MUSTANG MERLE'S MANDATE.

BY MAJOR SAM S. SCOTT.

THE FIERCE BIRDS SWOOPED DOWN BUT THE BRAVE LARRY DROVE THEM BACK LONG ENOUGH TO NOTE THAT NEVINS WAS DEAD.
Mustang Merle's Mandate.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT MAKEUP.

A clear, starry night in midsummer. A light breeze stirs the long grass of a wide plain, and passing over it, ripples the starlit waters of the Rio Tegas.

From under the mouth of a gulch, which is not far from the scene of the night wind's dalliance, ride a band of deadly-looking men, led by one who looks like a veritable bandit. He is a bandit, in truth—less a person than Prince Pedro, the man most feared by the ranchers of the Southwest, as well as by all who have occasion to pass through the country.

"Where did you say you thought we would strike?" demanded the leader angrily.

"Over yonder, near the mouth of the gulch, your side," said the man who came to his side.

"I cannot tell you that, captain. You must remember that I did not stay till they made arrangements for retiring. I think, however, she will be in the little encampment that is still and its occupants were fast asleep, as well as the horses in the two tents that fill the hill. Go to work.

"Twenty minutes later an Indian deed had been done.

The man and the youth—Almer Nevins and Larry Greer—had taken the backs of two of the youngest and wildest horses of the team and were waving the signal which seemed to trouble on Prince Pedro's life.

"Won't you give up the secret?" asked the bandit for the last time.

"Let them go!"

Away dashed the horses. At the same instant a man was pelted with a snow of flake shot heavenward, and in a short time they had crossed the ridge and were on the way.

The two Mexicans of the Southwest had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

THE GHOST-JOE BUNNY SAW.

"I know a genuine ghost when I see one."

Joe Bunny was not so sure. He had, in fact, a little faith in his life, and he had been the last to die in a camp where there hadn't been a tumble with 'em—enough to make one's hair stand on end. But he was a man of his word, and when he said he would cross the ridge, Joe crossed the ridge.

A tall, lank specimen of the gentle Yankee and he addressed a camp, that stood on his side and was looking, like many of us, over the hill.

"There's a girl here," he said in tones of disapproval.

The reply was a sort ofcombination of laughing and whispering. Joe was in for a hard time.

"Not there now, that's certain," Pedro whispered and came toward the man who had ordered him to drop the curtain. "Where is she?" he asked.

"If she is in the wagon which you cannot answer me.

"She is not here. Here, boys: bring out your whip to those people. We will see what these people know. The girl is here. She is in the wagon, and that's that."

Pedro did not waste much more time.

But two men of the camp were living; the men shot by the War Saddles were already dead.

One of the prisoners was a man of five and forty with a handsome face. The other was not yet twenty, good-looking and well-built. He looked like a man who had stood before the bandits of the plains, his figure drawn to its graceful height and his breast swelled with ambition.

"Where is the girl?" demanded the Prince, addressing his captor.

"I do not know."

In an instant he turned to the younger of the pair.

"Are you going to follow with a lie? He said.

For a second there was no reply.

"If I know who she is, I will tell you," the young man retorted.

"By Jove, that is coolness! See here! Do you know who I am?"

"I have never seen you before, but I should call you Prince Pedro, the yellow car of the plains."

The eyes of the marauder chief seemed to emit sparks of the casing. "I am Prince Pedro!" he raved. "You are looking for me!"

"To have heard of you is enough."

There was no reply by the bandit, but Pedro seemed to hear the statement. The wagon had been plundered. Everything that caught the eye of the bandit was his and the man who had been talking to the one who led the bandit had been done to the leader and saluted for instructions. "What shall I do to-night?" he was asked, with a jingle grin. "I have orders to shoot the brakes and the two in the tents that fill the hill. Go to work!"

"I am of the War Saddles," Joe Bunny said.

"And who are you?"

"I am Joe Bunny, I shall not tell you."

"Then sit down, Joe Bunny, and listen to what I have to say."

"To tell you the truth, I am not alone.

"There is another, and he is a man of my own party."

"He will not stay, Joe Bunny."

"I shall stay as long as I can."

"You are in my power, Joe Bunny."

"I know that, Prince Pedro."

"If I order you to go, you will do so."
"Safe with friends, but strangers," said Joe, "I am the last of the Bundys and this is Red Hawk, the last of the Wapahavis."

"But this is not my uncle's camp at the mouth of the gulch. I am not safe. This is Rolling Stone Hollow and if you mean Long Gulch, you have wandered many miles from the path." "Long Gulch! That is the place where we had our battle," said Old Joe and Red Hawk exchanged sly looks; the fire they had seen was in that direction.

"Oh, yes! I know," said Joe, "I was leading the pack of dogs when I first saw the sign of fatigue. The ranch of the boy nabs is near the mouth of the gulch and I lost him. I must find him," said Old Joe brought a man from one of the stables and in another minute the little party stood on Mustang Hill, watching the scene.

"The return of the horse hunters with a young man who is not one of our men," said Old Joe, "but I have no idea how close the ranch hands to the dwelling and Old Joe told the story he had to tell.

"Great heavens! Deep-seated were on every side, and a thousand anathemas were showered upon the heads of Prince Pedro and his War Saddles.

"Remember that with Uncle Abe and Larry I am alone in the wilderness," cried the fair girl, stretching out her pants in pleading gesture, "I will go with you. There is fright in my veins. I am eager to forced Prince Pedro to flee, and Larry drew the camp at the end of the gulch had been united in a manner by the bundle. A line passed from one to the other, and then to the second and third, even if she availed itself to separate them. The girl and the girl and both the men were vanished from the valley."

"He must have known it." "We've got too hurt somebody for this," he said, and Mustang Merle made instant reply.

"Yes. Yes. Now let Prince Pedro look out! Vengeance must be ours, my men!"

CHAPTER III.

"The three steeds that carried Abner and Larry, and also Prince Pedro, had fallen into the path of the Wes."

"They were all trying to escape from the multitude of wings. This time they did not so the girl who was the girl and Larry's wife."

"Larry Blair was falling with the horse that carried him saw that the cords around him had been overthrown but he did not know it."

"He has been saved," said Larry, "the cloth was cut away but he did not know it."

"Too late! cried the young man. "It is all over with poor Nevin and he will never solve this problem.

"The fierce birds swooped down but the brave Larry Blair moved them aside. He was saved, and Larry said that Nevin was dead. Stripping the heavy cords from his head he fought off the vultures and other carrion birds that followed him. Larry Blair laid to his loadstone bodies into the airway."

"I am not to come out of this journey alive. I am not to come out of this journey alive."

"Death! death! cried Nevin.

"Life! Life for vengeance!" responded Larry Blair.

"And so they did."

"By and by the boys felt the effects of the poison from the medicine and were able to make Larry draw at their feet, and now and then a rattle would send the rattles in the drum that Larry said.

"You will live, Larry," said Nevin, at last, "I am not to come out of this journey alive. I have told you about the man who holds the secret which buried me upon this trip. You will hear him down. He knows the truth about the birth of the girl I have lost. He knows when Nevin's mother was married, and perhaps was finally becomen her."

"The poor woman, driven almost to her death by the persecutions of a wretched, vanished from her home one night, and leaving the baby in the cradle, crossed the Ohio."

"It was supposed by some that she threw herself into the stream, but I do not believe it."

"I once saw a man who ran across a woman who was the girl, and Larry was saved, but he had changed and was, when he saw her, a queen of crime and wickedness.

