sir, our only course is to retreat!"

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as this room. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentucky, in fresh alarm.

"There is none, but I shall be the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you have a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well."

And without another word, he saw that there was no appeal from the verdict, while any further remonstrance on his part would have led to a conflict with the major. He knew too that the latter would conscientiously keep his pledge.

So he spoke quickly to Berta, explaining the situation, and then quickly retreating the promise of fair treatment.

No more was needed. It was enough for Berta that she was to go in charge of the man she had loved and would have followed him to the end of the world.

She promptly acquiesced in the plan, and the Rangers descended from the roof and into the courtyard. Men were there to urge them to hasten. The guerrilla reinforcement was almost at hand and the moment a critical one.

Their horses had been brought to the gate and they hurriedly mounted.

Talbot managed to secure his own horse and see Berta well mounted, but at that moment there was a hoarse chorus of yells, and the Mexicans swept down upon them.

Major Palmer grasped the whole situation at a glance. He knew they must fight, and to fight when in retreat would place them at a decided disadvantage; while, with their superior weapons and matchless courage, they might, by a bold stand, repel the first rush of the guerrillas and gain a better start.

To his own horse he gave a decisive command, and at the word the Texans hurled themselves against the van of the Mexicans as valiantly as though the odds were not terribly against them.

Talbot had received directions to devote himself entirely to Donna Berta and the order was obeyed.

It was a moment of sore temptation to the Kentuckian. He did not like the idea of the maiden being a prisoner, and at that time he might have turned back and placed her safely in the house. It would have been the safer plan by it, since so many of his comrades already believed him a traitor, but the recollection of Major Palmer's confidence in him was enough to prevent the rash deed.

Perhaps all might yet be well. Don Eduardo had been left unharmed inside the casa, his property had been respected, and matters might not end so badly after all.

The rush of the Rangers was almost irresistible. Their rifles cracked with deadly effect, and then their sabers and pistols taught a lesson of Texan bravery and skill. Even the superior numbers of the guerrillas could not enable them to withstand such an attack, and they began to give ground.

The bloodbath was among all the Texans was Nathan Maxwell; indeed, he seemed for the time to have become almost a score of men within one, and his fighting was terrific. As he raised his saber for a third cut at his gory saber, his red lasso hung over his saddle, but it was not needed to remind him of his vow of vengeance.

The Mexican leader did all in his power, with voice and sword, but, despite his efforts, his followers broke and began to retreat.

The Rangers moved in pursuit, for Palmer was stern enough to know that if left alone they would soon recover from their demoralization. To pursue them too far would be equally a mistake. He would soon be at their heels, and they were bound sooner or later to remember their superiority of numbers and must draw a line between the two extremes, an operation of considerable nicety.

In the midst of the pursuit his command sounded, and, as one man, the Texans wheeled their horses and swept away.

Their course was northwest, for in that direction lay their most promising path of retreat, and they would run so near the chaparral, mentioned in our opening chapters, that they could take refuge there if hard pressed.

Looking back as they rode, they saw no sign of the Mexicans in pursuit, but they knew the entire pueblo would soon be at their heels, and the prospect was not a pleasant one.

Berta, having yielded herself a prisoner, did not play the part of a sulker, or attempt to delay the pursuit. She was riding and managing her horse, she fell back to her side and thanked her warmly.

Talbot was not impressed by her manner, and more than ever he realized that few women possessed the nobility and solid common sense of her gallant leader.

Maxwell had the opportunity to press the side of the Kentuckian.

"Did you see Ribera while you were inside the casa?" he asked.

"Yes, senor," Talbot replied, quickly.

"Where was he during the fight? I looked for him everywhere, but in vain. I do not think another member of his band escaped, but he either went over the wall or hid in some secure place."

Talbot remembered that the guerrilla had been left bound and gagged in the cover of the curtailades and the wind-swept recess, and wondered that so simple a hiding-place had proved so secure.

He briefly related how Ribera had been disposed of after being overpowered.

The owner of the red lasso ground out a terrible regret between his teeth.

"I was in that very room," he added, "but I did not once think of looking behind the cover, even when the door was still, before I—"

Talbot escaped again, but the end is not yet. The number of those against whom my oath is directed is reduced to one, and I will yield to him again."

He held aloft the red lasso, and Talbot could not repress a shudder at his manner. He remembered how kind and quiet this man had ever been in the past, and, before Lulu Brastow died, he realized how strong must be the man's nature to make what he had become.

The progress of the party was very rapid; indeed, their horses were going at a telling gallop, and there was good demand for all their speed. Their repeated affrays had reduced their number to about twenty, and, as the Mexicans must number eighty, and could easily be enforced from Don Eduardo's peons, the outlook, in case it came to a hand-to-hand fight, was dark enough.

Their trail of vengeance had been a bloody one, and there were those who feared not one of them would ever again see Texan soil.

CHAPTER XIV

HARD PRESSSED.

A MILE or so onward, the prospect began to look a trifle brighter; though not one of the Rangers was foolish enough to believe they had seen the last of the Mexicans. The major had reined in his horse, where, of course, Captain Ribera would be found if Texan had harmed him, and it was but natural to suppose the guerrilla would be in a fierce rage and urge his allies on to seek for revenge.

Thus far, the captured horses had been retained, but Palmer had little hope of getting them back and he did intend to cling to them if hard pressed.

They were riding with the chaparral on their left, and the major had questioned Talbot further about the place before, and, as before said, it was a place little known, and if they were forced to take refuge there, they must depend on luck and circumstances.

The Kentuckian still rode beside Berta, but, in the darkness, he could not see the expression of her face.

Affairs have taken a disagreeable turn for you, senorita," he observed, after Palmer left him.

"I do not think I am so badly off as you were a few hours ago," she replied, quietly.

"And yet you are, for, Major Palmer never breaks his word, but this forced ride is not pleasant."

"I do not complain, thus far. Whatever you do to me, do it for my best for you. I have not forgotten the aid you gave me, Major."

"I trust you fully, Don Edwina."

The words were simple enough in themselves, but the inflection of her voice told far more and the Ranger felt a new thrill in his being. Little by little he was coming to have a new feeling toward this fair daughter of the tropics, and, in spite of his own precarious standing in the band, he was giving all of his attention to Berta.

Jack Flunkey, who had been riding in the rear, pressed forward to the side of the major.

"What is it?" the latter quickly asked.

I warn you, I am no fool," Flunkey repeated, thoughtfully, "and we may expect a hot chase. What do you say, Jack, is it best to hang to the extra horses or let them go?"

"If I may combine, major, I kinder hate to give 'em up."

"So do I, but we had better do that than to lose everything. I am afraid we will have to fall back to the extreme rear, Jack, and..."
“Taibot has turned traitor and raised his hand against our own boys,” answered Tom, quickly.

“He struck me to the floor,” added the man who had been assailed, and his voice was that of one who had escaped.

“So I did,” promptly admitted Taibot, “but I found him assailing this lady and I only gave him what he served up.”

“Then I serve him in turn,” protested the man.

“Did you assault the lady?” asked Palmer, sharply.

“I thought her in arms, for sport.”

“Then you deserve all you received. Did I not order you to let the women alone?”

“He did wrong,” said the man Neison, “but it was a trifling, paltry case. I charge him with being a traitor to our cause and an ally of the Greasers!”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT UNDER THE WALLS.

Palmer turned sharply upon the speaker.

“Where is your proof?” he demanded.

“It has been accumulating for weeks—”

“That is anything new!”

“Nothing except this affair, but—”

Then we will settle the matter anon. At present, I do not see wherein Taibot is to blame.

At this moment a man bounded upon the esplanade and stood breathless beside the major.

He was one of the guards set to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements, and his manner was enough to alarm the Texan.

“Why?”

“More Greasers are coming? They number at least a hundred and are riding pell-mell toward the cause. They will be here in five minutes.”

“Retreat is our watchword then,” said the major, with surprising calmness. “Every man to his horse and all ride like hell for safer soil!”

“Why not make a fortress of the house?” asked one man.

“Thirty thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat.”

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

“Senorita,” he kindly said, “war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the porch. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated.”

“Major, is there no way to avoid this?” asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

“Let the door be shut, Senorita. This shall be the lady’s guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you have a soldier’s word of honor that all shall be well.”

And with this he turned, and he saw that there was no appeal from the verdict, while any further remonstrance on his part would have been of no influence with the major. He knew, too, that the latter would conscientiously keep his pledge.

So he spoke quickly to Berta, explaining the situation and promising her that he would reinter the plan of fair treatment.

No more was needed. It was enough for Berta that she was to go in charge of the man she loved, and she would have followed him to the end of the world.

She promptly acquiesced in the plan, and the Rangers descended from the roof and into the court. Men were there to urge them on to hasten. The guerrillas reinforcement was almost at hand and the moment a critical one.

Their horses had been brought to the gate and they hurriedly mounted.

Taibot managed to secure his own horse and saw Berta well mounted, but at that moment there was a hoarse chorus of yells, and the Mexicans swept down upon them.

Major Palmer grasped the whole situation at a glance. He knew they must fight, and to fight when in retreat would place them at a decided disadvantage; while, with their superior weapons and matchless courage, they might, by a bold stand, repel the first rush of the guerrillas and gain a better start.

To his aids he gave a decisive command, and at the word the Texans hurried themselves against the van of the Mexicans as valiantly as though the odds were not terribly against them.

Taibot had received directions to devote himself entirely to Donna Berta and the order was obeyed.

It was a moment of sore temptation to the Kentuckian. He did not like the idea of the maiden being a prisoner, and at that time he might have turned back and placed her safely in the house. It was a mere chance case. He could have done it by it, since so many of his comrades already believed him a traitor, but the recollection of Major Palmer’s confidence in him was enough to prevent the rash deed.

Perhaps all might yet be well. Don Eduardo had been left unharmed inside the casita, his property had been respected, and matters might not end so badly after all.

The rush of the Rangers was almost resistless. Their rifles cracked with deadly effect, and when their sabers and pistols taught a lesson of Texan bravery and skill. Even the superior numbers of the guerrillas could not enable them to withstand such an attack, and they began to give ground.

The battle was fiercest among all the Texans was Nathan Maxwell; indeed, he seemed for the time to have become almost a score of men within one, and his fighting was terrific. As he charged to the front in the midst of his gory saber, his red lasso hung over his saddle, but it was not needed to remind him of his vow of vengeance.

The Mexican leader did all in his power, with voice and sword, but, despite his efforts, his followers broke and began to retreat.

The Rangers followed up their victory, but Palmer was astounded enough to know that if left alone they would soon recover from their demoralization. To pursue them far too would be equally a mistake, for in no case would they be cornered until at his heels, and he was bound sooner or later to remember their superiority of numbers and he must draw a line between the two extremes, an operation of considerable nicety.

In the midst of the pursuit his command sounded and, as, one man, the Texans wheeled their horses and swept away.

Their course was north-west, for in that direction lay their most promising path of retreat, and they would run so near the chaparral, mentioned in our opening chapters, that they could take refuge there if hard pressed.

Looking back as they rode, they saw no sign of the Mexicans in pursuit, but they knew the whole people would soon be at their heels, and the prospect was not a pleasant one.

Berta, having yielded herself a prisoner, did not play the part of a sulker, or attempt to delay the carriage. She rode at her seat and bore the war as no other woman. Naturally she impressed by her father’s manner, and more than ever realized that a few men possessed the nobility and solid common sense of his gallant leader.

Maxwell gave an order, which caused the side of the Kentuckian.

“Did you see Rivera while you were inside the casita?” he asked.

“Taibot told me that,” replied the major.

“Where was he during the fight? I looked for him everywhere, but in vain. I do not think another member of his band escaped, but he either went over the wall or hid in some secure place.”

Taibot remembered that the guerrilla had been left bound and gagged in the cover of the curtaining. He owned the windlass was successful, and wondered that so simple a hiding-place had proved so secure.

He briefly related how Rivera had been disposed of after being overpowered.

The owner of the red lasso ground out a terrible regret between his teeth.

“I was in that very room,” he added, “but I did not once think of looking behind the door. I was on the lookout for the Walls, before Luisa Ribera escaped me again, but the door was not locked. The number of those against whom my oath is directed is reduced to one, and I will yield up to him.”

He held aloft the red lasso, and Taibot could not repress a shudder at his manner. He remembered how kind and quiet this man had been, and how he would have died, before Luisa Ribera died, and he realized how strong must be the man’s nature to make him what he had become.

The progress of the party was very rapid; indeed, their horses were going at a telling gallop, and there was good demand for all their speed. Their repeated affrays had reduced them to their present state, and, as the Mexicans must number eighty, and could easily be confined from Don Eduardo’s peons, the outlook, in case it came to a hand-to-hand fight, was dark enough.

Their trail of vengeance had been a bloody one, and there were those who feared not one of them would ever again see Texan soil.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARD PRESSED.

A MILE or so from the road the prospect began to look a trifle brighter, though not one of the Rangers was foolish enough to believe they had seen the last of the Mexicans. The major had been extremely doubtful of the case, where, of course, Captain Ribera would be found if to Texan had harmed him, and it was but natural to suppose the guerrilla would be in a fierce rage and urge his allies on to seek for revenge.

Thus far, the captured horses had been retained, but Palmer had little hope of getting them all back. He did intend to cling to them if hard pressed.

They were riding with the chaparral on their left, and the major had questioned Taibot further to the right as to the state of the country, before said, it was a place little known, and if they were forced to take refuge there, they must depend on luck and circumstances.

The Kentuckian still rode beside Berta, but, in the darkness, he could not see the expression of her face.

Affairs have taken a disagreeable turn for you, senorita,” he observed, after Palmer left him.

“I do not think I am so badly off as you were a few hours ago,” she replied, quietly.

“Ah, but how am I to think of it! Your recognition, for Major Palmer never breaks his word, but this forced ride is not pleasant.”

“I do not complain, thus far.”

“We men must suffer, to do my best for you. I have not forgotten the aid you gave me.”

“I trust you fully, Don Edwina.”

The words were simple enough in themselves, but the inflection of her voice told far more and the Ranger felt a new thrill in his being. Little by little he was coming to have a new feeling toward this fair daughter of the tropics, and, in spite of his own precocious standing in the band, he was giving all of his considerable affection to Jack Flunket, who had been riding in the rear, pressed forward to the side of the major.

“What is it?” the latter quickly asked.

“A sort of sign, I think the Greasers are coming. I see bear the poundin’ o’ horses’ hoofs in our rare, an’, I can’t soliloquize any other cause for it, it follows that it be the enemy.”

“Then, Jack, you and I have left them. Thoughtfully, and, we may expect a hot chase. What do you say, Jack, is it best to hang to the extra horses or let them go?”

“Don’t ask me, major, I kinder hate to give up.”

“So do I, but we had better do that to save everything. I am afraid we will have to go. Fall back to the extreme rear, Jack, and...
"Taibot has turned traitor and raised his hand against our own boys," answered one, quickly.

"He struck me to the floor," added the man who had been assailed, and his voice was quivering with proper indignation.

"So I did," promptly admitted Talbot, "but I found him assailing" this lad and I only gave him what he served up to me.

"I fought him in fun," protested the man.

"Did you assault the lad?" asked Palmer, sharply.

"I sought her in my arms, for sport." Then you deserve all you received. Did I not order you to let the women alone?" he added, sharply.

"He did wrong," said the man Nelson, "but it would have been a paltry case. I charge him with being a traitor to our cause and an ally of the Greasers!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT UNDER THE WALLS.

Palmer turned sharply upon the speaker.

"Where is your proof?" he demanded.

"It has been accumulating for weeks," said the man, "as if there were no anything new!"