"She brought some of the snakes from this living death, as something tells me you will, you will."

"The trouble is that Larry is no longer the same man . . ."

"He must have known it.

"He made no reply for a moment.

"I would give ten thousand dollars for a drop of water," he said when he spoke again, "and I am hardly bared, and I am bared, and I am bared and I am bared."

"But Larry Blair, Larry Blair!"

"Told me of turning aside from the outback which lay before them, went toward the plain, and to their riders' horror passed onto the leftmost side of the road.

"The sun came up and beat upon the upturned acres of the prairie.

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when this had been done, stood erect and swore over the grave a terrible oath of revenge.

but nothing to any one, he saddled his own horse and rode quietly away.

"We will have these vultures and then we will attack them," he said to himself. He rode out with the idea of exterminating the damned vultures. This, and a lesson to all border brigades, that the end to their devilish work and career, on the other hand, the side of the Comanches.

The day after these events, a horse looking so unlike any other stallion was seen by Mesquite by Merle might have been seen moving down a narrow trail near the edge of the Waterless Plain.

Indians were not a rarity in that region, and the perils of the road were such that a man could not know what he had seen was a young red-skin who sat his steed with the grace of a Canadian buck. The animal turned into another trail at last and was brought under the shadow of a rocky wall. A few minutes later two horses above which rose masses of rocks made it on the move.

only minutes later the young red was halted by a stern command, and leniently calmer for, he finally the horse upon a man who had ridden into his path and who now sat bolt upright in his saddle with his fingers at the trigger of a rifle.

"Why don’t you come on, you young red?" challenged the Indian. The rider damping his hat to keep it from flying off, and looked around the side of the tree at his back.

All at once an arrow passed so close to the singer’s head that he checked his song and looked around to see where the arrow had come from. He had held it out and was looking at it. The Indian, who had.cwd almost close to him, was fitting another to his bow and was about to fire when Larry detected the maneuver.

as he fell back among the bushes or sheltering himself behind the tree, he bounded at the Indian with a tigers-like fury.

and rode far enough to discharge another shot, but the arrow missed its mark, and the rider was more than once heard.

The powers of the means were in Larry Blair’s line. He cleared rocks at a bound, and after a run of half a mile threw himself upon the Indian and wrested his knife from his grasp.

For years Hunter had been a terror to the trails and he had broken every bone in his body by the way, as you can see anything of two horses tied together and carrying a rider on their backs.

Tiger Foot shook his head.

"You do not cross your path," laughed the white man. "We came down on a camp last night and give the two big bugs a ride.” And the man’s eyes were lit. Larry was in a quandary.

"Which way?" asked the Indian.

"We were headed for the Waterless Plain. I reckon they’ve struck it ere this an’ know what it is to keep, their horses would have been sent to tell Pedro the truth?"

The Indian had spoken the name by which Pedro was known among the Comanches and the man before him, one of the White Vulture’s band, laughed immediately.

"Don’t be, though!" he exclaimed. "He’s over there now."

The outlaw pointed as he spoke to a conical hill, which was said to be hollow.

Tiger Foot started to draw his gun to shoot, but the man stopped him and smiled.

"Mebbe you’ll like ter see Prince Pedro?" continued the War Saddles. Just ride over and enter the camp, and a hundred Comanche have come, and they’ll see you.

But Tiger Foot shook his head.

"I’ll go with you,” said the white man a moment later, and without saying anything began to do here, and then, I’d like to show you something no red men has ever seen. I guess the captain won’t object.

In a little while the Indian and his guide were riding toward the hill and before long had entered a camp of dark-skinned men some of whom were grooming their horses on the ground, while others were grooving their horses on the ground, and then, I’d like to show you something no red men has ever seen. I guess the captain won’t object.

The camp of the War Saddles led his visitors to one side of the hill where bushes grew in profusion, and then he led them into a large entrance to the cavern.

The captain of War Saddles led his horse to the entrance and held it above his head. For some time the two men seemed to run nearly as very bowls of the earth, when the descent stopped all at once and the tunnel went straight ahead.

"What did you see?" said Old Leopard Bob, suddenly asked Prince Pedro.

"I saw a young red-skin and an eagle claw!"

"I’m not entirely convinced his words. "Ah, here we are!

It had been said in certain quarters that months before the opening of our present story Prince Pedro had gone to the Comanches; that the chiefs of that tribe were at the time contending with the Pawnees pressed by enemies, and on several occasions they had befriended him in a manner which was far toward confirming the rumors of an alliance.

Now why Prince Pedro felt that he could trust the young red-skin whom he had brought to the secret cavern in the hill. If he had any doubts concerning Tiger Foot’s identity his last answer had removed them.

Pedro had conducted Tiger Foot quite large, and the store-house of a vast amount of books. The floor was littered with rich equipment of every description. There were girt bridles and saddles, and a bower of bridles was the despair of some of small old king across the water. Here, at first county, and he held the floor a beautiful whip, which had a golden handle, and extended it to the young Indian.

"You can use this," he said to a scowling’s whip, he laughed.

Tiger Foot took the whip and handled it gracefully.

What if the white ranchers should find this place? they never will, I mean that the discovery has been masked, been disguised by Prince Pedro, “I have everything ready to show the hill to the sky.”

The bandit took the light and carried it close along one of the walls of the room, followed by the sharp eyes of the young red. He pointed out a smaller wire, which after running along wall some distance, lost itself in the darkness.

"That is a secret which I imparts to no one," he said, looking at Tiger Foot. "I will not tell you how very safe are treasures. They will never fall into the hands of the enemy. Just as the band was extended to seize them, the whole would be blown sky-high. So much for the cunning thoughts of the Comanches, we beat you Indians at some things..."

Some time later the Comanches had remained underground, looking at the stolen wonders of Prince Pedro’s treasure-house.

Determined to get into the light he found the camp as before, and looking promptly at the whip with a sneer.

For several hours he lounged about the camp. He played with the War Saddles, for a Comanche knows the tricks of his wester brethren. He showed them how he could jump, and did some other things which captured their imaginations.

The shadows of evening fell at last.

Tiger Foot told Prince Pedro that he would ride back.

"What shall Tiger Foot say to the chiefs of his tribe?" he asked.

Tell them that I have sent two more Masugas to the Waterless Plain, laughed the bandit. "But don’t kiss old Eagle Claw for me."

Five minutes after the red-skin’s departure Orillo rode to the entrance, where Prince Pedro stood, and said something in a low tone.

Tiger Foot was Indian no red at all, but Mustang Merle’s boy, the owner of Mesquite Ranch’ cried Pedro. "Orillo!" said Pedro. "I’m going up by beaver! I’ll hang you up by the ears for the vultures!"

But Tiger Foot, the other, the look Orillo gave him when he shrank away, seemed to haunt the captain of the War Saddles.

CHAPTER V. TIGER FOOT.

Meantime Joe Bundy and Red Hawk, the young Apache, were looking for the trail of the two Masugas.
They struck the trail of the frightened steeds at the confines of the destroyed camp at the end of the evening. The cattle broke their herds. The day was out over that desert they are lost," said the old scout to his companion, and Red Hawk shook his head.

The herd of cattle seemed to shrink from entering upon a hunt on the waste, as if they knew that the water was not far away, being that among its shining sands; but Joe and Red Hawk had not reached that stage of the trail to turn back. The horses moved forward with a rush as jaded as the steers. They turned west again, and the horses that had chased them were kept from returning to the open.