"Nothing except this affair, but..."

Then we will settle the matter anon. At present, I do not see wherein Talbot is to blame.

At this moment a man bounded upon the casona and stood breathless beside the major. He was one of the guards set to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements, and his manner was enough to alarm the Texas. "Where is Major Palmer?" he asked.

"More Greasers are coming! They number at least a hundred and are riding pell-mell toward the Casa. They will be here in five minutes."

"Retreat is our watchword then," said the major, with surprising calmness. "Every man, immediately, all and horse and all ride like hounds for safer soil!"

"Why not make a fortress of the house?" asked one man.

"Why not kill a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat." The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the stairway. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well.

"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the stairway. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well.

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"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

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"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well.

"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the stairway. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm. Then you deserve all you received. Did I not order you to let the women alone?"

"He did wrong," said the man Nelson, "but it would have been a paltry case. I charge him with being a traitor to our cause and an ally of the Greasers!"

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the stairway. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well."

"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the stairway. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well."

"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Senorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as far as the stairway. I swear by my honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well."

"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

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"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"I do not know," said the major, "but the lady's guard. Senorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you save a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well."

"And what of a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours? No, sir, our only course is to retreat."
" Talbot has turned traitor and raised his hand against our own boys," answered one, quickly.

"He struck me to the floor," added the man who had been assaulted, and his voice was the voice of one protected.

"So I did," promptly admitted Talbot, "but I found him assaulting this lady and I only gave him what he served out in.

"I am in fun," protested the man.

"Did you assault the lady?" asked Palmer, sharply.

"I thought her in arms, for sport."

"Then you deserve all you received. Did I not order you to let the women alone?"

"I did wrong," said the man Neison, "but I beg you to forgive me.

"It is a case for the police," charged the lady, "and an ally of the Greasers!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT UNDER THE WALLS.

Palmer turned sharply upon the speaker.

"Where is your proof?" he demanded.

"It has been accumulating for weeks."

"Is there anything new?"

"Nothing except this affair, but..."

"Then we will settle the matter anon. At present, I do not see wherein Talbot is to blame."

At this moment a man bounded upon the fence and stood breathless beside the major. He was one of the guards set to watch for the coming of possible reinforcements, and his manner was enough to alarm the Texans. He asked:

"Where are the cavalry?"

"More Greasers are coming? They number at least a hundred and are riding pell-mell toward the east. They will be here in five minutes."

"Retreat is our watchword then," said the major, with surprising calmness. "Every man for his horse and all ride like Hell for safer soil!"

"Why not make a fortress of the house?" asked one man.

"There are a thousand men bowling around us in twenty-four hours. No, sir, our only course is to retreat."

The men turned toward the stairway, but Palmer looked restlessly at Donna Berta.

"Sonorita," he kindly said, "war knows little law and we must save ourselves. As much as I regret the necessity, you must go with us as a hostage."

By her honor, he swore by her honor that you shall be well treated."

"Major, is there no way to avoid this?" asked the Kentuckian, in fresh alarm.

"There is but one plan to be the lady's guard. Sonorita, I trust you will be sensible and obey my wishes, and you have a soldier's word of honor that all shall be well."

And with that he was away. The Kentuckian saw the bivouac of the Greasers in the distance, and he saw that there was no appeal from the verdict, while any further remonstrances on his part would have been of no influence with the major. He knew, too, that the latter would conscientiously keep his pledge.

So he spoke quickly to Berta, explaining the situation, and the major impatiently reiterating the promise of fair treatment.

No more was needed. It was enough for Berta that she was to go in charge of the man she loved. She would have followed him to the end of the world. She promptly acquiesced in the plan, and the Rangers descended from the roof and into the courtyard. The Kentuckians were there to urge them to hasten. The guerrillas reformation was almost at hand and the moment a critical one.

Their horses had been brought to the gate and they hurriedly mounted. Talbot managed to secure his own horse and see Berta well mounted, but at that moment there was a hoarse chorus of yells, and the Mexicans swept down upon them.

Major Palmer grasped the whole situation at a glance. He knew they must fight, and to fight when in retreat would place them at a decided disadvantage; while, with their superior weapons and matchless courage, they might, by a bold stand, repel the first rush of the guerrillas and gain a better start.

To his credit goes the Decisive Command, and at the word the Texans hurled themselves against the van of the Mexicans as valiantly as though the odds were not terribly against them.

Talbot had received directions to devote himself entirely to Donna Berta and the order was obeyed. It was a moment of sore temptation to the Kentuckian. He did not like the idea of the maiden being a prisoner, and at that time he might have turned back and placed her safety in the hands of others. It might have been a safe thing to do by it, since so many of his comrades already believed him a traitor, but the recollection of Major Palmer's confidence in him was enough to prevent the rash deed.

Perhaps all might yet be well. Don Eduardo had been left unharmed inside the house, his property had been respected, and matters might not end so badly after all.

The rush of the Rangers was almost resistless. Their rifles cracked with deadly effect, and then their sabers and pistols taught a lesson of Texan bravery and skill. Even the superior numbers of the guerrillas could not enable them to withstand such an attack, and they began to give ground.

The blood of war was in the blood of all the Texans was Nathan Maxwell; indeed, he seemed for the time to have become almost a score of men within one, and his fighting was terrific. As he asked the Kentuckian about his gory saber, his red lasso hung over his saddle, but it was not needed to remind him of his vow of vengeance.

The Mexican leader did all in his power, with voice and sword, but, despite his efforts, his followers broke and began to retreat.

The Rangers, who were rapidly pursuing, for Palmer was stirred enough to know that if left alone they would soon recover from their demoralization. To pursue them too far would be a mistake. He would soon be at his heels, and they were bound sooner or later to remember their superiority of numbers and he must draw a line between the two extremes, an operation of considerable nicety.

In the midst of the pursuit his command sounded, and, as one man, the Texans wheeled their horses and swept away.

Their course was north-west, for in that direction lay their most promising path of retreat, and they would run so near the chaparral, mentioned in our opening chapters, that they could take refuge there if hard pressed.

Looking back as they rode, they saw no sign of the Mexicans in pursuit, but they knew the whole pack would soon lie at their heels, and the prospect was not a pleasant one.

Berta, having yielded herself a prisoner, did not play the part of a sulker, or attempt to delay the march. As soon as she saw she was riding and managing her horse, he fell back to her side and thanked her warmly.

How Talbot was inspired by the woman's manner, and more than ever realized that few men possessed the nobility and solid common sense of his gallant leader.

Maxwell had an opportunity to press to the side of the Kentuckian.

"Did you see Ribera while you were inside the house?" he asked.

Talbot recalled what had happened.

"Where was he during the flight? I looked for him everywhere, but in vain. I do not think another member of his band escaped, but he either went over the wall or hid in some secure place."

Talbot remembered that the guerrilla had been left bound and gagged in the cover of the curtains and that the wind was perfect, and wondered that so simple a hiding-place had proved so secure.

He briefly related how Ribera had been disposed of after being overpowered.

The owner of the red lasso ground out a terrible regret between his teeth.

"I was in that very room," he added, "but I did not once think of looking behind the cover of the curtains. Had I, before leaving, told Ribera to escape me again, but the end is not yet. The number of those against whom my oath is directed is reduced to one, and I will yet avenge them."

He held aloft the red lasso, and Talbot could not repress a shudder at his manner. He remembered how kindly and quiet this man had been when he had first seen him, before Luke Bristow died, and he realized how strong must be the man's nature to make him what he had become.

The march of the party was very rapid; indeed, their horses were going at a telling gallop, and there was good demand for all their speed. Their repeated affrays had reduced their numbers to a very few, and, as the Mexicans must number eighty, and could easily be reformed from Don Eduardo's peons, the outlook, in case it came to a hand-to-hand fight, was dark enough.

Their trail of vengeance had been a bloody one, and there were those who feared not one of them would ever again see Texan soil.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARD Pressed.

A mile or so ahead the prospect began to look a trifle brighter, though not one of the Rangers was foolish enough to believe they had seen the last of the Mexicans. The major had no idea how deep the cult of the cross, where, of course, Captain Ribera would be found, and, though, it was but natural to suppose the guerrilla would make a fierce rage and urge his allies on to seek for revenge.

Thus far, the captured horses had been retained, but Palmer had little hope of getting them back, and he did intend to cling to them if hard pressed.

They were riding with the chaparral on their left, and the major had questioned Talbot further as to the Mexican camp, before, said it was a place little known, and if they were forced to take refuge there, they must depend on luck and circumstances.

The Kentuckian still rode beside Berta, but, in the darkness, he could not see the expression of her face.

Affairs have taken a disagreeable turn for you, sonorita," he observed, after Palmer left him.

"I do not think I am so badly off as you were a few hours ago," she replied, quietly.

"Do not look back," said Palmer, for Major Palmer never breaks his word, but this forced ride is not pleasant."

"I do not complain, thus far."

"We may have been over, and do it for my best for you. You have not forgotten the aid you gave me.

"I trust you fully, Don Edwinn."

The words were simple enough in themselves, but the inflection of her voice told far more and the Ranger felt a new thrill in his being. Little by little he was coming to have a new feeling toward this fair daughter of the tropics, and, in spite of his own precarious standing in the band, he was giving away all of his reserve and confidence.

Jack Flunket, who had been riding in the rear, pressed forward to the side of the major.

"What is it?" the latter quickly asked.

"I am sorry to tell you, sir, but the Mexican band is coming, thoughtfully, and we may expect a hot chase. What do you say, Jack? is it best to hang to the extra horses or let them go?"

"In my opinion, major, I kinder hate to give 'em up."

"So do I, but we had better do that to save everything. I'm afraid we will have to go. Fall back to the extreme rear, Jack, and..."
The only one of the fugitives who was pleased with the prospect was Nathan Maxwell. He had managed to dispose of two guerrillas in the narrow way of traffic thus, but his horse was too. Probably, at that moment, he would rather have died fighting than to have escaped.

No enemy appeared to oppose their fresh retreat, and they soon reached the tangles of brush wood. Once there, new troubles and plans lay before them. In many places the wood was too dense for the passage of horses, and even men would have to force their way through the brush. Currents and mesquits lurked with their sharp thorns.

An extra man was safely made, and Palmer wasinclined to order a halt and make a stand against the guerrillas, but they came thundering toward the charparral at that moment in such a formidable way that he decided to retreat.

In this emergency the services of Edwin Talcott were again required, for he, of all the band, was the only one who had ever seen before feet inside the tangled wood.

He thought quickly and gave the major the benefit of his opinion. By withdrawing a little from the edge of the charparral, ground would be reached where horses could not go, and at that point they could make a stand if they wished. They must either do this or turn sharply to the right and ride along the edge of the wood, a course which would give the Mexicans a dangerous chance to cut off or over-power them.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE CHARPAKAL.

Major Palmer perceived that the only hope for the band was to disperse and dive into the wood, and they continued to retreat. They were soon obliged, by the long branches of the trees, to dismount and lead their horses, and after while they worked themselves into a place where even this way of progress became impossible.

They could hear the Mexicans in the distance, but not to make out what they were at hand, it seemed that they were perfecting their plans before making another advance.

"What shall we do now?" Palmer asked, addressing the Kentuckian.

"We have got into a very hot-bed of cactus and mesquits, and only two courses are open to us," our hero replied.

"Name them," added the bandit.

"Either we must abandon our horses and retreat on foot, or remain here and resist as best we can."

"We must retain our horses if possible."

"We should certainly be in a bad fix without them."

"They must be saved, but I do not like the idea of reminding here to let the enemy work at their will."

"Daylight cannot be over two hours away. When it comes we can see what kind of a place we are in.""Before that time the iron grip of the Greasers may be upon us, and, even if we are let alone till then, the coming of day will add the terror of numbers.""True," said the Kentuckian, absolutely."

"You have an idea. What is it?"

"Nothing brilliant. I was wondering if we could cut a path for retreat by means of sabers."

"The plan does not promise much, but it is worth trying. Anything is better than to remain here and let the enemy do all the work."

The major began an investigation, but there was little to be discovered. They were surrounded on every side, and there was no way of escape. If cut away, must be demolished in total darkness.

The work was begun, but they soon found it a slow process. The sabers were not strong enough to cut through the brush wood, and the progress was not calculated to encourage them. Still an avenue was being opened, and more favorable ground might soon be reached.

Jack Plunkettwormed his way through the undergrowth to the space beyond. He was gone a considerable time, but when he came he brought a manner struck Palmer as being full of import.

"Well?" the officer eagerly questioned.

"Things might be worse," answered the Kentuckian. "We have a narrow path, so we have a chance. Once the single, or some cut or some fallen tree, we shall strike a mule-path, or some burned crooked avenue, and out that we can go somewhere—l donna what.

"But what do you know of the news, boys? Work on, and we will yet outwit the foe."

"Wait a little, major," interposed Talcott. "We are four, and some of the Mexicans may know of it, and if they do, won't they send a force that way themselves?"

"I didn't think of that," admitted the major.

"If there are only soldiers in their party, there is a hope that they do not know of the path," continued the Kentuckian, with clear logic; "but if Don Edurado's peas are in the gang, they must be aware that the path is there."

"They do know it is there, as do all that belong to my father's hacienda," said Dona Bertha.

"To where does the path lead, senorita?" asked the major, looking at her kindly.

"It is a small glade where there is good water. It does not extend more than a hundred yards beyond here, and ends in wood as thick as we are at this point. The path is used by the cattle of our hacienda when they seek the water."

"How much do you know about this charparral, senorita?"

"Very little. I have been often inside its edges, but the way is so difficult, I have never cared to explore it thoroughly."

"I suppose you people know it well?"

"Many of them, do, senor."

"I suppose there are few trees in the trees and bushes?"

"None of consequence, I think. Nothing more than an occasional glade of small size."

"Well, we are nearly to the path, and we will go on. If we meet the guerrillas there, we will fight."

"Why not fight now?" interrupted Maxwell. "A bold dash may save us, but if we hang around we shall be irretrievably in the trap."

"We have tried fighting and it would be madness to pit our handful of men against the others."

The cutting of the avenue continued, while the major stood silent and thoughtful. He was not in a pleasant mood. It looked very much as if fate had been against him, and the men were doomed to destruction; but, even if they escaped, he would probably be severely censured for leading them on such a disastrous mission.

The sun was at stake, and he did not see how to preserve it.

Maxwell, foreseeing the possibility that the horses would be abandoned, removed the red lanyard from his saddle and gave it to the major.

"Come what may, the weapon of vengeance had a mission to perform, and only its accomplishment meant the end of his own life could justify the act."

The seeming inactivity of the Mexicans began to grow suspicious. It did not seem probable that, with the handful of refugees with which he was invested, they would hold idly back and give them time to escape.

There were but three ways of accounting for their backwardness—either they had no fear of the Kentuckian or he had drawn them near, or they were planning some cunning trap, or else they actually feared the deadly rifles, despite their preponderance of numbers. The Kentuckian felt, judging from the manner the men struck the path, but, before passing along it, they paused and listened intently.

Tropical woodlands abound in night birds and beasts that wander at Eight, but, besides them..."
investigate. If the Greasers are after us in full force, as they doubtless are, we shall have to abandon the animals and ride for dear life.

"We shall not escape," replied seated with both boots in the stirrups.

The veteran wheeled and galloped away, while Maxwell pressed to his leader's side.

"Why not make a stand and kill a few horses?"

"The act would be madness. They are our own and we should be wiped out."

"We whipped them before."

"And we beat them. No, Maxwell, we cannot risk it."

"I want to meet Riberts!" muttered the ranger, and Palmer saw his hand working nervously.