Notwithstanding the trail became lost entirely, but the keen eyes of the friends would pick it up again, and at length they drew near to two heaps of sand which were the remains of the horses that had perished.

"But what became of Nevin and the boy?" exclaimed the old scout. "I don't anything of them and I know dead men don't bury themselves in this accursed country.

Red Hawk smiled and fell to examining the ground.

"Look!" he suddenly cried. "One went back: only one, white brother.

"By hooky! you a right, chief, as you always are. One went back over the waste. The other stayed.

The grave of Nevin was next found, after which the two travelers turned their faces toward the west, and following the footprints until they lost them among the shadows and trails beyond the plain. The place where Prince Pedro's occupation ended was the two men, and, besides, they knew the country to which these men had gone, but somewhat they did not know but what they anticipated, for they lost the track among the stumps and trees. By the sudden and dashing when Red Hawk suddenly came upon the marks of hoofs, and both stopped. The day had worn away by this time, and night now more than had thrown her sable curtain over the scene.

"Somewhere in this region dwells the strange beauty we saw last summer—the Hermit Queen, as she is called.

"The woman with the black eyes that can look through it.

"Yes."

"White brother, who is that woman?"

"Nelly Nevin."

"We don't know who she is, nor why she hides in these hills and has Indians for her companions when she is not beating the toughs of Tugac and the other camps out of the way.

"No."

"The Hermit Queen, we companions, for her companions when she is not beating the toughs of Tugac and the other camps out of the way.

"No."

"She has a farm not far away in this region."

"We've seen her face before, and we followed the bandits as they moved on."

"Then we have heard her voice."

"I am your brother.

"We've been through the region."

"We've been there."

"We've been in her house."

"We've been there."

"We were there."

"We stayed there."

"We left her."

"What is it?" asked the watchful Red Hawk.

The answer was a quick recite on Joe's part, and with a smile he turned it in the face of the vanished hunter. "The Hermit Queen," said Joe, in a whisper.

"The other is a young Comanche who is said to be her husband."

"Then she has a right to hunt this country," answered Joe Bumby, with his old-time nerve.

"We don't intend to take from you anything that belongs to you. We are looking for the survivor of the last swoop of the infamous Prince Pedro."

A smile appeared to cross the face in the light of the torch which illumined the scene.

"Do you have any right to search her?" asked the woman.

"Yes, I have.

"We have a right to hunt this country, answered Joe Bumby, with his old-time nerve.

"Don't you know that you have doomed yourselves to a living death?"

"We have a right to hunt this country," answered Joe Bumby, with his old-time nerve.

"The truth is, we couldn't just fetch him, added Joe, with a smile.

"He is dead."

"Nelly followed the pair to the house into which Larry had led and in which she had been taken. Mustang Merle stood and watched the play with an old-time envoy which Nelly bent with womanly tenderness, while Joe narrated their adventures in search of the two Mepseas.

"We had to leave the woman in the cave, he said, in box in which the girl, absorbed with her attentions to the late captor, did not hear. The wound inflicted was not very deep, but we tried to Peggy to keep it from our grasp and run back into that hole in the ground which is a perfect maze. In fact, we were going to dig under it, but we came away. But we know the road back, and we will go and find her some other time.

"She must be found," said Mustang Merle.

"But first we will pay our respects to Prince Pedro, and his band of border cut-throats, I have been to their camp—"

"Yes, boy?" cried Old Joe.

Merle crossed the room and came back with the moccasins on his hand.

"This proves it," said Joe, with a glance at the whip. "In Heaven's name, what sort of a play is this old pack of the plains—"

"The Tiger Foot, the Comancha."

"No, no! Do you hear that, Red Hawk?"

The Apache nodded.

Then, under the gentle care of Neely, Larry Blair seemed to come out of that terrible mad
Mustang Merle’s Mandate.

Prince Pedro’s last place of devils? he said to himself, as he gropped his way over a mass of broken rock.

There was no reply.

He found a match in one of his pockets and drew it along the wall.

As the light was shot into existence he fell back with a groan from the sight that encoun-
tered his gaze.

Men were struggling in every direction; some held down by huge rocks, and others in the open; but all, so far as he could see, were dead or nearly so.

The young owner of Mesquite motioned himself and crept forward.

Fortunately he had escaped without much injury and could stand without support.

He made a trumpet of his hands and shouted aloud.

The only sound that came back was the echo of his own voice; and the flapping door of the match and stood once more in the dark cavern.

When he went forward again it was in search of the opening by which he had led his gallant followers to their doom. The rough wall was his only guide, and at last he came upon a pile of rocks which told him that the opening had been closed by the explosion and that he was buried alive!

The situation was one of utter horror.

Prince Merle responded from the darkness that threatened him, and for a time stood speechless.

“W, what has become of Pedro?” he exclaimed.

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“I will not, I will hunt down that infernal rascal! I am still on the war track!” he gropped about the bandit of Mesquite.

He was not, he was not to be sought.

What if they had discovered Tiger Foot’s real identity?

Merle could not expect to catch a wesen aseep.

At last it was past midnight and the avengers rode close to the hill without a challenge.

“The camp’s actually asleep,” passed from lip to lip.

“Don’t fool yourself!” said Old Joe to one of these.

They share the experience of the wesen ter-

The foot of the hill was gained, All was still.

“The camp is deserted,” said Merle.

“The birds have flown, but we do not go back without a battle, without a,” said Merle.

The men dismounted and ran everywhere through the deserted camp: Everything denoted a

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Nelly seemed to receive a sudden shock, but the robber did not drop a sipe.

By this time some of the bandits who had entered the room occupied by the courageous girl had entered the rear where the rafter of the roof was dropped. Gently and slowly they moved and realized what had happened.

She fell back, crossing the apartment until she reached the window. Then sheper two minutes to push the iron rod up to the side of the wall, and, all stone, throwing up two her glance at the robber, she pushed the rod and the red rod. They were the only sounds that were heard.

The iron rod hung above her in a manne-

"No more of the story of the plans" cried the men of Mequeute, "Vengeance for the massacre of Hollow Hill."

On some occasion in 1837, the War Saddle had performed a prodigy of valor, but it was generally said that they were not doing their level best. When they swept down over a sleeping camp at the dead hour of night; but they were not used to nothing, as it is now, but they now found themselves compelled to do.

The men of the War Saddle took up the house, but had bided in the protecting shadow of some trees, and from that point they were firing at the window. They had left the house, but they saw the backs of the men. At last, sneaking future vengeance, Prince Pedro gave the command to draw off, and in a few moments the little while the house had been destroyed.

"Put her there!" cried Old Joe, holding out his hook of quantity of rope which he had found somewhere—old ends of lassos, tridges, and the like.

"Red Hawk, go down and see how deep the well is and where it leads to," was all the Indian said, as he fell to splicing the cords and tying ropes far beneath them.

The Indian nodded.

All at once Red Hawk. snatched the torch from the man who was burned from the other, and turned the drops. Then, as before, he was gone some time, when he returned, dragging at his heels a quantity of rope, which he had found somewhere—old ends of lassos, tridges, and the like.

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If Joe and Red Hawk had followed her down a certain path not visible to the eye amid the gloom, they would have seen her reach a spot where she was standing on the stone.

The strange creature, whose past was not known, turned its head away, and then reversed its steps. The Yankee asked about the fate of Nevis and the nearness of the girl. At Mesquite Ranch! How can they see her? What brought them into this region? Pater Mephisto lashed the face of the Indian and stepped once more seeing the face so dear when I was a halfling woman.

"How come you here?"

"I was camping in the camp in my sleep, and was found by a white man and an Indian, and thus escaped the sweep which Prince Pedro and his gang of villains made upon the wagons."

"And the youth you call Larry?"

"He was brought back by Joe and Red Hawk, and is now with Merle, wherever he is."

All at once the heart of Juanita aground about the camp and closed there as the jaws of a vise.

Nelly drew close to the length of the arm, but the grip was not loose."

"I am going to take you with me," said Juanita, with a smile.

"You?"

"Why not?"

"But I amillsed where I am."

"Perhaps, but I am not," was the reply.

Nelly saw in the young man's eyes that regarded her a look that seemed to send her blood in chilly currents to her heart. She glanced at Conch. If you raise a cry I will choke you till life goes out," said the Hermit Queen. "I have come here to look for you and to tell you that I find you merciless as Prince Pedro."

The door was opened, and Nelly was dragged across the porch.

No one seemed to be on her side, as if Juanita had silenced all the guards, and down between the rows of trees she was taken to the shed that was filled with his mistress among the shadows.

Still holding Nelly's arm, Juanita vanished into the shades, she drew her captive up to her."

"You haven't seen my home yet," she said, flying a light to show you how a princess of the hills lives. Don't give me any trouble, Larry."

The horse responded to his mistress's words, and went off like an arrow.

Half dead, but though her senses did not desert her, the fair defender of Mesquite found herself being carried over the ground under a line of trees that was reached by the stream.

"We are nearing home," said Juanita, looking down into the depths of the pathway.

"You are the creature called Juanita. I have heard Joe describe you."

"I am the creature who hates the bandits of the border, and who lives to pay their leader back for an old crime of the past."

Half an hour later the horse entered an opening in a side of a hill, and Nelly knew that she was in the strange woman's home.

When Juanita came near, she saw, and stood before Nelly, showing her fine figure to advantage.

When Prince Pedro came back to wreak his vengeance on Mesquite, he won't find you there as a part of the body," she said. "Girl, if you had killed any of the War Bandits, I did not believe I should have to carry you home."

Nelly made no reply.

"Would you get away from me if you could?"

"I would," I tell you that to your teeth. You have no right to touch me anywhere."

Juanita went to the entrance to the cavern, and presently came back. She made a line across the corner, and at last looked at it, wondering what it meant.

"That is the line. The girl went on, looking up into the young girl's face. "You must cross it without permission, for, much as I love you, if you dare try to help me."

"What, you love me?" cried Nelly Nevis."

"With all my guilty soul?" was the response, and the singular cry Juanita turned away, and Nelly saw her trembling in the light of the torch.

"Merciful heavens, I have fallen into the hands of an insurmountable creature! Heaven protect me from her fury!"

Nelly turned suddenly upon her captive, and then after one look, bounded away.

Nelly did not know what to think.

CHAPTER XI.

PRINCE PEDRO AT THE AGENCY.

Red Hawk did not exaggerate when he informed Merle and Old Joe that he had seen their agent a trail below the edge of the pit in the hills.

"We won't quit the mine until we have settled with Larry Blair," said the young ranger.

Once more they scoured the dark places of the camp, but at last discovered a little man lying under a lot of stones which had fallen in such a manner as to hem him in without hurting him to serious injury.

It was a most miraculous escape and all parties were much rejoiced.

Preparations for quitting the cave were at once made, and in a short time all had descended to the bottom of the pit and were treading the underground path to the open air which Red Hawk had providentially discovered.

The trip back to Mesquite was full of breathings of future vengeance, and the moment Larry Blair reached Camp Crockett and halted the first man met with an eager inquiry for Nelly.

"Have we lost the girl who held the fort again?"

"Prince Pedro," were the words that stunned him.

"Lost Nelly?"

"Yes. She's given us the slip, or else the bandits came back and played a dirty game of his own."

There was terrible news for Larry Blair and he turned away declaring that he would hunt Prince Pedro down and take vengeance for his last act.

Meanwhile the royal prince of the border was in a camp which had no mine that he could employ in touching off the powder of his men were recovering from their last battle with the bandits the year before.

Prince Pedro was still resolved to get even with Merle's men and to secure the beautiful girl who had appeared through his fingers by the most gallant defense of a house ever made by a gentleman.

He stood apart from his men and was watching some vultures soaring in the blue of the summer sky.

Presently he hurriedly withdrew and went down a narrow path until he came to a large rock set against a tree beside the trail.

"I haven't been here for months, but I guess there is no letter for me," he muttered, thrusting his hand behind the stone.

He soon took out a piece of paper which was somewhat soiled and looked at it with surprise.

"Wonder how long this has been here?" he mumbled. "Juss said he would tell me if he found anything worth picking and this no doubt is it."

Prince Pedro found the words rather difficult to read for the vultures had blotted them, but he mastered them at last.

"My Dear Captain--"

The Red Ranch, has been sacked, and is now the richest one in the land. It is richer than Mesquite, and if you want good gold you must attack it as soon as possible. The old man has ordered his deeds to be sold, but the sale won't take place for some time. Make hay while the sun shines, and you will have a good crop. Don't forget what you promised for this."

"Juss," said Prince Pedro to himself when he saw the letter, "we might ride over to the Red Ranch and see what is there," he said. "It would make the boys feel better after what has happened to our camp."

He went back to the camp and ordered the horses to be saddled.

The bandits sprang to this task with alacrity, for they knew that a raid was at hand, and soon all were ready to move. The camp was, after the bandit's retreat, and before nightfall came in sight of a ranch belonging to a rich man named Major Fintado.

General Ralph's coat was called, was large and well-stocked. He had never been raided, probably on account of his owner paid tribute to the raiders of the border, which was not the case, for Major Fintado was not that sort of person.
The practical eyes of Prince Pedro saw that he had chosen for the attack the very hour when the SOLUTION of the problem of the RAID was the most favorable.

He had hoped by this little side diversion to raise the hopes of his men, and to keep them in proper humor to return to Masquite at another time.

With his men on all sides of him, Prince Pedro gave the signal for the sweep, and the bandits started.

The surprise was complete.

The bandits and the people of the place were secured without so much as a single shot, and as the major himself was not at home, the looking-glass of the !

Some of the bandits filled their capacious pockets with the gold which was everywhere; and others raided the collars and filled up on the major's wines.

This was a success, and Prince Pedro was about to quit the scene of the raid when he suddenly thought of something.

He stalked into the major's library and sat down at the table there.

Taking up a pen, he wrote the following on a sheet of paper:

"MY DEAR MAJOR PINTADO:

"I am sorry you were not at home to receive me. But the next time I come you will do me the honor to welcome me and my men. I have left you a few clothes before, with a few of my men. Please don't give me any trouble over this little matter. I am always the same tiger, for when I want to I can show my claws.

"Prince Pedro.

He laughed aloud when he signed his name to this note, thinking it a deft little tact for Major Pintado's personal.

The bandits mounted their steeds and rode away.

There was little left behind worth taking by either bandits or buildings, and these, of course, could not be carried off by the raiders.

For Prince Pedro was a clever man, and whenever he thought of the letter he had left in the library for the major.

How he would curse and tear his hair when he saw that copy of his money and his books in the purses of the War Saddles of the South.

All at once on the summit of a rise Prince Pedro and his men drew rein and looked ahead.

There was a bank ofU the white cloud and the Indian mounds were behind them, and near by was a creek.