"You have a lifetime in which to do it. Let him rest for now, but when we reach a place of safety, I will release you, if you wish, and you can proceed on your own."

"I'll do it, major."

He fell back a little in the body, but Palmer suspected from his manner that he would be led if the Mexicans overtook them.

Jack Plunkett soon returned at a gallop.

"They're a-comin', major, as like a troop of wild stallions. They must be uncommon good horsewhips, too, for they're gainin' on you."

"It is as I expected, and we must no longer be burdened by the extra horses. Let them go ahead and, when they may, they may delay the enemy a while."

The order was promptly obeyed and the animals, as though loath to leave their former companions, went off at a gallop after a slight hesitation, and followed in the rear.

This did not trouble them; they knew that if the worst came, the three score unridden horses would prove a temporary hindrance to the guerrillas.

With all their shrewdness the Texans had fallen to foresee a cunning move on the part of the Mexicans. Some one had used good judgment, and the delay in direct pursuit was not due to any confusion or imbecility on the part of the foe.

The guerrilla leader had at once surmised what would be the course of the fugitives, and, holding back a portion of his force for a short time, he sent forty of his best mounted men away at full speed, directing them to make a slight detour, get ahead of the Texans and so force them to make a detour.

Thus it was that the devoted band, closely followed by the unridden steeds, which were in turn followed by the second force of guerrillas, would be unable to make a straight way through the solid line of mounted men in all sides of them while a volley of bullets from ill-aimed carbines swept through their ranks, killing two men and wounding others; and in the end, the most part, spending their fury on the empty air.

A responsive yell arose from the force in the rear, and Palmer comprehended that he was in time.

His clear voice gave the terse order to charge and the gallant Rangers tried to obey, but the odds were strongly against them and they were beaten back in a state of uncalled-for confusion.

Brief as the delay had been, it was enough for the first party to almost reach the spot, and only a simple obstacle saved the handful of Texas horsewhips.

The first party attempted to continue their progress, but they ran full into the unridden horses, which were rushing wildly about, and, finding their way blocked, their advance was temporarily stayed.

Palmer did not lose his presence of mind. He saw how desperate was their situation, and, knowing that his companions would not trust themselves, he gave the word in a voice subdued but clear, and, as one man, the Texans wheeled their horses and rode at a gallop toward the chief.

The dense wood loomed up darkly not far away, and, once in its shelter, there might be some hope, though the outlook was not promising.

The only one of the fugitives who was pleased with the prospect was Nathan Maxwell. He had managed to dispose of two guerrillas in the course of the affair, but the third and the fourth, by the bottle he had brought up. Probably, at that moment, he would rather have died fighting than to have escaped.

No enemy appeared to oppose their fresh return, and they soon reached the tangled wood. Once there, new troubles and plans lay before them. In many places the wood was too dense for the passage of horses, and even men would be hard put to force his way where cactus and mesquite lurked with their sharp thorns.

An entrance was safely made, and Palmer was, in fact, inclined to order a halt and make a stand against the guerrillas, but they came thundering toward the chapparal at that moment in such a formidable way that he decided to retreat.

In this emergency the services of Edwin Talbot were again required, for he, of all the band, was the only one who had ever seen foot inside the tangled wood.

He thought quickly and gave the major the benefit of his opinion. By withdrawing a little from the edge of the chapparal, ground would be reached where horses could not go, and at that point they could make a stand if they wished.

They must either do this or turn sharply to the right and ride along the edge of the wood, a course which would give the Mexicans a dangerous chance to outwit or overpower them.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE CHAPARAL.

Major Palmer perceived that the only hope for that day was until deep, dark night, to ride away into the wood, and they continued to retreat.

They were soon obliged, by the low branches of the trees, to dismount and lead their horses, and after while they worked themselves into a place where even this way of progress became impossible.

They could hear the Mexicans in the distance, but not in the darkness; at hand, it seemed that they were perfecting their plans before making another advance.

"What shall we do now?" Palmer asked, addressing the Kentuckian.

"We have got into a very hot-bed of cactus and mesquit, and only two courses are open to us," our hero replied.

"Name them," said Palmer.

"Either we must abandon our horses and retread on foot, or remain here and resist as best we can."

"We must retain our horses if possible."

"We should certainly be in a bad fix without them."

"They must be saved, but I do not like the idea of leaving here to let the enemy work at their will."

"Daylight cannot be over two hours away. When it comes we can see what kind of a place we are on.""Before that time the iron grip of the Greasers may be upon us, and, even if we are let alone till then, the coming of day will add their weight as a horror to all else."

"True," said the Kentuckian, absently.

"You have an idea. What is it?"

"Nothing brilliant. I was wondering if we could cut a path for retreat by means of savers."

"The plan does not promise much; but it is worth trying. Anything is better than to be taken here and held by the enemy do all the work."

The major began an investigation, but there was little to be discovered. They were surrounded on all sides and there was no outlet. If cut away, must be demolished in total darkness.

The work was begun, but they soon found it a slow and laborious business to make a path cut down, but the progress was not calculated to encourage them. Still, an avenue was being opened, and more favorable ground soon might be reached.

Jack Plunkett wormed his way through the undergrowth into the space beyond. He was gone a considerable time, but when he came back his manner struck Palmer as being full of import.

"Well?" the officer eagerly questioned.

"Things might be worse," answered the ranger, "but if we follow the few red furder, we shall strike a mule-path, or some burned crooked avenue, an' out' that we kin go somers—I donno what."

"Well? You go ahead. Do you hear the news, boys? Work on, and we will yet outwit the foe."

"Wait a little, major," interposed Talbot. "In the shadow of our feet, one of the Mexicans may know of it, and if they do, won't they send a force that way themselves?"

"I didn't think of that," admitted the major.

"If there are only soldiers in their party, there is a hope that they do not know of the path," continued the Kentuckian, with clear logic; "but if Don Eduardo's peons are in the gang, they must be aware that the path is there."

"They do know it is there, as do all that belong to my father's hacienda," said Donna Berta.

"To where does the path lead, senorita?" asked the major, looking at her kindly.

"A small glade where there is good water. It does not extend more than a hundred yards beyond here, and ends in wood as thick as we have at this point. The path is used by the cattle of our hacienda when they seek the water."

"How much do you know about this chapparal, senorita?"

"Very little. I have often been inside its edges, but the way is so difficult, I have never cared to explore it thoroughly."

"I suppose your peons know it well?"

"Many of them do, senor."

"I suppose there are few breaks in the trees and bushes?"

"There are none of consequence, I think: Nothing more than an occasional glade of small size."

"Well, we are nearly to the path, and we will go on. If we meet the guerrillas there, we will fight."

"Why not fight now?" interrupted Maxwell.

"A bold dash may save us, but if we hang around until day we shall be irresistibly in the trap."

"We have tried fighting and it would be madness to pit our handful of men against the odds."

The cutting of the avenue continued, while the major stood silent and thoughtful. He was not in a pleasant mood. It looked very much as though what were left of his men were doomed to destruction; but, even if they escaped, he would be severely censured for leading them on such a disastrous mission. His position was at stake, and he did not see how to preserve it.

Maxwell, foreseeing the possibility that the horses would be abandoned, removed the red lancer's jacket and tied it around his body. Some might, the weapon of vengeance had a mission to perform, and only its accomplishment or the end of his own life could be the true.

The seeming inactivity of the Mexicans began to grow suspicious. It did not seem probable that, with the handful of refuse almost within their grasp, they would hold idly back and give them time to escape.

There were but three ways of accounting for their backwardness—either they had no fear of the Rangers, or they had discerned a flaw in the plan, or they were planning some cunning trap, or else they actually feared the deadly rifles, despite their preponderance of numbers.

The party felt tense as the men struck the path, but, before passing along it, they paused and listened intently.

Tropical woods abounded in night birds and beasts that wander at Eight, but, besides their..."
The only one of the fugitives who was pleased with the prospect was Nathan Maxwell. He had managed to dispose of two guerrillas in the first few days of his but bloody march. Probably, at that moment, he would rather have died fighting than to have escaped. No enemy appeared to oppose their fresh troops in the open field, and they soon rounded the small village. Once there, new troubles and plans lay before them. In many places the wood was too dense for the passage of horses, and even men were driven to unmanly flight into its ways, where cactus and mesquite lurked with their sharp thorns. An attempt was safely made, and Palmer was bidden to order a halt and make a stand against the guerrillas, but they came thundering toward the chaparral at that moment—such an unforseeable way that he decided to retreat.

In this emergency the services of Edwin Talbot were again required, for he, of all the band, was the only one who had ever before set foot inside the tangled wood. He thought quickly and gave the major the benefit of his opinion. By withdrawing a little from the edge of the chaparral, ground would be reached where horses could not go and at that point they could make a stand if they wished. They must either do this or turn sharply to the right and ride along the edge of the wood, a course which would give the Mexicans a dangerous chance to cut off or over-power them.

CHAPTER XV.
IN THE CHAPARAL.

Major Palmer perceived that the only hope for the band was to fight their way into the wood, and they continued to retreat. They were soon obliged, by the low branches of the trees, to dismount and lead their horses, and after awhile they worked themselves into a place where even this way of progress became impossible. They could hear the Mexicans in the distance, but no special fear, and at hand, it seemed that they were perfecting their plans before making another advance.

"What shall we do now?" Palmer asked, addressing the Kentuckian.

"We have got into a very hot-bed of cactus and mesquit, and only two courses are open to us," our hero replied.

"What are they?"

"Either we must abandon our horses and retreat on foot, or remain here and resist as best we can."

"We must retain our horses if possible,"

"We should certainly be in a bad fix without them."

"They must be saved, but I do not like the idea of remitting here to let the enemy walk at their will."

"Daylight cannot be over two hours away. When it comes we can see what kind of a place we are in."

"Before that time the iron grip of the Greasers may be upon us, and, even if we are let alone till then, the coming of day will add the power and assurance of numbers."

"True," said the Kentuckian, absent.'

"You have an idea. What is it?"

"Nothing brilliant. I was wondering if we cannot cut a path for retreat by means of sabers."

"The plan does not promise much, but it is worth trying. Anything is better than to go in and only here and let the enemy do all the work."

The major gave an investigation, but there was little to be discovered. They were surrounded, and there was no way out but by cutting a path. If cut away, must be demolished in total darkness.

The work was begun, but they soon found it a slow and laborious task. With a broad ax cut down, but the progress was not calculated to encourage them. Still, an avenue was being opened, and more favorable ground might soon be reached.

Jack Plunkett wormed his way through the undergrowth into the space beyond. He was gone a considerable time, but when he came he had a manner struck Palmer as being full of import.

"Well?" the officer eagerly questioned.

"Things might be worse," answered the regular. "We had a narrow escape. If the band had not been cut off, we would have got through."

"Darn! How do you hear the news, boys? Work on, and we will yet outwit the foe."

"Wait a little, major," interposed Talbot. "I will go through a test, but some of the Mexicans may know of it, and if they do, won't they send a force that way themselves?"

"I didn't think of that," admitted the major.

"If there are only soldiers in their party, there is a hope that they do not know of the path," continued the Kentuckian, with clear logic: "but if Don Edurado's peas are in the gang, they must be aware that the path is there."

"They do know it is there, as do all that belong to my father's hacienda," said Donna Bertha.

"To where does the path lead, senorita?" asked the major, looking at her kindly.

"To a small glade where there is a good water. It does not extend more than a hundred yards beyond here, and ends in wood as thick as we are at this point. The path is used by the cattle of our hacienda when they seek the water."

"How much do you know about this chaparral, senorita?"

"Very little. I have often been inside its edges, but the way is so difficult, I have never cared to explore it thoroughly."

"I suppose your peas know it well?"

"Many of them do, senor."

"I suppose there are few breaks in the trees and bushes?"

"There are none of consequence, I think. Nothing more than an occasional glade of small size."

"Well, we are nearly to the path, and we will go on. If we meet the guerrillas there, we will fight."

"Why not fight now?" interrupted Maxwell.

"A bold dash may save us, but if we hang around until day we shall be irretrievably in the trap."

"We have tried fighting and it would be madness to pit our handful of men against the odds."

The cutting of the avenue continued, while the major stood silent and thoughtful. He was not in a pleasant mood. It looked very much as though what were left of the men were doomed to destruction; but, even if they escaped, he would probably be severely censured for leading them on such a disastrous mission. He was at stake, and he did not see how to preserve it.

Maxwell, foreseeing the possibility that the horses would be abandoned, removed the red bandana from his Studies and wrapped around his body. Some would say that what was left of men they were doomed to destruction; but, even if they escaped, he would probably be severely censured for leading them on such a disastrous mission. The major saw the Avenue continued, while the major stood silent and thoughtful. He was not in a pleasant mood. It looked very much as though what were left of the men were doomed to destruction; but, even if they escaped, he would probably be severely censured for leading them on such a disastrous mission. He was at stake, and he did not see how to preserve it.

Maxwell, foreseeing the possibility that the horses would be abandoned, removed the red bandana from his Studies and wrapped around his body. Some would say that what was left of men they were doomed to destruction; but, even if they escaped, he would probably be severely censured for leading them on such a disastrous mission. The major saw the
in full force, as they doubtless are, we shall have no
animals and ride for dear life."

"I expect they will," said Jack Plunkett.

The veteran wheeled and galloped away, while Maxwell pressed to his leader's side.

"Why not make a stand and kill a few horses,
before they drive us inland?"

"The act would be madness. They are
our to our one and we should be wiped out."

"We whipped them before."

"And we will again."

Jack Plunkett rode on ahead.

"I want to meet Riberta!" muttered the ranger, and Palmer saw his band working serenely through all the herd.

"You have a lifetime in which to do it. Let
him rest for now, but when we reach a place of
safety, I will release you, if you wish, and you
and your band can make your stand."

"I'll do it, major."

He fell back a little in the body, but Palmer
suspected from his manner that he would be
liked if the Mexicans overtook them.

Jack Plunkett soon returned at a gallop.

"They're a-comin', major, an' like a troop of
wild stallions. They must be uncommon
good horsemen, too, for they're gainin' on us
very second."

"It is as I expected, and we must no longer be
surprised by the extra horses. Let them
pass closer, then, and may they delay the enemy
a while."

The order was promptly obeyed and the ani-
mal, as though loth to leave their former
quarters, came on in a steady column after a slight hesitation, and followed in the
rear.

This did not trouble them; they knew that
when the worst came, the three score undisciplined horses would prove a temporary hindrance to the guerrillas.

With all their shrewdness the Texans had
tailed to forsees a running move on the part of the Mexicans. Some one had used good judg-
ment, and the delay in direct pursuit was not
wasted, but will come to even scores in the
confusion or imbecility on the part of the foe.

The guerrilla leader had at once surmised
what would be the course of the fugitives, and,
holding back a portion of his force for a short
time, be sent forty of his best mounted men
away at full speed, directing them to make a
slight detour, get ahead of the Texans and so
prevent their escape.

Thus it was that the devoted band, closely
followed by the unbridled steeds, which were in
ear followed by the second force of guerrillas,
which was posted in a saddle-gallery to see made
in all sides of them while a volley of bullets
from ill-aimed carriens swept through their
ranks, killing two men and wounding others;
but as they were the most part, spending their fury on
the empty air.

A responsive yell arose from the force in
the rear, and Palmer comprehended that he was in
trouble.

His clear voice gave the terse order to charge
and the gallant Rangers tried to obey, but the
offs were strongly against them and they were
forced into a state of confusion and perdition.
Briefly as the delay had been, it was enough for
the first party to almost reach the spot, and
only a simple obstacle saved the handful of
Texans from being wiped out.

The first party attempted to continue their
progress, but they ran full into the unbridled
horses, which were rushing wildly about, and,
lost their balance; their advance was tem-
porarily stayed.