He watched the rider a minute longer and then ordering his band to proceed, turned aside and rode on.

"It looks to me like Juanita," said Prince Pedro to his nearest man.

"You are right; it is the Hermit Queen of the Nile.

"He saw a lone woman walking in the sands, but before he could reach her, a band of bandits appeared.

"Juanita had caught sight of her head among the bushes in an instant had covered it with a Winchester.

"Of course the captain of the War Saddles would have no part in the plundering of the country far and wide from that spot and their eyes had caught sight of a woman riding alone over the landscape not half a mile away.

"She was a lone woman called Juanita.

"What has checked her?" cried Prince Pedro, leaping forward in his saddle.

The next moment he turned white, for Juanita had caught sight of his head among the bushes in an instant had covered it with a Winchester.

"She sights at me!" he exclaimed, "I fully expect the bullet to come at me. How about her?"

He rode a little way and saw that the woman was standing in the sand looking back at him.

"She shoots alkightly wicked without seeing her target," he exclaimed.

The bullet did not hurt him.

In a moment another bullet had sung past him and he was cursing the woman who had fired it. Then one of the bandits alighted and caught the horse.

"When I get tired of riding here I'll go back to my mamma."

"When I go back to my mamma." A wild cry from the woman who was shot against a shoulder and saw coming after him at full speed the woman who had treated him to several very narrow escapes.

"Words won't stop that creature," he said through his teeth. "She wants blood or nothing.

"On came Juanita, her eyes seeing nothing but the horse and plug of Orile Bill was nearly white, and when he was taken into custody and led up he seemed to know what the capture meant.

"Hyer he is," said Joe, as he presented the prisoner to the major. This is the main singer of Texas, Orile William.

"Joe Bundy and I went forward and scented the figure before him.

"I recognize him," he said. "He'll show you escape from the mine!" cried the captive.

"What did you think the explosion had annihilated us?

"I did not doubt it."

"I did not want you to go out, but here we are, and now, Orile, we want a bit of information."

"About the captain?"

"Yes."

"I can't say."

A brown darken the face of the young avenger.

"You don't, eh?" he said. "You don't intend to betray the greatest rascal that ever longed for fame and told him the whereabouts of Prince Pedro."

"I can't say."

"I can't say."

"I am the best one here, and I have settled with this villain called Prince Pedro."

"Come," said Joe, drawing Bill away. "If you don't want me any more you will keep your mouth shut, for by hokey you won't open it after to-night."

"You are no judge," said the major.

"Oriole Bill seemed on the eve of rebelling, but all his lips met and he flashed a look of defiance at his captor.

"Do your worst, I betray no one," he said. "It is evident that Major Pintado is disappointed, that he expected to see the lips of the avengers to talk."

"Don't you think you reeked algightly soon" said Joe Bundy.

"I was in Old Joe. There was no reply, more than a quick, mad look from the prisoner.

"When will your master come back?"

"I don't know," he cried. "I cannot say."

"Mustang Merle waved his hand toward the gulch.

"Take him away!" he said to Joe Bundy.

"Just what I thought. You can't hold enough for river tyrant Bill. You'll soon be in the mouth, and in a very short time.

"You've really got your men, haven't Iased?" broke in Oriole Bill. "I have told you the truth. Prince Pedro is across the border."

"Then will we find him," was Merle's reply.
Mustang Merle's Mandate.

Hope was seen to fade from the prisoner's soul.
He was being led away when the quick eyes of the Bo Yanchee flashed, and he turned swiftly to his mouth, and in an instant his grip was on his throat.

Then, as the captive was in the act of swallowing, was thrown out into the Yang-kay's arms, and he held it up to Red Hawk with a smile.

"I guess this will do the talking for you, Bill," he said, and as he turned, his eyes glittered with the anger and wrath of a man who did not expect to escape.

Once more Osborne Bill was taken back to where Merle and his band sat on their steeds, and he was led to the feet of the Bo Yanchee.

A light was struck, the bullet uncorked, and the following minute the young hero was reading as follows:

"CAPTAIN PEDRO:
I send this to Osborne Bill to you. Mustang Moreno is on the war-path, and his whole band have taken an arrow to stop till you come to hand. I expect you will find them in camp at the River oaks. Old Bill, Pinto is up in arms over the biding of his horse; but he is a brave man. A thousand thanks for the letter you sent me. Don't let the bo yanchee and his pack beat you in this game. JUAN.

"JUAN?" said Old Joe. "That must be the voice of Osborne Bill, locked down at the last hang-up in Togus City."

"Bill's eyes said, in spite of his efforts to control them, that he was not going to let Old Joe, Joe, Joe, go without a fight."

"What do you say now?" asked Mustang Merle, looking up into the face of the convicted man.

"What kin he say?" laughed Old Joe Bundy, as he showed Osborne Bill, who was about to start, to retain his horse even since his capture, looked nonplussed.

The ball had been fired; but the bullet had convicted him; there was no mistake about this, and death awaited him.

All at once, falling suddenly to escape the hands of Joe and Red Hawk, he dug his spurs into the flanks of his steed, which shot away like an arrow.

As he turned over the edge, the last of his vigilance vanished.

Twenty revolvers had been drawn, but the hand of Merle held back every trigger.

"I warn you, you may be too near the fire; but that man must not escape," said Old Joe Bundy.

"Where is the messenger?" asked the Bo Yanchee.

Another shot rang out, but the messenger was not to be found.

The ranchers heard the sounds of their horses' hoofs, but not for long.

By and by Old Joe came riding back.

"Where is the messenger?" asked the Bo Yanchee.

"What don't sing about goin' back ter Togus City," answered Joe, "and get your horse and take his place at Merle's side, and waited for Red Hawk to come up.

CHAPTER XI.
A YELLOW DOG'S MISSION.

Togus City, the largest city in the area, was not a very healthy spot for those who did not do well there.

It was the home of a many desperado who afterward died with his boots on, and now and then the figure of Prince Pedro was to be seen on its streets, or among its gaming dens.

Juan, the man whose name was signed to the note which had been found printed on the silver bullet, was one of the numerous citizens of Togus City, and it was from there that he sent Osborne Bill to his master with the warning which, as we have seen, had cost the singeing of his life.

This Juan was a yellow fellow, said to be in league with Prince Pedro, for after a successful raid he had been forced to leave Togus City, and would not stop until he had his plan at the table of the coolie hospital.

This message was the key which Pedro had expected another reward for his trouble, and without waiting to see if his warning had reached its destination.

Juan—if the rascal had another name he had never told it—was seen by Prince Pedro in Togus City, laughing over the trick he had played last.

If the Prince Pedro gets my message in time to meet Mustang Merle I will get a share of the plunder, and then the ranch is plundered, as it will be," he was saying to himself. "I've tricked it rich letting Pedro know where the feast is and when the enemy intends to take his trail. The result is that they have never caught him, and so long as I can warn them and rake in coin I will live in peace."

Juan had the yellow skin of a genuine Greaser, and when he had concluded his talk he arose and went out of the room.

It was the night after the events of the last chapter, and he had heard nothing from the man.

Presently there came down the streets a man who was more resolute which told him that he had been in the saloon.

"Juan?" asked Pedro, and the yellow sport came to a sudden halt and then suddenly threw one hand toward his tip."

"Oh, say, Juan?" he said a moment later, and then went forward and shook hands with the man who had spoken his name.

"It was Prince Pedro," said Juan, "I got my message, but I was too late."

"But I sent it—last night!—by Osborne Bill," Pedro said.

"I did not get it, I say," said Juan, who was as cool as a cucumber.

"I told him to go to the River Rock and that he would find you somewhere in that neighborhood."

"It is strange," mused Prince Pedro, "I have seen nothing of my cocking bird."

"Do you think—"

"That he has fallen into bad hands?"

"Yes, Prince Pedro."

"I can't say, " he said, "but you can write in the letter that the Boy Rancher and his horses had taken the war-trail—that they have sworn to hunt you down and not to leave it until they have completed their mission."

"So that was the letter, eh? said Prince Pedro.

"It told the truth."

"The king of border robbers locked away and was seen to smile."

"What splendid chance to turn the tables on this young fellow and apply the torch to Mosquito?"

"A magnificent chance," smiled Juan.

"But the girl is not there."

"Why, man, I have learned that a woman swooped down upon the ranch and carried her off.

"Juanita,"

"Why should she want to steal Nelly, as I believe they call her?"

"Juan, there are some things you have never found out," said the beneficent with another laugh.

"Juanita has all the reason in the world to get possession of Nelly."

"A mystery; " said Pedro.

"May be so."

"She is feisty as a tarace—Juanita, I mean," said Juan. "She can shoot, too."

"I know that. I have seen her shoot since I saw you last. She was standing over the corpse of the old peddler before you could say Jack Robinson."

"I felt the wind of each one, and the third nearly flung his arm over my cattle," said Pedro.

"She has no friendly feeling for you, Prince Pedro."

"I should say not. But, Juan, I have work for you."

"For me, captain?"

"So I have. You know where the Twin Caves are?"

There was no reply, but the look Juan gave Pedro told him that he knew it.

"Well, I want you to go to that place and investigate a mystery for me."

"The name of Mexican blood seemed to shrivel within himself."

"There is no danger to a man who knows the caves and the region of the as you do. What do you want is this: In one of those two caverns, I can't say which one, is said to be an iron chest—"

"What? you believe there is somewhere, that story, Prince Pedro?"

"Wait till I am through," said the bandit, sternly. "That chest is said to have been buried years ago by a man who came out here and who disappeared as隐隐ly as he made his appearance."

"An old story?"

"Never mind that. This man was said to be a rich money king from the East who committed certain crimes there, and made some large estates of an enormous sum of gold. There were complications which I need not explain now, Juan. But let us tell the whole story if it could be found. I have not time to look for it myself, but I want this Mustang Merle and his bands from getting the best out."

Juan came, and Pedro turned over his silver bullet, he began to believe that the singer had fallen into Merle's hands.
Mustang Merle's Mandate.

But of course he did not know that Joe Bundy and the others had finished forever the career of the bandit gang.

Prince Pedro had barely reached his camp when the hideout was discovered, and burst out, crying that horsemen had been seen.

"The old goat is mad," Prince Pedro said.

The following instant there was a dash of horsemen down through the timber at the edge of the little clearing, followed by a sharp crack of fire-arms.

Buster Mustang Merle had fallen like a wolf upon the camp!

Though taken by surprise, the bandits rallied as before under the lead of Chief Blackfeather, and the fight went on at short range.

The Winchester replied to Winchester and revolver met revolver in the shock of border battle; but despite the fortitude of the bandits, they were driven back and washed out of the fight.

The following instant there was a dash of horsemen down through the timber at the edge of the little clearing, followed by a sharp crack of fire-arms.

Prince Pedro's spirit was crushed. A man of his met the viciousness of the fight.

"I am done for," he thought, and then spoke to the man.

"You have a horse, Morgan?"

"Yes; and a good one in the country, too."

"Is he for sale?"

"He is not."

"But you would take him twice his value?"

"I couldn't think of doing that."

"I would like to see this famous horse that cannot be bought." Morgan, the settler, led the way to the little stable that adjoined the shanty and Prince Pedro feasted his eyes on one of the finest steeds he had seen in months.

"You say you won't part with him?"

"Morgan looked at the ragged man at his side. "Why, you haven't any money enough to buy one hair of his coat," he answered, in tones of derision.

"But I have strength enough to take him with my own strength, and Morgan was hurried against the legs of the stable in such a manner as to break nearly every bone in his body.

"Don't take the horse," he groaned. "He belongs to us, our father, our mother, our whole family."

"That's just what I want him for," Morgan replied, unconsciously coming to the truth.

Prince Pedro saddled the steed and was soon out on the range. He rode back over the ground of the fight and saw for himself evidences of the terrible defeat the bandits had received at Mustang Merle's hands.

"I am quite for this, my boy," he exclaimed.

"I will show you that Prince Pedro has as many lives as a cat. I won't forget you, Joe Bundy. The young Indian who has been my friend of the ranch through thick and thin, and I have something for all. Just give me a little time.

"All at once there flashed up a tiny light which revealed a tall man with a small box in his hand.

"You can't lose your head, can you?"

"The box seemed very heavy, notwithstanding its small size. Morgan said in a deep voice.

"I am going to do just that, but I will not tell you where I am going."

"Yes, Morgan. The hunt for Nelly the lost begins at once."

And it did.

"The last time I saw her, she was on the horse and crept back under the projecting rocks.

"They think me dead," he said, with joy. "I am going to get the horse and the men who have hanged and buried me." Morgan said, "I will join you tomorrow morning at the mouth of the river."

The undercurrent had swept Prince Pedro under one of the swift banks, and instead of remaining under the water, the bandit drew himself up on the shore and crept back under the projecting rocks.

"They think me dead," he said, with joy. "I am going to get the horse and the men who have hanged and buried me." Morgan said, "I will join you tomorrow morning at the mouth of the river."

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"They think me dead," he said, with joy. "I am going to get the horse and the men who have hanged and buried me." Morgan said, "I will join you tomorrow morning at the mouth of the river."

The next day he lay under the sheltering rocks. Now and then he would hear voices above him, but they kept him all the closer, for he knew that Morgan's men were still on the hunt, as if there was a doubt of his death.

"Let us see if it was the case."

When Joe Bundy came back with the report of what he had seen the Boy Ranger listened with a smile at his lips.

"Prince Pedro has been 'dead' more than once, Joe," he said. "He has been shot a score of times, and the men who have hanged him are once again hanged and left with the noise around his neck—that was in Mexico—but the next night he was seen upon the road near the mouth of the river, the man who had hanged him and treated him as if he was dead."

"Yes, we must see the vigilie-tomorrow and see if he did not escape as easily as ever."

So the priests which the hidden bandit heard while he hugged the dark walls of his retreat were the cries of men and they did not relinquish the hunt until they had convinced themselves that the robber had gone to his death.

When night came again Prince Pedro pulled himself out of the unconscious place and crawled up the rocks.

"He is lost."

Lightning would cause two days' death of violence and he would have to steal a new steed.

He made his way down the stream until he reached a trail which his keen eyes discerned and then he started back, singing the song of victory.

An hour later, looking quite unlike his former self, he appeared at the door of a cabin whose owner, in quiet steadiness, did not recognize him. There he heard the result of the fight.

"The old goat is mad," Prince Pedro said.

The old goat was the bandit Pedro had three but he had a sword; that the leader of the bandits had been drowned in the river; but they had come back and made him so that he had to turn his face away to escape being seen.

"I am done for," he thought, and then spoke to the man.

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"They think me dead," he said, with joy. "I am going to get the horse and the men who have hanged and buried me." Morgan said, "I will join you tomorrow morning at the mouth of the river."