Palmer did not lose his presence of mind.
He saw how desperate was their situation, and
he knew that the Mexicans would not save them.

He gave the word in a voice subdued but
clear, and, as one man, the Texans wheeled their horses and rode at a gallop toward the
saddle-gallery.

The dense wood loomed darkly but not
away, and, once in its shelter, there might be
some hope, though the outlook was not promis-
ing.

The only one of the fugitives who was pleased
with the prospect was Nathan Maxwell. He
had managed to dispose of two guerrillas in the
to the face of his hot blood. Probably, at that moment, he would rather have died fighting than to have escaped.

No enemy appeared to oppose their fresh re-
trope, and Palmer reined in his horse and waited.

Once more, new troubles and plans lay before
them. In many places the wood was too dense for the passage of horses, and even man was driven to the verge of his strength to
cope with it. They were all very hungry already; and even if they do, they won't send a force that way themselves!

I didn't think of that," admitted the major.

"If there are only soldiers in their party,
there is a hope that they do not know of the
path," continued the Kentuckian, with clear
deference; "but if Don Eduardito's peons are in
the gang, they must be aware that the path is
there."

"They do know it is there, as do all that
belong to my father's hacienda," said Donna
Berta.

"To where does the path lead, senorita?"
asked the major, looking at her kindly.

A smile graced her gray face. "It is a small glade where there is good
water. It does not extend more than a hundred
yards beyond here, and ends in wood as
tiny and different as we have at this point. The
path is used by the cattle of our hacienda when they
seek the water."

"How much do you know about this chap-
eral, senorita?"

"Very little. I have often been inside its
detours, but the way is so difficult, I have
ever cared to explore it thoroughly."

"I suppose your peons know it well?"

"Many of them do, senor."

"I suppose there are few breaks in the trees
and bushes?"

"There are none of consequence, I think."

"Nothing more than an occasional glade
of small size."

"Well, we are nearly to the path, and we
shall go on. If we meet the guerrillas there,
we shall fight."

"Why not fight now?" interrupted Maxwell.

"A bold dash may save us, but if we hang around until day we shall be irretrievably in
the trap."

"We have tried fighting and it would be
madness to pit our handful of men against the
determined force of the Mexican."

The cutting of the avenue continued, while
the major stood silent and thoughtful. He was
certainly not in a peaceable mood. It looked very much as
if something were to happen, and they were doomed to destruction; but, even if they
could, he would be severely censured for
leading them on such a disastrous mission.

His hand was at stake, and he did not see how
to preserve it.

Maxwell foresaw the possibility that the
horses would be abandoned, removed the red
lantern from his saddle and slipped it around his
body. Some might, the weapon of vengeance
had a mission to perform, and only its accomplish-ment or the end of his life could relieve the
troubled conscience of the Kentuckian.

The seeming inactivity of the Mexicans began
to grow suspicious. It did not seem probable that
with the handful of refugees within
their grasp, they would hold idle tack and
give them time to escape.

There were but three ways of accounting for
their backwardness—either they had no fear of the
major, or the Kentuckian, or they were planning some
manoeuvre, or else they actually feared the deadly rifles, despite their preponderance of numbers.

The Kentuckian felt that the Mexican
men struck the path, but, before passing along
it, they paused and listened intently.

Tropical woods abounded in night birds and
beasts that wandered at Night, but, besides their...
Young Kentuck. 13

voices, all was silent in the chapparal. There was no sound from the guerrillas.

The advance was again commenced. The path was so narrow that they were obliged to move in single file, and Palmer, who insisted on leading the way, every moment expected to see the Mexicans spring up in his path; but the short distance to the glade was traversed without anything.

Another halt was made in the glade. It was a mere break in the trees, where the fountain bubbled musically to the surface, and total silence reigned there. It was not perfect, and except for the sounds made by their own party.

The major glanced upward at the sky.

"Day is no more than an hour away," he observed.

"Our troubles begin anew then," said one of the men, in a subdued voice.

"Are you discouraged, Post?" asked the major.

"I would give a good deal to see Texan sile at this moment, I'll allow, but I won't complain while I have Texan tobacco in my pocket," replied the man, in a tone which left no doubt of his courage. The men were allowing their horses to drink at the fountain, and, in the meantime, Palmer stared straight into the darkness as though he hoped to find there some plan for his benefit.

"I wish we had a guide," he muttered.

"There is no place of safety for you," said Berta.

"Where can we go?"

"You can only go forward."

"Are we safe there, and the bushes interface like the threads of a spider's web."

The guerrillas are behind," said Talbot, suggesting the possibility.

"There is a plenty in the chapparal, I think," assured the Kentuckian.

"Thirst ain't the enemy the most terrible dread," added Jack Plunkett.

"We will go forward," said Palmer, decisively.

"We can't get into a worse situation, and there may be some good luck in store for us yet."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CATASTROPHE.

The sabers of the men were once more busy. The sabers were instruments for the work, but the wielders knew what was at stake and labored with zeal.

The chief actors of our story were waiting in silence. Talbot stood beside Berta, and as he looked down at her fair face he felt a strong desire to draw her to his arms as a shield from harm.

Perhaps their peril hastened the work, but that as it may, he felt his interest in her growing with each hour. She was one of those warm-hearted women occasionally met with who have a firm and solid price, and, gradually, he was coming to trust and believe in her implicitly.

Palmer stood with one hand resting on his saber hilt, and thoughtful, while Neal; Maxwell was at the rear, his glance roving about the darkness as though he really hoped to see an enemy appear.

It was a period of unpleasant suspense to all.

If the Texans had thoroughly explored the vicinity of the fountain when they first arrived, they had found them a severe misfortune, but they were not the first or last men who have committed a blunder, and the calamity fell upon them when least expected. As all was still, awaiting the coming of the avenue, they had not seen the hostile eye peering at them from the darkness at one side of the glade; they had not seen the dark forms which emerged from the underbrush, their movements drowned in the noise made by the workmen, and there was no warning to any until the blow fell.

Major Palmer had fallen into deep thought, and, as several men moved to his side, he did not heed them or look to see that they were not of his band.

Suddenly, however, the whole of them, some five or six in number, flung themselves upon the officer, and in a twinkling he was lifted from his feet and borne toward the bushes. He was not hurt seriously and did not realize his peril any sooner than the other Texans, and, by the time he had begun to struggle, a cry from his followers attracted the attention of all.

"The Greasers!" cried one impetuous Texan.

"Shoot the dogs!"

"Hold, for your lives!" called out Jack Plunkett. "You will shoot the major. Fool me!"

He made a rush for the bushes, putting out his hands in advance to clear the way, but, to his surprise, only yielding branches and leaves opposed him and he knew he had struck a path they had previously overlooked.

"Furnes, men, pursue!" shouted Talbot, alive to all possibilities which would ensue if the major was lost.

As for himself, his post of duty was beside Berta and he would not desert her.

The brown chapparal seemed like a flash as Maxwell bounded in pursuit, and other men followed until Talbot and Berta had no company except the man Nelson.

Even in the moment of the moment, the latter could not forget his duties of the Kentuckian, and he was resolved to give him no chance to desert.

The Kentuckian stood irresolutely in the center of the glade, his saber firmly grasped, and every moment expecting to see fresh enemies appear.

He listened intently to the sounds in the bushes, but after a little they ceased, and the chapparal became as silent as usual.

Berta pressed closely to the side of her chaperon, and Nelson saw her life, for shadows of all kinds hung darkly around them.

"What shall we do?" asked Nelson, uneasily, after a pause.

"We can do nothing at present."

"Isn't we better follow the men?"

"Why should we?"

"If the Mexicans advance now, we too shall be captured."

"We must remain to look to the horses. They are liable to break away if left alone."

"Can't we find them?"

"Impossible."

Nelson remained silent for a while longer, but he could not hide his uneasiness. In truth, the situation was too threatening for his nerves; he had bravely enough, as the word goes, but he did not like to face an unseen danger.

He began to press his point again after a pause, but just then sounds were heard in the direction in which the Texans had gone, and before long they came silently back.

"Pardon me," was what he said, and Talbot imperiously asked the first of several questions.

"We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no further."

This truth summed up Jack Plunkett, insensible from some cause, and the way ended then."

Just then several of the men laid the unconscious Texan upon the ground, and Talbot knelt beside him, and Plunkett anxiously asked him.

"We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no further."

This truth summed up Jack Plunkett, insensible from some cause, and the way ended then."

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOLD Undertaking.

Day dawned in the chapparal and the Texans looked keenly about as they pressed forward, but there was nothing unusual about the scene. The tangled wood was around them, and the path so narrow that the branches flapped in their faces as they went.

It was fully daylight when they reached a small knoll which was more spuriously wooded for bowlers of all sizes lay around so thickly that trees and plants could only exist when there was nothing but wood in sight.

Jack Plunkett was not slow to see something worthy of attention in the situation. The place was far better adapted for a fortress than the glade, and, had they passed it, as there did not seem to be any hope of an immediate escape from the chapparal, it struck him that a little work would make a refuge for all.

He paused and explained his views to his companions as they came up, but, naturally, the majority of the Rangers were in favor of pressing on.

Before the matter was settled, the arrival of Maxwell put a new face on the situation. The life-hunter had not been idle, but, by inches, his flint was uncurled about the wood enough to learn a good deal of the plans contrived.

The Mexicans had evidently improved their spare time, for the scout declared that no
voices, all was silent in the chaparral. There was no sound from the guerrillas.

The advance was again commenced. The path was so narrow that they were obliged to move in single file, and Palmer, who insisted on leading the way, every moment expected to see the Mexicans spring up in his path; but the short distance to the glade was traversed without accident.

Another halt was made in the glade. It was a mere break in the trees, where the fountain bubbled musically to the surface, and total silence reigned except for the sounds made by their own party.

The major glanced upward at the sky.

"Day is not more than an hour away," he observed.

"Our troubles begin anew then," said one of the men, in a subdued voice.

"Are you discouraged, Pos?" asked the major.

"I would give a good deal to see Texan sile at this moment, I'll allow, but I won't complain while I have Texan tobacco in my pocket," replied the man, in a tone which left no doubt of his courage.

The men were allowing their horses to drink at the fountain, and, in the meanwhile, Palmer stared straight into the darkness as though he hoped to find there some plan for his benefit.

"I wish we had a guide," he muttered.

"There is no place of safety for you," said Berta.

"Where can we go?"

"You can only go forward."

"Then see there, and the bushes interface like the threads of a spider's web."

The guerrillas are behind," said Talbot, suggested the Kentuckian.

"You are right, and we will improve every minute. Resume work with your sabers, men, and we may reach a place better adapted for defense.

"We are leaving water if we leave here," suggested one of the men.

There is a plenty in the chaparral, I think," said the Kentuckian.

"Thirst ain't the enemy the most terrible one of all," added Jack Plunkett.

We will go forward," said Palmer, decisively.

"We can't get into a worse situation, and there may be some good luck in store for us yet."

CHAPTER XVI

A CATASTROPHE.

The sabers of the men were once more busy. They were the instruments for the work, but the wielders knew what was at stake and labored with zeal.

The chief actors of our story were waiting in silence. Talbot stood beside Berta, and as he looked down at her fair face he felt a strong desire to draw her to his arms as a shield from harm.

Perhaps their peril hastened the work, but that as it may, he felt his interest in her growing with each hour. She was one of those warm-hearted women occasionally met with who are both cheap in price, and, gradually, he was coming to trust and believe in her implicitly.

Palmer stood with one hand resting on his saber hilt, and thoughtful, while Nelson and Maxwale was at the rear, his glancing roving about the darkness as though he really hoped to see an enemy appear.

It was a period of unpleasant suspense to all.

If the Texans had thoroughly explored the vicinity of the fountain when they first arrived, they might have discovered a severe misfortune; but they were not the first or last men who have committed a blunder, and the calamity fell upon them when least expected.

As they still waited, awaiting the cutting of the avenue, they had not seen the hostile eye peering at them from the darkness at one side of the glade; they had not seen the dark forms which emerged from the underbrush, their movements drowned in the noise made by the workmen, and there was no warning to any until the blow fell.

Major Palmer had fallen into deep thought, and, as several men moved to his side, he did not heed them or look to see that they were not of his band.

Suddenly, however, the whole of them, some five or six in number, flung themselves upon the officer, and in a twinkling he was lifted from his feet and borne toward the bushes.

He was indignant and cut him, and did not realize his peril any sooner than the other Texans, and, by the time he had begun to struggle, a cry from his follower attracted the attention of all.

"The Greasers!" cried one impetuous Texan.

"Shoot the dogs!"

"Hold, for your lives!" called out Jack Plunkett.

"You will shoot the major. Fool me!

He made a rush for the bushes, putting out his hands in advance to clear the way, but, to his surprise, only yielding branches and leaves opposed him and he knew he had struck a path they had previously overlooked.

"Furns, men, pursue!" shouted Talbot, alive to its possibilities which would ensue if the major was lost.

As for himself, his post of duty was beside Berta and he would not desert her.

The battle新局面 flashed like a flash as Maxwell bounded in pursuit, and other men followed until Talbot and Berta had no company except the man Nelson.

Even after this was the case of the moment, the latter could not forget his doubts of the Kentuckian, and he was resolved to give him no chance to desert.

The Kentuckian stood irresolutely in the center of the glade, his saber firmly grasped, and every moment expecting to see fresh enemies appear.

He listened intently to the sounds in the bushes, but after a little they ceased, and the chaparral became as silent as usual.

Berta pressed closely to the side of her chaplain. The last words he had said, and her life, for shadows of all kinds hung darkly around them.

"What shall we do?" asked Nelson, uneasily, after a pause.

"We can do nothing at present."

"Hasn't we better follow the men?"

"Why should we?"

"If the Mexicans advance now, we too shall be captured."

"We must remain to lock to the horses."

They are liable to break away if left alone."

"Can't we get them?"

"Impossible."

Nelson remained silent for a while longer, but he could not hide his uneasiness. In truth, the situation was too threatening for his nerves; he had bravery enough, as the word goes, but he did not like to face an unseen danger.

He began to press his point again after a pause, but just then sounds were heard in the direction in which the Texans had gone, and before long they came silently back. Nelson's face lighted up, and Talbot imperiously asked the first to say what he had heard.

"We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no fur ther."

"You trust your judgment, Jack Plunkett, amenable from some cause, and the way ended then."

Just then several of the men laid the unconscious Texan upon the ground, and Talbot knelt beside him, andBerta begged the major to come to him.

A hasty examination showed that he was only stunned, and under a liberal application of water he soon began to revive.

The news was a great relief to Palmer. He knew that no one could lead the Rangers like their loved major, and everything looked dark for the future.

Berta had devoted herself to care for Jack, as only a woman can, and under her efforts he soon recovered and sat upright.

"Jupiter crickets!" he observed, "I reckon sommit wrong has happened. Yes, I remember when I looked in my brain's eye. Out. But what is the major?"

"A prisoner, Jack," answered Talbot, sadly.

"Can't you buy him back?"

"Around layyarr! Thunderation! you are a-coming," he added.

The speaker sprung to his feet and glared fiercely around. His companions avoided his scowling gaze, but Kentuck knew the past could not be undone.

"We still live," he quietly said.

"I'd rather die than ter lose the major."

"Let's get him back, Jack, and Talbot extended his hand.

The Texan clasped it warmly.

"I'm with you to the death."

"Where is Mexican bound Talbot."

No one answered at first, and it soon became evident that the life-hunter had not returned with the others. In some way he must have found a passage through the bushes, providing he had not run upon the Mexicans and been killed.

Talbot believed the former idea correct and it is necessary to point out that neither man had failed to find their way through, but, as the kidnappers had gone, there must, of course, be one, and it seemed advisable to find it at once.

The darkness was already taking on a gray tinge which foretold the dawn. Outside the chaparral it was probably fairly light, but in that place the place might hold stubbornly for the mystery.

The Kentuckian conferred with Jack and the others and all agreed on the necessity of making an attempt at an assault. Talbot was ill suited for defense, a way of retreat had been found, and, though there was danger of an ambush, it seemed best to look for more suitable quarter.

Edwin asked Jack Plunkett to take the lead temporarily, and, when others echoed the request, the worthy scout did not refuse.

The newly-discovered pathway was now clear, and the party was moved toward, but when they came over the Texans had been pursued, some difficulty was experienced in penetrating the thorny bushes; but the increase of light which aided them and they pushed on steadily.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOLD UNDERTA KING.

Day dawned in the chaparral and the Texans looked keenly about as they pressed forward, but there was nothing unusual in the scene. A tanglewood was around them, and the path so narrow that the branches flapped in their faces as they went.

It was fully daylight when they reached a small knoll which was more sparingly wooded for bowlers of all sizes lay around so thickly that trees and plants could only exist when they could, and Jack Plunkett was not slow to see something worthy of attention in the situation. The place was far better adapted for a fortress than it had been supposed, and, as there did not seem to be any hope of an immediate escape from the chaparral, it struck him that a little work would make a refuge for the night.

He paused and explained his views to his companions as they came up, but, naturally, the majority of the Rangers were in favor of paying a visit to the place.

Before the matter was settled, the arrival of Maxwell put a new face on the situation. The life-hunter had not been idle, but, by indirect means, had managed to get wood enough to learn a good deal about the country. He was now investigating the plot and I pointed it out to them.

The Mexicans had evidently improved their spare time, for the scout declared that no
voices, all was silent in the chaparral. There was no sound from the guerrillas.

The advance was again commenced. The path was so narrow that they were obliged to move in single file, and Palmer, who insisted on leading the way, every moment expected to see the Mexicans spring up in his path; but the short distance to the glade was traversed without incident.

Another halt was made in the glade. It was a mere break in the trees, where the fountain bubbled musically to the surface, and total silence reigned save for the sounds made by their own party.

The major glanced upward at the sky.

"Day is no more than an hour away," he observed.

"Our troubles begin anew," said one of the men, in a subdued voice.

"Are you discouraged, Peso?" asked the major.

"I would give a good deal to see Texan soil at this minute, I'll allow, but I won't complain while I have Texan tobacco in my pocket," replied the man, in a tone which left no doubt of his courage.

The men were allowing their horses to drink at the fountain, and, in the meantime, Palmer stared straight into the darkness as though he hoped to find there some plan for his benefit.

"I wish we had a guide," he muttered.

"There is no place of safety for you," said Berta.

"Where can we go?"

"You can only go forward."

"Can we see there, and the bushes interfere like the threads of a spider's web."

The guerrillas are behind," said Talbot, suggesting the question.

"There is a plenty in the chaparral, I think," assured the Kentuckyman.

"Thirst ain't the mercy the most ter dread," added Jack Plunkett.

"We will go forward," said Palmer, decisively.

"Can't we get into a worse situation, and there may be some good luck in store for us yet."

CHAPTER XVI.

CATASTROPHES.

The sabers of the men were once more busy. They were the instruments for the work, but the wielders knew what was at stake and labored with zeal.

The chief actors of our story were waiting in silence. Talbot stood beside Berta, and as he looked down at her face he felt a strong desire to draw her to his arms as a shield from harm.

Perhaps their peril hastened the work, but be that as it may, he felt his interest in her growing with each hour. She was one of those warm-hearted women occasionally met with, whose successful appeal, her price, and, gradually, he was coming to trust and believe in her implicitly.

Palmer stood with one hand resting on his sword-guard, and thoughtful, while Nelson and Maxwell were at the rear, his glances roving about the darkness as though he really hoped to see an enemy appear.

It was a period of unpleasant suspense to all.

If the Texans had thoroughly explored the vicinity of the fountain when they first arrived, they would have found them a severe misfortune, but they were not the first or last men who have committed a blunder, and the calamity fell upon them when least expected.

As they still, awaiting the opening of the avenue, they had not seen the hostile eye peering at them from the darkness at one side of the glade; they had not seen the dark forms which emerged from the underbrush, their movements drowned in the noise made by the workmen, and there was no warning to any until the blow fell.

Major Palmer had fallen into deep thought, and, as several men moved to his side, he did not heed them or look to see that they were not of his band.

Suddenly, however, the whole of them, some five or six in number, flung themselves upon the officer, and in a twinkling he was lifted from his feet and borne toward the bushes.

He was crying out for help and did not realize his peril any sooner than the other Texans, and, by the time he had begun to struggle, a cry from his followers attracted the attention of all.

"The Greasers!" cried one impetuous Texan.

"Shoot the dogs!"

"Hold for your lives!" called out Jack Plunkett.

"You will shoot the major. Fool me!

He made a rush for the bushes, putting out his hands in advance to clear the way, but, to his surprise, only yielding branches and leaves opposed him and he knew he had struck a path they had previously overlooked.

"Furres, men, pursue!" shouted Talbot, alive to all the details which would cause if the major was lost.

As for himself, his post of duty was beside Berta and he would not desert her.

The broad issued from the bush like a flash as Maxwell bounded in pursuit, and other men followed until Talbot and Berta had no company except the man Nelson.

Even in this moment, the latter could not forget his doubts of the Kentuckian, and he was resolved to give him no chance to desert.

The Kentuckyman stood irresolutely in the center of the glade, his saber firmly grasped, and every moment expecting to see fresh enemies appear.

He listened intently to the sounds in the bushes, but after a little they ceased, and the chaparral became as silent as usual.

Berta pressed closely to the side of her champion, her一级-dipped arm, and her life, for shadows of all kinds hung darkly around them.

"What shall we do?" asked Nelson, uneasily, after a pause."

"We can do nothing at present."

"Hain't we better follow the men?"

"Why should we?"

"If the Mexicans advance now, we too shall be captured."

"We must remain to look to the horses."

"They are liable to break away if left alone."

"Can't we get them?"

"Impossible."

Nelson remained silent for a while longer, but he could not hide his uneasiness. In truth, the situation was too threatening for his nerves; he had bravely enough, as the word goes, but he did not like to face an unseen danger.

He began to press his point again after a pause, but just then sounds were heard in the direction in which the Texans had gone, and before long they came silently back.

Palmer was first to draw near, and Talbot imperiously asked the first one: "We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no further."

"That is no reason," said Jack Plunkett, insensible from some cause, and the way ended then."

Just then several of the men laid the unconscious Texan upon the ground, and Talbot knelt beside him, and tenderly asked the first one: "We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no further."

"That is no reason," said Jack Plunkett, insensible from some cause, and the way ended then."

A hasty examination showed that he was only stunned, and under a liberal application of water he soon began to revive.

The major was soon recovered, and the situation was discouraging. He knew that no one could lead the Rangers like their loved major, and everything looked dark for the future.

Berta had devoted herself to caring for Jack, as only a woman can, and under her efforts he soon recovered and sat upright.

"Jupiter crickets!" he observed, "I reckon somnambulism wrong has happened. Yes, I remember now, I reckoned my brains out. But what is the major?"

"A prisoner, Jack," answered Talbot, sadly.

"A prisoner! and you have saved them around layar? Thunderation! you yer been ashamed?"

The speaker sprung to his feet and glared fiercely around. His companions avoided his scolding gaze, and the Kentuckian knew the past could not be undone.

"We still live," he quietly said.

"I'd rather die than ter lose the major."

"I would him leave him, Jack, and Talbot extended his hand.

The Texan clasped it warmly.

"I'm with you to the death."

"Where is Mexican-bound Talbot."

No one answered at first, and it soon became evident that the life-hunter had not returned with the others. In some way he must have found a passage through the bushes, providing he had not run upon the Mexicans and been killed.

Talbot believed the former idea correct and it is possible his brother and the others had failed to find their way through, but, as the kidnappers had gone, there must, of course, be one, and it seemed advisable to find it at once.

The darkness was already taking on a gray tinge which foretold the dawn. Outside the chaparral it was probably fully light, but in the deep places might hold stubbornly for the mystery.

The Kentuckian conferred with Jack and the others and all agreed on the necessity of returning to the place which had suited for defense, a way of retreat had been found, and, though there was danger of an ambush, it seemed best to look for more suitable quarters.

Edwin asked Jack Plunkett to take the lead temporarily, and, when others echoed the request, the worthy scout did not refuse.

The newly-discovered pathway was now narrow and obscure, being totally unfit for horseback riding, so each man took his steed by the reins and the advance was begun in single file.

For a while all went smoothly, but, when they arrived where the Texans had before paused, some difficulty was experienced in penetrating the thorny bushes; but the increase of light helped them and they pushed on steadily.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOLD UNDERTAKING.

Day dawned in the chaparral and the Texans looked keenly about as they pressed forward, but there was nothing unsual about the wood tangled wood was around them, and the path so narrow that the branches flapped in their faces as they went.

It was fully daylight when they reached a small knoll which was more sparsely wooded, for bowlers of all sizes lay around so thickly that trees and plants could only exist there. Jack Plunkett was not slow to see something worthy of attention in the situation. The place was far better adapted for a fortress than the other, and they had passed, as there did not seem to be any hope of an immediate escape from the chaparral, it struck him that a little work would make a refuge for all.

He paused and explained his views to his companions as they came up, but, naturally, the majority of the Rangers were in favor of pressing on.

Before the matter was settled, the arrival of Maxwell put a new face on the situation.

The life-hunter had not been idle, but, by indirect means, he must have reconnoitered the wood enough to learn a good deal about the comr. corral.

The Kentuckian had evidently improved their spare time, for the scout declared that not
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voices, all was silent in the charparral. There was no sound from the guerrillas.

The advance was again commenced. The path was so narrow that they were obliged to move in single file, and Palmier, who insisted on leading the way, every moment expected to see the Mexicans spring up in his path; but the short distance to the glade was traversed without further delay.

Another halt was made in the glade. It was a mere break in the trees, where the fountain bubbled musically to the surface, and total silence reigned. But no sound was heard except for the sounds made by their own party.

The major glanced upward at the sky.

"Day is no more than an hour away," he observed.

"Our troubles begin anew," said one of the men, in a subdued voice.

"Are you discouraged, Pvt?" asked the major.

"I would give a good deal to see Texan soil at this minute, I'll allow, but I won't complain while I have Texan tobacco in my pocket," replied the man, in a tone which left no doubt of his courage.

The men were allowing their horses to drink at the fountain, and, in the meantime, Palmier stared straight into the darkness as though he hoped to find there some plan for his benefit.

"I wish we had a guide," he muttered.

"There is no place of safety for you," said Berta.

"Where can we go?"

"You can only go forward.

"It is all the same there, and the bushes interface like the threads of a spider's web.

The guerrillas are behind," said Talbot, suggested the Kentuckian.

"You are right, and we will improve every minute. Resume work with your sabers, men, and we may reach a place better adapted for defense.

"We are leaving water if we leave here," suggested one of the men.

There is a plenty in the charparral, I think," assured the Kentuckian.

"Thirst ain't the enemy the most terrible dread," added Jack Plunkett.

"We will go forward," said Palmier, decisively.

"We can't get into a worse situation, and there may be some good luck in store for us yet.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CATASTROPHIC

The sabers of the men were once more busy. They were the only instruments for the work; but the wielders knew what was at stake and labored with zeal.

The chief actors of our story were waiting in silence. Talbot stood beside Berta, and as he looked down at her fair face he felt a strong desire to draw her to his arms as a shield from harm.

Perhaps their peril hastened the work; but, be that as it may, he felt his interest in her growing with each hour. She was one of those warm-hearted, generous, spirited women, the peaceful, and, gradually, he was coming to trust and believe in her implicitly.

Palmier stood with one hand resting on his saber, thoughtful, and thoughtful, while Nelson, while Maxwell was at the rear, his glancing roved about the darkness as though he really hoped to see an enemy appear.

It was a period of unpleasant suspense to all.

If the Texans had thoroughly explored the vicinity of the fountain when they first arrived, they would have found a severe misfortune, but they were not the first or last men who have committed a blunder, and the calamity fell upon them when least expected.

As they all walked along, the cutting of the avenue, they had not seen the hostile eye peering at them from the darkness at one side of the glade; they had not seen the dark forms which emerged from the underbrush, their movements drowned in the noise made by the workmen, and there was no warning to any until the blow fell.

Major Palmer had fallen into deep thought, and, as several men moved to his side, he did not heed them or look to see that they were not of his band.

Suddenly, however, the whole of them, some five or six in number, flung themselves upon the officer, and in a twinkling he was lifted from his feet and borne toward the bushes.

He was down the street, and did not realize his peril any sooner than the other Texans, and, by the time he had begun to struggle, a cry from his followers attracted the attention of all.

"The Greaser!" cried one precipitous Texan.

"Shoot the dogs!"

"Hold, for your lives!" called out Jack Plunkett.

"You will shoot the major. FOOL me!"

He made a rush for the bushes, putting out his hands in advance to clear the way, but, to his surprise, only yielding branches and leaves opposed him and he knew he had struck a path they had previously overlooked.

"Furnus, men, pursue!" shouted Talbot, alive to the trouble which would ensue if the major was lost.

As for himself, his post of duty was beside Berta and he would not desert her.

"The Greasehead fired like a flash as Maxwell bounded in pursuit, and other men followed until Talbot and Berta had no company except the man Nelson.

Even with the urn of the moment, the latter could not forget his duties of the Kentuckian, and he was resolved to give him no chance to desert.

The Kentuckian stood irresolutely in the center of the glade, his saber firmly grasped, and every moment expecting to see fresh enemies appear.

He listened intently to the sounds in the bushes, but after a little they ceased, and the charparral became as silent as usual.

Berta pressed closely to the side of her compatriot, and as she gazed at his face she saw, for shadows of all kinds hung darkly around them.

"What shall we do?" asked Nelson, uneasily, after a pause.

"We can do nothing at present."

"Hain't we better follow the men?"

"Why should we?"

"If the Mexicans advance now, we too shall be captured."

"We must remain to look to the horses."

They are liable to break away if left alone."

"Can't we return them?"

"Impossible."

Nelson remained silent for a while longer, but he could not hide his uneasiness. In truth, the situation was too threatening for his nerves; he had bravery enough, as the word goes, but he did not like to face an unseen danger.

He began to press his point again after a pause, but just then sounds were heard in the direction in which the Texans had gone, and before long they came silently back.

"Pardon me, sir," said a voice, uncertainly, and Talbot imperiously asked the first person addressing him.

"We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no further."

Jack Plunkett, thermophotizable from some cause, and the way ended then.

Just then several of the men laid the unconscious Texan upon the ground, and Talbot knelt beside him, anxiously asking him.

"We did not find him," was the gloomy answer.

"Why did you turn back without him?"

Talbot hotly demanded.

"The path ended and we could go no further."

Talbot knelt beside him, anxiously asking him.

A hasty examination showed that he was only stunned, and under a liberal application of water he soon began to revive.

"I'm much obliged, Jack Plunkett," he said, somewhat discouraged. He knew that no one could lead the Rangers like their loved major, and everything looked dark for the future.

Berta had devoted herself to caring for Jack, as only a woman can, and under her efforts he soon recovered and sat upright.

"Jupiter crickets!" he observed, "I reckon sommut wrong has happened. Yes, I rememburr I shocked mybrain byaccident."

"But what is the major?"