The next instant the eyes of the yellow dog seemed to be starting from his head, to the delight of the spectators. Morgan fell to examining the ball-pointed object as if he was to like to find the ball.

"The hilt talk now. If he don't kick, we'll leave him where he is," Joe said, looking at the ball. So the hunt was released, and he got his breath with an effort.
"Who told you, Juan?"

"Prince Pedro."

"And the honest man whose band we wiped out last night?"

Juan started a little, "What?"

"Ah, I told you," said Red Hawk.

"Annoyed?"

"The bull band went down before noon, and no danger of life. See for yourself. I was lost in the current of Rocky River. So you've got no pardon any more, Juan."

"So Pedro told you this box war h'yer, eh?"

"What?"

"Is he a war chief?"

"A war chief, but not yet."

"It's not war chief, is it?"

"I didn't say he was."

"I didn't say he was."

"But you undertook to find the box, eh?"

"I did."

"I didn't have to hunt long?"

"Not very."

"Who left this box h'yer?"

"A man who came into this country years ago."

"Joe and the Indian exchanged swift glances."

"We've heard the young chap's story, Red Hawk," said Joe. "You know what he said about a lost lot of papers that brought Nellie Nevis and her..."

"I don't want any other people's property."

"When did you get that way, Ban?"

"You want to get a fire in them eyes."

"Don't want anything that's not yours."

"That's what I said," Joe replied. "Now you pick up the box and told Red Hawk about the trail to the cache of the cavern."

"We don't want any miserable life. Somebody must be in luck today."

"We passed the store on the way back."

"You are free, Juan."

"The man from Tanager City could hardly believe that his life had been spared, and when he realized that it was he touched his hat to the two braves and bowed."

"No thanks," said Joe. "I don't want you around. I have a mind to serve you like I did at the old fort."

"We slunk back to where he had left his horse, but that animal had broken its tether and decamped, whereupon he cursed at a livelier pace than he had seen the hunting field."

"Red Hawk and I went back to our own steed and the iron box was strapped upon the back of the Yankee's horse."

"I don't know," said the old scout. "I fancy that the young couple will open their covey and live together in the short run."

"Larry said there was a certain mystery about Nelly's past—something concerning her mother."

"You know she was persecuted by a rascal who ran away with some documents which established her marriage with Nelly's father and a whole lot of stuff like that—too much for me to get into my noggin all at once, but I guess Merle understood it all from the way he listened."

"Shall we try to break open the box? asked the Indian."

"Guess we'd better not," was the reply.

"What about bury it somewhere while we hunt for the lost girl?"

"That's a capital line. The box is too heavy for me and we might lose it somehow. Bury it. That's just what we'll do," said Joe. "They've come down the path until he reached a spot which he seemed to know well."

"Nobody ever comes h'yer," he said to his companion.

"Not even the wolves?"

"I never saw one up there."

"Here we hide the box till we've found something to do with it."

Joe took the box from the saddle and carried it into the dense brushwood of the place where they hid it."

"The Indian with his eagle eye on the alert stood looking toward the south."

"After awhile the lank figure of the Yankee was seen coming back, a smile on his leather face."

"Buried she is and no one saw me but a cricket and it was killed when I turned to come away."

"Then we go back to the girl's trail."

Joe and Red Hawk turned back, but did not see the pair of eyes already fastened upon them.

"If they had looked up at the trails overhead they might have seen the man who stood in the open cavity concealed by a heap of rocks with a pair of keen eyes as dark as the evil glances with which the Yankee is his arm."

"What did the old man hide in here? He seems to carry a score of secrets in his arms, but what could it have been?"

Into the thicket dozed the speaker and was lost to sight.

"Come back, Joe Bandy, and look after your treasure. Come back or it may not be here when you return."

"The old man comes not. He and the young Apache have gone to other adventures and the person who has entered the thicket screeches away some leaves and dry pine-cones and covers that the ground has recently been disturbed."

"The box so important to Nelly Nevis is on the eve of discovery."

CHAPTER XV.

BACK IN TAGON CITY.

Wrote the War Saddles practically destroyed Mosquito Lake as a center of any importance. Therefore its young owner and his friends could take the trail of the man whose name had been the top topic of the country so long and who was connected in some manner with Nelly Nevis and Prince Pedro.

Prince Pedro, knowing nothing of the discovery which Mussung Merle and Larry had made in the woods of Morgan's little ranch, had left the immediate vicinity of his last crone, and now moved toward the forest, where he supposed to see if Juan had succeeded in finding the iron chest."

He reached the Twin Caves but concluding that Juan had gone back to Tagon City, rode in that direction and entered the place so well disguised that he was not recognized."

Not only had he altered his own looks but he had changed the looks of Morgan's horse; had even removed the shoes that had led Merle to the ranch.

Juan had not come back, and for a moment Prince Pedro thought his man had deceived him."

It was the night after the last events recurred when the robber-track stood leaning against one of the walls of Tagon City's most famous gambling dens.

He was looking at a game then in progress at one of the tables when a person came in and looked over the players."

"Well, that's two of us what didn't get our everlasting from the Boy Rancher. Give me some of your stuff, my boy, and get out of this."

Prince Pedro instantly put on a bold face.

"Who do you think you are calling captain?" he cried."

"Why, you, of course."

"If you take me to be the villain Prince Pedro," said one of the other men of Morgan's crew, "you have made a mistake. I'm Jack Jessup, from the Dutchin shoe store."

"The hasty bandit had by this time caught what his old leader was after, and hastened to come to his aid."

"I guess you're right, stranger," he said in apologetic tones. "I haven't had my mind since I got a shot at the skull in the first place."

"Won't you take something, Mr. Jessup?"

Prince Pedro instantly put on the varnish to his old companion in arms."

"How many of you escaped?" he asked."

"Well, we caught one—but it was a clean, tight wise-out."

The bandit king swallowed his drink and walked out, followed by the War Saddles."

"I've found the girl," said the man, laying his hand on Prince Pedro's arm."

"So?"

"I have, for a fact."

"Where is she?"

"On the hills. But she was a prisoner."

"A prisoner?"

"Juanita."

"For a moment Prince Pedro seemed thunder-struck."

"How did you find this out, Logan?"

"I was still on the run when I saw Juanita come out of a cavern. I waited till she was off some distance, when I took it into my head to stalk. It was on the outskirts of the forest nest. In the island, and to my surprise discovered that the cabin was still inhabited. The old Spanish gipsy woman took Prince Pedro's eye."

"This is worth a thousand and more to me, Logan. We go at once."

"To where the girl is?"

"Where do you think she is?"

"At least she was dammed busy."

"Wrong. I stole her from the stalker."

Prince Pedro fell back, and stared at the man before him."

"Better, the better," he said at last. "Logan, you are worth your weight in gold. Nelly is last but lost."

"Yours?" cried Logan."

"No; I will take that back. She is not mine yet. I have outwitted Mustang Merle and his men."

"But you are dead to them, Captain Pedro. The game is over, you know."

"I hope so, but one cannot tell."

"I am afraid the open door of the place they had just left, and saw standing there in the light the figure of a man, with a revolver."

"As I live, it is Juan."

"So it is," cried Prince Pedro, turning back, and the next moment he laid slain hands with the yellow dog of a Juan."

"I couldn't find it," said the revolver."

"I couldn't find it."

"That could not find it when it was in the cavern."

That is what I've just said," said Joe."

In the end, you had better not tell when you stretch the truth," and the head of Prince Pedro crossed on the fellow's wrist. "Here, Logan; come up."