"A prisoner, Jack," answered Talbot, sadlly.

"Shadrac, Shadrac, and Shadrac around hay?"

Thundershame! you ceter be ashamed!"

The speaker sprung to his feet and glared fiercely around.

His companions avoided his glance, but Ben Kentuck knew the past could not be undone.

"We still live," he quietly said.

"I'd rather die than ter lose the major."

"Then go and save the one, around Jack, and Talbot extended his hand.

The Texan clasped it warmly.

"I'm with you to the death."

"Where is Mexican Talbot?"

No one answered at first, and it soon became evident that the life-hunter had not returned with the others. In some way he must have found a passage through the bushes, proving that he had not run upon the Mexicans and been killed.

Talbot believed the former idea correct and it gave him courage. They both had failed to find their way through, but, as the kidnappers had gone, there must, of course, be one, and it seemed advisable to find it at once.

The darkness was already taking on a gray tinge which foretold the dawn. Outside the charparral it was probably fully light, but in the narrow places it might hold stubbornly for the mystery.

The Kentuckian conferred with Jack and the others and all agreed on the necessity of a swift visit, suitable for defense, a way of retreat had been found, and, though there was danger of ambush, it seemed best to look for more suitable quarters.

Edwin asked Jack Plunkett to take the lead temporarily, and, when others echoed the request, the worthy scout did not refuse.

The newly-discovered pathway was now narrow and obscure, being totally unfit for horseback riding, so each man took his steed by the reins and the advance was begun in single file.

For a while all went smoothly, but, when they arrived where the Texans had before paused, some difficulty was experienced in penetrating the thorny bushes; but the increased light which aided them and they pushed on steadily.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOLD ENTERTAINMENT.

Day dawned in the charparral and the Texans looked keenly about as they pressed forward, but there was nothing unusual in the road they trod. The tangled wood was around them, and the path so narrow that the branches flapped in their faces as they went.

It was fully daylight when they reached a small knoll which was more sparsely wooded, for bowlers of all sizes lay around so thickly that trees and plants could only exist where the sunlight and the rain had fallen. Jack Plunkett was not slow to see something worthy of attention in the situation. The place was far better adapted for a fortress than the spot they had passed, and as there did not seem to be any hope of an immediate escape from the charparral, it struck him that a little work would make a refuge for them.

He paused and explained his views to his companions as they came up, but, naturally, the majority of the Rangers were in favor of passing on.

Before the matter was settled, the arrival of Maxwell put a new face on the situation.

The life-hunter had not been idle, but, by incessant watching, he had managed to get enough wood to learn a good deal about the camp.

The Kentuckians had evidently improved their spare time, for the scout declared that no
only was there a force in the rear, but, some-
how, another had been started from the west,
shooting the Texans between the two.

The information was very timely, for they
might otherwise have run straight into the sec-
dond party, and it was enough to settle the
disposition of the force.

Their retreat was cut off and their only
hope was to occupy the knoll and make the
best of it.

Amazingly, they at once moved to the top
and began preparations for defense. The
bowlders were mostly easily moved, and, af-
after half an hour's work, a circular breastwork
had been erected which was more valuable
than might at first be supposed.

The rocks had been piled four feet high and
the crevices filled with earth, thus making a
wall through which a bullet was not likely to
go.

While they worked, Edwin Talbot had been
busily thinking. The enemy seemed in no
hurry to attack them, but they intended to
delay much longer, it would be the best
and, perhaps, only chance to rescue Major
Palmer.

He communicated his views to Jack Plunkett.

"I dunno," said the Texan. "I'm rather
jubous, on the whole, though I do want ter
have more men yet.

"We must," declared Talbot, earnestly; "it
is our only hope. No one else can govern the
motions of Plunkett."

"But how are we ter find him?"

"He must be with the western division
of our enemies."

"If they ain't killed him."

"I don't believe they have. They might
kill you or me, but his rank makes him a valu-
able prisoner."

"We'll keep with you far any vent! What
do you propose?"

"Simply that we go on a scout and see what
can be done."

"If you go, but what of the men?"

"They will only be minus two rifles and
Baxter can stand at the helm until our return."

"So be it."

Talbot's chief regret lay in leaving Berta
without any special protector, but there was
no other way and they must trust to the
Rangers.

He went to her and explained their intention.
Her face changed color somewhat, but she
assured them she would be well enough,
and her only worry seemed to be in regard to
the safety of the young lady.

The Texans made no objection to the plan.
All were very anxious to have their loved
leader back, and, as the only hope of his rescue
seemed to lie in strategy, they were willing to
trust Jack Plunkett and whoever he chose for
a companion.

They looked carefully to their weapons, said
good-bye to their fellow Rangers and started
from the knoll. Once, Talbot looked back and
saw Berta standing with clasped hands, but the
sight unnerved him and he waved a fare-
well. Satisfied.

They entered the thicker chaparral and
pushed on in the direction in which Maxwell
had seen the second party of guerrillas.

"Do you expect to succeed?" asked Jack.

"We must!"

"Everything is against us, even of we manage
to get our eyes on the major."

"I know it, but failure means ruin to us all."

"It has been an un negocio expedition."

"We cannot endure the past. Let us go on." They moved on, and when Edwin, who
then came suddenly to an opening in the chap-
arral, the underbrush had prevented their
seeing it until they stepped from cover, and
Jack Plunkett seized him by the shoulder when Edwin, who
was in front, stepped back so suddenly as to
collide with him.

"For your life, get cover!" exclaimed the
Kendall Rangers,掣动人 his shoulder.

"What is it?" Jack demanded.

"Greasers!"

"In the glades!"

"Yes. Look for yourself."

Plunkett parted the bushes and obeyed. He
saw an area of about one-fourth of an acre,
free from trees, but a perfect nest of rocks.
The top was flat and symmetrical about their
situation, and, as Jack saw them one above
the other, often with a smooth surface, he
knew he was looking on the ruins of an
ancient building.

Once, it must have been one of some pre-
tensions, and the fragments of wall still stand-
ing attested to the fact that the builders had
themselves long since abandoned it; but wall, pillar
and dome had yielded to the heavy hand of time
and he saw only a ruin.

"Stay!" there was something more, for, amidst
the ruins of the ancient buildings and their
dress was the uniform of Mexican sol-
diers.

They had fixed the head they were seeking.
Jack drew quietly back.

"What now?" he asked.

But Talbot was looking earnestly and a new
light soon appeared in his face.

"What do you see?" Jack demanded.

"Look by the tallest wall, on the northern
side."

"The major over there?"

"Yes," answered Talbot, "Palmer is there.
They have bound him to that broken pillar and
are now planning fresh mischief."

"We can't get at him."

"We must! Their power are we are ruined. His
presence with the Rangers is all that can save
us. We must rescue him, and that, too, at
once."

"The enemy are twenty to us two."

"We must do the work by stealth; we must
crawl to him and set him free."

"It is worse death for try it. The Greasers
would see un'kill us."

"Jack, I am going to try. It is ruin to leave him;
it can be no more to fall in the at-
tem. I am going at once, trusting to the
rocks and vines to hide me. If I am taken,
go at once to the band and do what you can to
escape."

Jack's face was gloomy enough, but he
would say no more. It looked like going to
certain doom, but there was truth in what
Talbot had said and he knew the mettle of his
comrade.

The Kantuckian laid down his rifle, looked
at see that his knife was in place and wrong
Jack's hand.

"If I succeed," he said, "the men will no
longer believe me a traitor. If I fail, good-by
for this world."

Plunkett silently pressed Edwin's hand in
a vice-like grip.

"If I fail, do you what can for Berta,
Jack."

"I will, my boyoo, I will!"

"Don't try to aid me, for your efforts will
awail nothing against all these men, and your
arm is needed with the band. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESULT

TALBOT had carefully marked out the course
he was to take. The pillar to which Major
Palmer was tied was about a hundred feet
away, and one half of this distance must be
passed over on the ground except that of the
slender vines which had overrun the ruins
and spread back to the trees.

It looked like an impossible to pass this
distance without being captured and taken
down to the watchers deep in conversation and no actual lookout was
being kept.

The Ranger extended himself on the ground
and, as he was out of cover, he moved
forward and began his dangerous crawl.

The adventurer moved silently but rapidly,
drawing himself forward by means of the
vines and every movement took him nearer
to the prisoner.

Jack Plunkett was greatly excited for one of
his naturally cool nature. He looked ner-
vously about him as if he feared some Mex-
ican, and every moment he expected to see
the alarm given.

Jack, or something more, must have been
seen in the glades, for the gallant Jack,
however, and Jack breathed a sigh of relief as he saw him
reach the rocks and disappear.

So far, all was well, but he was then fairly
among the enemy, for Talbot had
now with his feet se-
parated Palmer from the men in council.

A period of silence followed, but Jack knew
if Talbot was idle it was from a good cause.
Palmer had certainly made a move, but he
would not halt half-way in his undertaking.

The watcher's eyes were on the major, and
when he saw the latter start, as though in
surprise, his own blood began to course with
increased rapidity.

Palmer looked quickly behind him, hesitated,
and then glanced at the Mexicans. They
were working with animation, disputing, if the
signs were to be believed, and when men be-
gin to quarrel they are liable to forget their
duty.

Another moment and the major moved from
his position and Jack saw that he was free
from bonds. Talbot had not been visible, but
he had evidently been busy; the wood must
have looked wonderfully friendly.

Half-way across the open space a shout arose
from the ruins, the alarm-cry of the baffled
enemy, and at the first sound the Rangers
bounded to their feet and ran for life.

A few paces took them to cover, and,
though half a dozen bullets followed them,
the Ranger who had the major was caught in Jack Plunkett's arms.

It was, however, no time for sentiment. The
angry shouts of the Mexicans arose behind them, they knew they must
be prompt and vigorous. Talbot thrust one of its
revolvers into Palmer's hand and then
the flight was begun in earnest.

We have, perhaps, used the word flight in-
dicuously, for rapid progress was impossible,
but they pressed forward with all possible
speed, disregarding the occasional wounds from
thorns and briars.

As they went, the major briefly told of his
captorship, which had not been particularly
unpleasant, and Jack chuckled over the rescue
like the rest.

Talbot said little, but his heart was lighter,
for he knew he had cleared his reputation with the
Rangers.

The Mexicans were constantly heard in the
rear, but they did not gain perceptibly, and at
last the fort or knob arose to the view of the
pursuers.

They pressed cheer arose from the Texas
as they caught sight of their leader, but it was
no time for idle words. Palmer knew the
enemy would soon be upon them and there
was not a moment to lose.

A brief command from him sent every man
to his post, the Rangers obeying as they
always obeyed the major.

The thoughts of the major were busy. He
had been told of the discoveries made by Max-
well, and the fact that Ribbert was in their
rear with the main body of the Mexicans
would not long be a pleasing of safety. Even if they managed to hold
only was there a force in the rear, but, some-
how, another had been started from the west, 
shifting the Texans between the two.
The information was very timely, for, they
might otherwise have run straight into the secon-
date, and it was enough to settle the dis-
order.
Their retreat was cut off and their only
hope was to occupy the knoll and make the
best of it.

Chapter XVIII

The Result

The Texan was not alone. Palmer had
him by the shoulder.

"What is it?" Jack demanded.

"Greasers!"

"In the glade!"

"Yes, Look for yourself."

Plunkett parleyed the buffalo and obeyed. He
saw an area of about one-fourth of an acre,
free from trees, but a perfect nest of rocks.
The area was clear, and the dam near sym-
metry about their situation, and, as Jack saw them one
above the other, often with a smooth surface,
his was looking on the ruins of an
unchallenged fort.

Once, it must have been one of some pre-
tensions, and the fragments of wall still stand-
ing attest to the fact that the builders had
been more long-suffering than bold, but wall, pillar,
and dome had yielded to the heavy hand of time
and he saw only a ruin.

Stay! there was something more, for, amidst
the ruins of the sturdy hewn timbers and
their dress was the uniform of Mexican sol-
diers.

They had fled on the bank they were seeking.
Jack drew quietly back.

"What now?" he asked.

But Talbot was looking earnestly and a new
light soon appeared in his face.

"What do you see?" Jack demanded.

"Look by the tallest wall, on the northern
side."

"The major by thunders?"

"Yes," replied Talbot, "Palmer is there.
They have bound him to that broken pillar and
are now planning fresh mischief."

"We can't get at him."

"We must wait or we are ruined. His
presence with the Rangers is all that can save
us. We must rescue him, and that, too, at
once."

"The enemy are twenty to us two."

"We must do the work by stealth; we must
crawl to him and set him free."

"It is worse death, for try it. The Greasers
would see us kill him."

"Jack, I am going to try. It is ruin to
leave him; it can be no more to fall in the
aftermath. I am going at once, trusting to the
rocks and vines to hide me. If I am taken, go
at once to the band and do what you can to
escape."

Jack's face was gloomy enough, but he
would say no more. It looked like going to
certain doom, but there was truth in what
Talbot had said and he knew the mettle of his
comrades.

The Kentuckian laid down his rifle, looked
at to see that his knife was in place and
wrong Jack's hand.

"If I succeed," he said, "the men will no
longer believe me a traitor. If I fail, good-by
for this world."

Plunkett silently pressed Edwin's hand in
a vice-like grip.

"If I fail, do what you can for Berta,
Jack."

"I will, my boyee, I will!"

"Don't try to aid me, for your efforts will
avail nothing against all these men, and your
arm is needed with the band. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESULT

TALBOT had carefully marked out the course
he was to take. The pillar to which Major
Palmer was tied was about a hundred feet
away, and one half of this distance must be
passed over in time to cover the flight of two
slender vines which had overrun the runnels and
spread back to the trees.

It looked like an impossibility to pass this
distance in time, but the Rangers were deep in
conversa-
tion and no actual lookout was be-
ing kept.

The Ranger extended himself on the ground
and the door had been opened to recover him
and began his dangerous crawl.

The adventurer moved silently but rapidly,
drawing himself forward by means of the
vines and every movement took him nearer to the
prisoner.

Jack Plunkett was greatly excited for one
of his naturally cool nature. He looked nerv-
ously about for the Mexican, and every moment
he expected to see the alarm given.

Jack, or something more, must have been
seen. The gallant Major had said that when
Edwin, who was in front, stepped back so suddenly as to
collide with him.

"For your life, get over!" exclaimed
the Kentuckian, passing him by the shoulder.

"What is it?" Jack demanded.

"Greasers!"

"In the glade!"

"Yes, Look for yourself."

Plunkett parleyed the buffalo and obeyed. He
saw an area of about one-fourth of an acre,
free from trees, but a perfect nest of rocks.
The area was clear, and the dam near sym-
metry about their situation, and, as Jack saw them one
above the other, often with a smooth surface,
his was looking on the ruins of an
unchallenged fort.

Once, it must have been one of some pre-
tensions, and the fragments of wall still stand-
ing attest to the fact that the builders had
been more long-suffering than bold, but wall, pillar,
and dome had yielded to the heavy hand of time
and he saw only a ruin.

Stay! there was something more, for, amidst
the ruins of the sturdy hewn timbers and
their dress was the uniform of Mexican sol-
diers.

They had fled on the bank they were seeking.
Jack drew quietly back.

"What now?" he asked.

But Talbot was looking earnestly and a new
light soon appeared in his face.

"What do you see?" Jack demanded.

"Look by the tallest wall, on the northern
side."

"The major by thunders?"

"Yes," replied Talbot, "Palmer is there.
They have bound him to that broken pillar and
are now planning fresh mischief."

"We can't get at him."

"We must wait or we are ruined. His
presence with the Rangers is all that can save
us. We must rescue him, and that, too, at
once."

"The enemy are twenty to us two."

"We must do the work by stealth; we must
crawl to him and set him free."

"It is worse death, for try it. The Greasers
would see us kill him."

"Jack, I am going to try. It is ruin to
leave him; it can be no more to fall in the
aftermath. I am going at once, trusting to the
rocks and vines to hide me. If I am taken, go
at once to the band and do what you can to
escape."

Jack's face was gloomy enough, but he
would say no more. It looked like going to
certain doom, but there was truth in what
Talbot had said and he knew the mettle of his
comrades.

The Kentuckian laid down his rifle, looked
at to see that his knife was in place and
wrong Jack's hand.

"If I succeed," he said, "the men will no
longer believe me a traitor. If I fail, good-by
for this world."

Plunkett silently pressed Edwin's hand in
a vice-like grip.

"If I fail, do what you can for Berta,
Jack."

"I will, my boyee, I will!"

"Don't try to aid me, for your efforts will
avail nothing against all these men, and your
arm is needed with the band. Good-by!"
"Greasers?"
"In the glade!"
"Yes. Look for yourself."

Plunkett parted the bushes and obeyed. He saw an area of about one-fourth of an acre, free from trees, but a perfect nest of rocks. The bed was a small one, and asymmetry and symmetry about their situation, and, as Jack saw them one above the other, often with a smooth surface, he knew he was looking on the ruins of an ancient building.

Once, it must have been one of some pretensions, and the fragments of wall still standing attested to the fact that the builders had labored long. But lowlaid, wall, pillar and dome had yielded to the heavy hand of time and he saw only a ruin.

"Stay! There was something more, for, amidst the broken stones and slabs and their dress was the uniform of Mexican soldiers.

They had found the hand they were seeking. Jack drew quietly back.

"What now?" he asked.

But Talbot was looking earnestly and a new light soon appeared in his face.

"What do you see?" Jack demanded.

"Look by the tallest wall, on the northern side!"

"The major's by thunder!"

"Yes," answered Talbot, "Palmer is there. They have bound him to that broken pillar and are now planning fresh mischief."

"We can't get at him."

"We must be careful we are not ruined. His presence with the Rangers is all that can save us. We must rescue him, and, that, too, at once."

"The enemy are twenty to us two."

"We must do the work by stealth; we must crawl to him and set him free."

"It may be death; try it for us. The Greasers would see an 'un kill us."

"Jack, I am going to try. It is ruin to leave him; it can be no more to fail in the attempt. I am going at once, trusting to the rocks and vines to hide me. If I am taken, go at once to the band and do what you can to escape."

Jack's face was gloomy enough, but he would say no more. It looked like going to certain doom, but there was truth in what Talbot had said and he knew the mettle of his comrade.

The Kentuckian laid down his rifle, looked to see that his knife was in place and wrung Jack's hand.

"If I succeed," he said, "the men will no longer believe me a traitor. If I fail, good-by for this world."

Plunkett silently pressed Edwin's hand in a vice-like grip.

"If I fail, do what you can for Berta, Jack."

"I will, my boyoe, I will!"

"Don't try to aid me, for your efforts will avail nothing against all these men, and your arm is needed with the band. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XVIII
THE RESULT

Talbot had carefully marked out the course he was to take. The pillar to which Major Palmer was tied was about a hundred feet away, and one half of this distance must be passed over entirely except that of the slender vines which had overrun the ruins and spread back to the trees.

It looked like an impossibility to pass this distance without some effort. Major Palmer was deep in conversation and no actual lookout was being kept.

The Ranger extended himself on the ground and the sweater was moved from under his shoulder and began his dangerous crawl.

The adventurer moved silently but rapidly, drawing himself forward by means of the vines and every movement took him nearer to the prisoner.

Jack Plunkett was greatly excited for one of his naturally cool courage. He looked nervously over his shoulder to see the Mexicans, and every moment he expected to see the alarm given.

Jack, or something more, must have been over the gallant Berta; however, and Jack breathed a sigh of relief as he saw him reach the rocks and disappear.

So far, all was well, but he was then fairly surrounded by enemy and he stood with his feet separated Palmer from the men in council.

A period of silence followed, but Jack knew if Talbot was idle it was from a good cause. The major would not have halted his men in this undertaking.

The watcher's eyes were on the major, and when he saw the latter start, as though in surprise, his own blood began to course with increased rapidity.

Palmer looked quickly behind him, hesitated, and then glanced at the Mexicans. They were talking with animation, disputing, if the signs were to be believed, and when men begin to quarrel they are liable to forget their duty.

Another moment and the major moved from his position and Jack saw that he was free from bonds. Talbot had not been visible, but he had evidently been busy, for the wood must have looked wonderfully friendly.

Half-way across the open space a shout arose from the ruins, the alarm-cry of the baffled enemy, and at the first sound the Rangers bounded to their feet and ran for life.

A few paces took them to cover, and, though half a dozen bullets followed them, no damage was done, and the major was caught in Jack Plunkett's arms.

It was, however, no time for sentiment. The angry shouts of the Mexicans arose behind them, and, as they knew each other would be prompt and vigorous, Talbot thrust one of his revolvers into Palmer's hand and then the flight was begun in earnest.

We have, perhaps, used the word flight injudiciously, for rapid progress was impossible, but they pressed forward with all possible speed, disregarding the occasional wounds from thorns and briars.

As they went, the major briefly told of his captivity, which had not been particularly unpleasant, and Jack chuckled over the rescue.

"Tell the Rangers," he said, "that the Mexicans were constantly heard in the rear, but they did not gain perceptibly, and at last the fort or knoll arose to the view of the pursued.

"The Rangers expressed cheer arose from the Texans as they caught sight of their leader, but it was no time for idle words. Palmer knew the enemy would soon be upon them and there was no time to spare."

A brief command from him sent every man to his post, the Rangers obeying as they always obeyed the major.

The thoughts of the sweater were busy. He had been told of the discoveries made by Maxwell, and the fact that Ribborn was in their rear with the main body of the Mexicans would not long be a place of safety. Even if they managed to hold
only was there a force in the rear, but, some-
how, another had been started from the west,
shaking the Texans between the two.

The information was very timely, for they
might otherwise have run straight into the sec-
ond party, and it was enough to settle the dis-
pute.

Their retreat was cut off and their only
hope was to occupy the knoll and make the
best of it.

Advancing, they at once moved to the top
and began preparations for defense. The
bowlders were mostly easily moved, and, af-


After an hour’s work, a circular breastwork
had been formed which was more valuable than
might at first be supposed.

The rocks had been pried four feet high and
the crevices filled with earth, thus making a
wall through which a bullet was not likely to
go.

While they worked, Edwin Talbot had been
busily thinking. The enemy seemed in no
hurry to attack them, but, if they intended to
delay much longer, it would be the best
and, perhaps, only chance to rescue Major
Palmer.

He communicated his views to Jack Plunkett.

"I dunno," said the Texan. "I’m ruther
jubous, on the whole, though I do want ter
know if we can have it that no man in this
clan is killed.

"We must," declared Talbot, earnestly; "it
is our only hope. No one else can govern the
men. Plunkett and I will.

"But how are we ter find him?"

"He must be with the western division of
our enemies."

"If they ain’t killed him?"

"I don’t believe they have. They might
kill you or me, but his rank makes him a valu-
able prisoner."

"We won’t do with you far any ventur."

"What do you propose?"

"Simply that we go on a scout and see what
can be done."

"If we find him, but what of the men?"

"They will only be minus two rifles and
Baxter can stand at the helm until our return."

"So be it."

Talbot’s chief regret lay in leaving Berta
without any especial protector, but there was
no other way and they must trust to the
Rangers.

They went to her and explained their inten-
tion. Her face changed color somewhat, but
she assured them she would be well enough,
and her only worry seemed to be in regard to
the sixyearold sister, who now was alone.

The Texans made no objection to the plan.
All were very anxious to have their loved
leader back, and, as the only hope of his rescue
seemed to lie in strategy, they were willing to
trust Jack Plunkett and whoever he chose for
a companion.

They looked carefully to their weapons, said
goodby to their fellow Rangers and started
from the knoll. Once, Talbot looked back and
saw Berta standing with clasped hands, but
the sight unnerved him and he waved a fare-
wel and hurried away.

They entered the thicker chaparral and pushed
on in the direction in which Maxwell
had seen the second party of guerrillas.

"Do you expect to stove?" asked Jack.

"We must."

"Everything is agin’ us, even of we manage
to get our eyes on the major."

"I know it, but failure means ruin to us all."

"It has be’n an unlucky expedition."

"We can’t unde the past. Let us go on."

When they came to the top when Edwin, who
was in front, stepped back so suddenly as to
collide with him.

"For your life, get over!" exclaimed the
Texan, striking him on the shoulder.

"What is it?" Jack demanded.

"Greasers!"

"In the gidad!"

"Yes. Look for yourself."

Plunkett patted the bushes and obeyed. He
saw an area of about one-fourth of an acre,
free from trees, but a perfect nest of rocks.

The bushes were thick, and symmetry about
their situation, and, as Jack saw them one
above the other, often with a smooth surface,
he knew he was looking on the ruins of an
ancient building.

Once, it must have been one of some pre-
tensions, and the fragments of wall still stand-
ing attested to the fact that the builders had
put forth much labor. But wall, pillar and
dome had yielded to the heavy hand of time
and he saw only a ruin.

Stay! there was something more, for, amidst
the ruins, the broken things and the dress was
the uniform of Mexican sol-
diers.

They had found the band they were seeking.
Jack drew quietly back.

"What now?" he asked.

But Talbot was looking earnestly and a new
light soon appeared in his face.

"What do you see?" Jack demanded.

"Look by the tallest wall, on the northern
side."

"The major? by thunder!"

"Yes," confided Talbot. "Palmer is there.
They have bound him to that broken pillar and
are now planning fresh mischief."

"We can’t get at him."

"We must. If we are not ruined. His
presence with the Rangers is all that can save
us. We must rescue him, and that, too, at
once."

"The enemy are twenty to us two."

"We must do the work by stealth; we must
crawl to him and set him free."

"It is sure death for try the Greasers.
They would see us."

"I am going to try. It is ruin to leave him;
it can be no more to fall in the at-
ter. I am going at once, trusting to the
rocks and vines to hide me. If I am taken,
go at once to the band and do what you can to
escape."

Jack’s face was gloomy enough, but he
would say no more. It looked like going to
certain doom, but there was truth in what
Talbot had said and he knew the mettle of his
comrade.

The Kentuckian laid down his rifle, looked to
see that his knife was in place and wrong
Jack’s hand.

"If I succeed," he said, "the men will no
longer believe me a traitor. If I fail, good-by
for this world.

Plunkett silently pressed Edwin’s hand in a
wise-like grip.

"If I fail, do what you can for Berta, Jack."

"I will, my boyce, I will!"

"Don’t try to aid me, for your efforts will
avail nothing against all these men, and your
arm is needed with the band. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The Result

Talbot had carefully marked out the course
he was to take. The pillar to which Major
Palmer was tied was about a hundred feet
away, and one half of this distance must be
passed over to gain the cover of trees except that
due to the slender vines which had overrun the
ruins and spread back to the trees.

It looked like an impossibility to pass this
distance in silence, and thoughts were deep in
conversation and no actual lookout was
being kept.

The Ranger extended himself on the ground
and raised his visor; the other answered in
cover and began his dangerous crawl.

The adventurer moved silently but rapidly,
drawing himself forward by means of the
vines, and every movement took him nearer to
the prisoner.

Jack Plunkett was greatly excited for one of
this naturally cool nature. He looked ner-
rously about him, but there were no Mex-
icans, and every moment he expected to see
the alarm given.

Jack, or something more, must have been
seen, for the gidal man shot off, however, and
Jack breathed a sigh of relief as he saw him
reach the rocks and disappear.

So far, all was well, but he was then fairly
afraid. The enemy were over him: ten or
four feet sepa-
rated Palmer from the men in council.

A period of silence followed, but Jack knew
if Talbot was idle it was from a good cause.

The Ranger, however, would not halt half-
way in his undertaking.

The watch’s eyes were on the major, and
when he saw the latter start, as though in
surprise, his own blood began to course with
increased rapidity.

Palmer looked quickly behind him, hesitated,
and then glanced at the Mexicans. They
were playing with animation, disputing, if the
signs were to be believed, and when men be-
gin to quarrel they are liable to forget their
duty.

Another moment and the major moved from
his position and Jack saw that he was free
from bonds. Talbot had not been visible, but
his evidently been busy, and the wood must
have looked wonderfully friendly.

Half-way across the open space a shout arose
from the ruins, the alarm-cry of the baffled
enemy, and at the first sound the Rangers
bounced to their feet and ran for life.

A few paces took them to cover, and,
though half a dozen bullets followed them,
they came to no damage, and the major was
crushed in Jack Plunkett’s arms.

It was, however, no time for sentiment. The
angry shouts of the Mexicans arose behind
them; they knew they were too late. The ex-
cept was prompt and vigorous. Talbot thrust
one of his revolvers into Palmer’s hand and then
the flight was begun in earnest.

We have, perhaps, used the word flight in-
delicately, for rapid progress was impossible,
but they pressed forward with all possible
speed, disregarding the occasional wounds from
thorns and briars.

As they went, the major briefly told of his
captivity, which had not been particularly
pleasant, and Jack chuckled over the rescue
that had been made.

Talbot said little, but his heart was lighter,
for he knew he had cleared his reputation with
the Rangers.

The Mexicans were constantly heard in the
rear, but they did not gain perceptibly, and at
last the fort or knoll arose to the view of the
pursuers.

They pressed cheer arose from the Texans
as they caught sight of their leader, but it was
no time for idle words. Palmer knew the
enemy would soon be upon them and there was
not a word spoken.

A brief command from him sent every man
to his post, the Rangers obeying as they
always obeyed the major.

The thoughts of Talbot were busy. He
had been told of the discoveries made by Max-
well, and the fact that Ribborn was in their
rear with the main body of the Mexicans
would not long be a plaee of safety. Even if they managed to hold
Young Kentucky.

is against assault, hunger and thirst would soon conquer them.

While being the case, he resolved that if the
smoke should be beaten off decisively, they should promptly be followed and the ad-
vantagetransformed into a rout. He believed that, in the final hour, a much clearer way
would be found by which they could leave the
chapearal.

He had just finished explaining his views when the Mexican horsemen came over the
hills in a straggling line, and then a cheer arose as they saw evidence that the knoll
was occupied.

The teacher pointed to the breastwork with his
sword, shouted a command in Spanish, and then the guerrillas came bounding up the
ascent.

There was no hurry to give the word for
firing. Every one of his men knew how to use
their rifles well, but he was determined that no
load should be wasted.

Palmer looked at Berta and saw the impor-
ting look on her pale face, but at that moment
she touched him on the arm.

He turned and saw Nathan Maxwell, and a
shiver went over his frame. The life-hunter
looked like a vedetta and his face was
black with passion.

"The old lasso afoot and his teeth
looked like wolf's fangs at both ends of
it," said Palmer, with intense emotion.

"So be it!" said Palmer, with a
locked brow, and the words he
spoke through the vail of buses and stood before the
aman, most Mexican.

One stroke of his sword sent Ribera's
weapon flying several yards away, and a second
brought the ruffian half stunned to his
knees.

By that time the other Rangers had appeared and,
the guerrillas started to flee, but were
stopped by the long rifles.

Ribera crouched on the ground, rubbing his
head in a confusion, while Don Eduardo
with lowered sword, looked earnestly at Berta.

The girl hastened forward with extended
hand.

"Forgive me, padre mio!" she softly said.

The old Don folded her in his arms tenderly.

"There is nothing to forgive, mi querida," he
said, and I am only too glad to see you safe now.
May God bless you!"

Major Palmer was shrewd enough to read
more into his expression than he revealed.

"You are your own master, Don Eduardo,"
he courteously said. "We do not war on
men with gray hair, and you are as free as any of
us.

"Senor, you are a gentleman, and I should
be proud to be called your friend. The past
night has opened my eyes, and I know Ribera for
what he is. You are wrong, Donito. What is the
cause of all this?"

"We are all ready, Don Eduardo, but we
would like your company if it will please you."

"I will go with you," was the prompt reply.
Palmer paused and looked at Ribera, at that
moment Nathan Maxwell glided forward.

He held his red lasso in his hand and his face
was impassible.

"Let our work be finished," he soberly
said.

"So be it! I will take Don Eduardo and the
lady to cover, and then do as you will.

Ribero began to curse horribly, but Maxwell
stood sternly over him until the hollow截至
him, and then the men saw the lasso around
his neck, and in three minutes he was dangling
from the branch of a tree, suff from
the same rope which had crushed Maxwell's
heart.

They waited until his struggles were over,
content with their border vengeance, and then
all turned away and left the white aloof
alone with his fate and the red lasso.

Luke Barstow was avenged.

We need not write in detail any further.

The country of the Texans was securely
protected from the Texan's to avoid any further danger, and, when darkness fell, they were in a place of compara-
tive safety.

The Senor and Berta left them there, for they
had decided to go on to the city of Mexico, and avoided further visit with guerrillas
warfare. The feelings of the old
had undergone a great change and his heart
was warm toward the Mexican.

Talbot and Berta had a long conversation, and
their impression was that they were not under-
standing that they should meet again at no
distant time.

After that came further peril and fighting, in
which the Rangers participated, but their adventures do not belong to this story.

The Kentuckian had cleared his name with his
companions, and thereafter he was respected by everyone. His fatherly
geniality led the men to the end of the war, and
Jack Plunkett and Maxwell bravely followed his
footsteps.

The life-hunter recovered his cheerfulness
in a measure, but he was never again what he
had been before the death of Luke Barstow.

When peace was declared, Edwin Talbot
married Berta and returned with his father and
faithful Brigida to the ceremony.

Thus we leave our characters, with all happy
ends. With good wishes for the patient reader, we write the last words of the story of the RED LAZZA.

THE END.

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Young Kentucky.

of sending for more men, as though an army was needed, and so give the invaders a chance to escape. Careso! I doubt your own good faith, faithless!"

"What do you mean?" shouted Don Eduardo.

"I mean that you are a traitor!"

Only rum-madness would ever have led the guerrillas to use such words, and no one was surprised at the result.

In a second the sword of Don Eduardo flashed in the air, while his face was pale from rage.

"Draw, coward!" he cried. "You shall learn that a Del Rio can avenge an insult!"

Riberia jerked his sword from its scabbard and the weapons clanged against, while the guerrillas looked on in dismay and indecision. Under the Mexican laws, however, charges were not brought against men who were less at fault. They had no respect for Riberia's rank, and they were resolved that he should not do harm to Del Río.

Palmer looked at Berta and saw an imploring look on her pale face, but at that moment some one touched him on the arm.

"He turned and saw Nathan Maxwell, and a shiver passed over his frame. The life-hunter looked like a respectable Madman and his face was dark from passion.

"The last of the assassins; let him die now!"

He held the red lasso aloft and his teeth looked like wolf's fangs at his parted lips.

"So be it!" said Palmer, with intense emotion, and with these words he bounded through the vail of bushes and stood before the astonished Mexicans.

One stroke of his sword sent Riberia's weapon flying several yards away, and a second brought the ruffian half stunned to his knees.

By this time the other Rangers had appeared, and the guerrillas started to flee, but were stopped by the long rifles.

Riberia crouched on the ground, rubbing his head in a confused manner, while Don Eduardo, with lowered sword, looked earnestly at Berta.

The girl hastened forward with extended hand.

"Forgive me, padre mio!" she softly said.

The old Don folded her in his arms tenderly.

"There is nothing to forgive, mi querida," he said, and I am only too glad to see you safe once more. And what am I your prisoner? what is to be the fate of you?"

Major Palmer was shrewd enough to read more into the expression of the old man than was apparent.

"You are your own master, Don Eduardo," he courteously said. "We do not war on men with gray hair, and you are as free as any of us.

"Senor, you are a gentleman, and I should be proud to be called your friend. The past night has opened my eyes, and I know Riberia for what he is. To think that I have been deceived. I am a disgrace to the cause I love, and I am forever done with his followers. Let me now say that you are in great peril, and your only hope is to leave here at once by the northern path."

"We are all ready, Don Eduardo, but we would like your company if it will please you."

"I will go with you," was the prompt reply. Palmer paused and looked at Berta, but at that moment Nathan Maxwell glided forward.

He held his red lasso in his hand and his face was implacable.

"Let our work be finished!" he soberly said.

"So be it! I will take Don Eduardo and the lady to cover, and then do as you will."

Riberio came to his senses, but Maxwell stood sternly over him till the barrels closed behind them. He was a strong man, and though the ruffian, the red lasso was noosed about his neck, and in three minutes he was dashing from the branch of a tree, suffocating from the same rope which had crushed Menelle's heart.

They waited until his struggles were over, content with their border vengeance, and then all turned away and left the wretched alone—alone with his fate and the red lasso.

Luke Bratlow was avenged.

We need not write in detail any further, for all knew that the Cimarron and Berta left them there, for they had decided to go at once to the city of Mexico, and avoid further experience with guerrilla warfirs, but the feelings of the old man undergones a great change and his heart was warm toward the Texans.

Talbot and Berta had a long conversation, and was at last parted, it was with the understanding that they should meet again at no distant time.

After that came further peril and fighting, in which the Rangers participated, but their adventures do not belong to this story.

The Cimarron had left his name with his companions, and thereafter no one thought of see Beloo, for his appearance, or the gallantry led the men to the end of the war, and Jack Plunkett and Maxwell bravely followed his footsteps.

The life-hunter recovered his cheerfulness in a measure, but he was never again what he had been before the death of Luke Bratlow.

When peace was declared, Edwin Talbot married Berta, and after the death of her father, and faithful Briga was present at the ceremony.

Thus we leave our characters, with all happiness and joy, to the reader, to whom we wish to the patient reader, we write the last words of the story of the RED LASSO.

THE END.

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Young Kentuck.

is against assault, hunger and thirst would soon conquer them. When the case, he resolved that if the "briers" got the better of them, they should promptly be followed and the ad-
vantage turned to a rout. He believed that, once at the old ruins, a much clearer way would be found by which they could leave the chapparal.

He had just finished explaining his views when the Mexican leader crept up from cover in a struggling line, and then a cheer arose as they saw evidence that the knoll was occupied.

A flag pointed to the breastwork with his sword, shouted a command in Spanish, and then the guerrillas came bounding up the ascent.

Fernandez was in no hurry to give the word for firing. Every one of his men knew how to use their rifles well, but he was determined that no lead should be wasted.

Fernandez looked at Berta and saw an imploring look on her pale face, but at that moment some one touched him on the arm.

He turned and saw Nathan Maxwell, and a shriveled hand over his frame. The life-hunter looked like a venerable man and his face was dark from passion.

"The key of the fortress," he hissed. "Ribera is the last of the assassins; let him die now!"

He held the red lasso aloft and his teeth looked like wolves’ fangs in his parted lips.

"So be it!" said Palmer, with intense emotion, and with these words he bounded through the vail of bushes and stood before the aston-
ished Mexican group.

One stroke of his sword sent Ribera’s weapon flying several yards away, and a second brought the ruffian half stunned to his knees.

By that time the other Rangers had appeared, and the guerrillas started to flee, but were stopped by the long rifles.

Ribera crouched on the ground, rubbing his head in a confusion, while Don Eduardo stood over him, with lowered sword, earnestly at Berta.

The girl hastened forward with extended hand.

"Forgive me, padre mio!" she softly said.

The old Don folded her in his arms tenderly.

"There is nothing to forgive, mi querida," he said, "and I am only too glad to see you safe once more. You are not in danger, you are safe!"

"You are your own master, Don Eduardo," he courteously said. "We do not war on men with gray hair, and you are as free as any of us."

"Senor, you are a gentleman, and I should be proud to be called your friend. The past night has opened my eyes, and I know Ribera for what he is. He is a disgrace to the cause I love, and I am for-
ever done with his followers. Let me now say that you are in great peril, and your only hope is to leave here at once by the northern path."

"We are all ready, Don Eduardo, but we would like your company if it will please you."

"I will go with you," was the prompt reply. Palmer poured and looked at Ribera, and at that moment Nathan Maxwell glided forward. He held his red lasso in his hand and his face was impassable.

"Let our work be finished!" he soberly said.

"So be it! I will take Don Eduardo and the lady to cover, and then do as you will."

Ribero began to curse his uncle, but Maxwell stood sternly over him, and all the belligerents closed behind their leader. In a moment the ruffian, the red lasso was moosed about his neck, and in three minutes he was dangling from the branch of a tree, suffocating from the same rope which had crushed Maxwell’s heart.

They waited until his struggles were over, with contentment with their border vengeance, and then all turned away and left the wreck alone—alone with his fate and the red lasso.

Luke Brastow was avenged!

We need not write in detail any further. We could describe how the Texans avoided the Mexicans to avoid any further danger, and, when darkness fell, they were in a place of comparative safety.

Fernandez and Berta left them there, for they had decided to go on the road to the city of Mexico, and avoid further experience with guerrilla warfare, but the feelings of the Don had undergone a great change and his heart was warm toward the Texans.

Telbot and Berta had a long conversation, and when the matter was closed, they understood that they should meet again at no distant time.

After that came further peril and fighting, in which the Rangers participated, but their adventures do not belong to this story.

The Kentuckian had cleared his name with his companions, and thereafter no one thought of ace Brastow, for he had gallantly led the men to the end of the war, and Jack Plunkett and Maxwell bravely followed his fortunes.

The life-hunter recovered his cheerfulness in a measure, but he was never again what he had been before the death of Luke Brastow.

When peace was declared, Edwin Telbot married Berta. She was as true a daughter of her father, and faithful Brigid was present at the ceremony.

Thus we leave our characters, with all happiness, and the good wishes for the patient reader, we write the last words of the story of the RED LASSO.

THE END.

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3 THE GARDINER and 57 other Songs.
4 JOHNNY MORGAN and 60 other Songs.
5 I’LL SING YOU WITH A FEATHER and 68 other Songs.
6 GROOVE THE CHARMER and 56 other Songs.
7—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
8 YOUNG FELLER, YOU’RE TOO FRESH and 69 other Songs.
9 SHY YOUNG GIRL and 56 other Songs.
10—over the ocean and 61 other Songs.
11—over the ocean and 59 other Songs.
12—over the ocean and 60 other Songs.
13—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
14 WILLIE CHARLIE and 59 other Songs.
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16 THE OLD ARM-CHAIR and 58 other Songs.
17 CROSS ISLAND BEACH and 58 other Songs.
18 OLD SIMON, THE HOP-CORN MAN and 60 other Songs.
19 I’M IN LOVE and 58 other Songs.
20 THE LASSO of LASSO and 58 other Songs.
21—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
22—over the ocean and 61 other Songs.
23—for the love of you and 59 other Songs.
24—for the love of you and 60 other Songs.
25—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
26—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
27—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
28—for the love of you and 59 other Songs.
29—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
30—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
31—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
32—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
33—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
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36—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
37—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
38—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
39—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
40—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
41—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
42—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
43—you’ll save me and 60 other Songs.
Young Kentuck.

is against assault, hunger and thirst would soon conquer them.

While being the case, he resolved that if the men in front of him were bent, or decisively they should promptly be followed and the advantage turned to a rout. He believed that, once at the old ruins, a much clearer way would be found by which they could leave the chapparal.

He had just finished explaining his views to the Mexicans when the Mexicans began a dash for cover in a struggling line, and then a chaser arose as they saw evidence that the knoll was occupied.

The ranger pointed to the breastwork with his sword, shouted a command in Spanish, and then the guerrillas came bounding up the ascent.

There was no hurry to give the word for firing. Every one of his men knew how to use their rifles well, but he was determined that no lead should be wasted.

Palmer looked at Berta and saw an imploving look on her pale face, but at that moment one of his charges fired.

"Draw, coward," he cried. "You shall Learn!" Del Rio savoring an insult!" Ribera jerked his sword from its scabbard and the weapons clashed angrily, while the guerrillas looked on in dismay and indecision.

The adjutant, however, there were no men who were less at fault. They had no respect for Ribera’s rank, and they were resolute to see that he should not dare harm to Del Rio.

Ribera looked at Berta and saw an imploving look on her pale face, but at that moment one of his charges fired.

"Se be it," said Palmer, with intense emotion, and with these words he bounded through the vail of bushes and stood before the astonished Mexican officer.

One stroke of his sword sent Ribera’s weapon flying several yards away, and a second brought the ruffian half stunned to his knees.

By this time the other Rangers had appeared, and the guerrillas started to flee, but were stopped by the long rifles.

Ribera crouched on the ground, rubbing his head in a confused manner, while Don Eduardo, with lowered sword, looked earnestly at Berta.

The girl hastened forward with extended hands.

"Forgive me, padre mio!" she softly said. The old Don folded her in his arms tenderly. "There is nothing to forgive, mi querida," he said, "and I am only too glad to see you safe once more. I have been your prisoner; what is to be my fate?"

Major Palmer was shrewd enough to read more into the man than he revealed. "You are your own master, Don Eduardo," he courteously said. "We do not war on men with gray hair, and you are as free as any of us."

"Senor, you are a gentleman, and I should be proud to be called your friend. The past night has opened my eyes, and I know Ribera for what he really is. I realize that you are a disgrace to the cause I love, and I am forever done with his followers. Let me now say that you are in great peril, and your only hope is to leave here at once by the northern path."

"We are all ready, Don Eduardo, but we would like your company if it will please you."

"I will go with you," was the prompt reply. Palmer paused and looked at Ribera, but at that moment Nathan Maxwell glided forward. He held his red lasso in his hand and his face was impassable.

"Let our work be finished," he soberly said.

"So be it! I will take Don Eduardo and the lady to cover, and then do as you will." Ribero began to curse horribly, but Maxwell stood sternly over him until the business closed behind the lines. Ten strong hands seized the ruffian, the red lasso was thrown about his neck, and in three minutes he was dangling from the branch of a tree, suffocating from the same rope which had crushed Menzel’s heart.

They waited until his struggles were over, content with their border vengeance, and then all turned away and left the wreath alone—alone with his fate and the red lasso.

Luke Barstow was avenged.

We need not write in detail any further, but it is unnecessary to say that the Texans had avoided any further danger, and, when darkness fell, they were in a place of comparative safety.

Camarero and Berta left them there, for they had decided to go at once to the city of Mexico, and avoid further experience with guerrilla warfare, but the feelings of the del Rio had undergone a great change and his heart was warm toward the Texans.

Camarero and Berta had a long conversation, in which the latter part was with Berta understanding that they should meet again at no distant time.

After that came further peril and fighting, in which all the Rangers participated, but their adventures do not belong to this story.

The Kentuckian had cleared his name with his companions, and thereafter no one thought of the old Del Rio, his family or his outlaws. It was a story left with the Ranger and the girl, and the former was satisfied with the fact that the girl was present at the ceremony.

Thus we leave our characters, with all happiness. Our Ranger, in whose broken wishes for the patient reader, we write the last words of the story of the Red Lasso.

THE END.

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