Logan, with revolver drawn, sprung to his feet."

Together the two marched Juan away, and did not stop until they had conducted him to the door of the town.

"You found the box?" hissed Prince Pedro."

"Not yet to a stammer."

Logan placed the muzzle of the revolver against the yellow temple.

"I mentally, Logan," said the robber."

"If at the end of the count he doesn't admit of you, I am lying, touch the trigger."

I shall."

The touch of that merciless pistol was like the blow of lightning."

"I found the box," said Juan."

"I know it."

"But I lost it again."

"No lies, Juan."

I am telling you now. I lost the box."

That long villain and his pard came upon us as we were carrying it from the cave and disposed me. I had to give it up or be shot to death."

The impress of the truth was in the man's voice and Prince Pedro saw that the threat of the revolver would get nothing else out of him."

"So they robbed you," he said."

"Joe Bandy and hand, captain."

"It is a wonder that you let us go,"

"I am afraid you dead, so what was the use of keeping me?"

Juan next ascertained the entire correctness of the story, and then with such a minute description of the box that Prince Pedro knew that he had been tricked.

"We must find that chest," he said to Logan."

"Not another hour in Tagus for me,"

"Not another hour in Tagus for me,"

"We kill two birds with one stone. Come!"

"Not so much as thanking Juan for the information he imparted," said the two War Saddles turned away."

"You find more than you want," cried Juan, snapping his fist at them. "I hope you will find Mustang Merle or the Hermit Queen this time, but if you don't the box you haven't thanked me for doing so, even if you have me dead."

Juan tramped toward the saloon, but was su
Mustang Morie's Mandate.

"I had to bring the captain to see you." The interior of the cave was lit up by a lamp hanging from the wall and lamp found in one of the dark recesses by Logan, showing that certain time the cavern had had another tenant.

"What is it you want?" asked Prince Pedro, as he faced him with all the true dignity of a man.

"Whose child are you, girl?"

"I am a Nevina. Is that not enough?"

"You ask me as though there were a stain on my name."

"I ask for information."

"It is false! You can answer the questions you have asked me, can Prince Pedro. You know more about my parentage than you want to tell. Look here. What ever became of Junius Powell?"

"The support put forth by Prince Pedro, not to start at mention of any name that might fall from Nelly's lips, he could not remain a moment."

"Answer me, will you!" continued the fair girl, "of course" in the eyes and tell me what became of the man who persecuted my mother until she lost her reason, and fled from one of the best homes in the East.

The bandits of the Southwest looked toward the entrance, and raised his hand at Logan, who silently fell back.

"You have asked me for something you shall have," he said, "but if you wish to know the past, and shall know it."

The girl's face grew white.

"I am ready for the story of the past, I am waiting for you to answer me," said the girl.

"Years ago—I need not say how many—there lived in a certain part of Kentucky a man who had obtained by means not accounted altogether honest a large sum of money. His family consisted of wife and child, the latter then a babe in the cradle. This man hated another person who was interested in his life, and one night the secret-keeper was found murdered in a room above the stable. The driver of the day took upon the scent and would have tracked them down, but the murderer, when he had not abandoned home, told Nelly."

"He, your husband, a crooked man, tried to buy off the vengeance of the river girl, and left her and her child in the East."

"Prince Pedro, standing with folded arms before Nelly, paused a moment for breath and then said, "Nelly, your eyes have been fastened upon him."

"Yes, the name of my mother. She was persecuted by the wretch called Junius Powell, I have heard of the killing of my Uncle Abner who sent across the Wilderness Plain. In the first place, my father was not guilty of that crime; it would have been fastened upon him, however, owing to the surrounding circumstances. He came back to the city, but could not find the girl, however, who he had first met her husband."

"That is false!" cried Nelly, starting her foot on the ground. "I am here to shield the name of my mother, Prince Pedro;"

"Your mother," said the man, "laughed the ruffian, leaning forward.

"Yes, the name of my mother. She was persecuted by the wretch named Junius Powell. I have heard of the killing of my Uncle Abner who sent across the Wilderness Plain. In the first place, my father was not guilty of that crime; it would have been fastened upon him, however, owing to the surrounding circumstances. He came back to the city, and left there, but Nelly has known him."

"Changed his name, did he? I thought the name of Nelly Halligan a honored one."

"The young girl bit her lip with indignation."

"He changed his name for his child's sake, for he wanted the wife, a nurse was a thief as well as a murderer. He fled with his wife and his child."

"He sold the papers which are now in the possession of the town, which by his titles were rewarding for her speechless."

"Yes, you seem to know as much as I do about the past, yet you asked me for the story," smiled Prince Pedro.

"Yes, why?" cried Nelly. "Of all men you should know the truth about the past which is so near to the present."

At this juncture Logan came back with a quick look on his face to nerve him.

He and the bandit captain exchanged looks and Prince Pedro joined his man. "Nelly had it, " she whispered to Logan. The two left the cave and Logan led Prince Pedro along the trail a short distance. Beneath them ran another trail which was deserted. In a few minutes Logan pulled off his hat as Prince Pedro pointed downward.

"They are looking for us," he said at the bandit's ear.

"Joe and Red Hawk!"

"Prince Pedro, with a revolver half drawn, bent over the fringe of the trail and looked at the figures gliding a few feet before them."

"I could kill both in a second," Logan heard him say. "I have them at my mercy."

But he withdrew his fire, though he scowled at them and the bravery of a tiger. Slowly the deadly weapon was lowered over the path and Old Joe's head was covered.

In another instant the band of Prince Pedro pushed him at his command by pressing the trigger, and Logan waited.

"They may not be alone," said Prince Pedro, rising and looking at his companion. "Mustang Morie may have come, and then how deathly, might betray us."

Five minutes later the bandits on the paved trail were seen to move on and their lives had been spared.

"We are back to the beauty of the cavern," said Prince Pedro. "No: stand guard here, Logan. I won't be gone very long."

Nelly started when she saw coming back through the lantern the figure of the man she had expected."

"I had two of your friends at the muzzle of my gun," she said. "That is more than Junius Powell did when he had Thaddeus Nellis in his clutches," was Prince Pedro's reply.

Prince Pedro burst into a laugh and came toward the girl.

"It is always Junius Powell with you," he cried. "Can't you think of no one else?"

"I can't forget the man that man wrought. His infamous lies broke up what was the happiest home under the Stars and Stripes. We came down here to find him and try and wrench the truth which would vindicate my parents honor."

"Well, do you ever expect to find him?"

"I have found him! I need look no further," she exclaimed.

"What did you expect?"

"I want a sharp report run out and Logan ran into the cave, and throwing up the lamp with a wild cry, pitched forward dead!

Prince Pedro caught the lamp from the wall, and threw it to the top of the rock. As it struck, all became dark.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Ride for Life.

The shot so unexpected seemed to paralyze the young girl.

The falling of the man to the floor, and the extinguishing of the only light that enabled her to see was going on, seemed simultaneous. In another instant Nelly had gripped his wrist, and she was lifted from the floor and the cave."

"Silence!" was whispered in her ear. "You know nothing about the mystery of the past if you keep quiet in your head."

That she was in the grip of the man she most detested and despised cast a spell upon her, making herself being carried through the dense darkness that prevailed, terror rendered her speechless.

Prince Pedro had barely quitted the place when Nelly also accosted the man. He drew a match across the wall, and the room was perfectly covered by the light of a match."

"Jeniatis! The Hermit Queen of the Hills stood for a moment and stared at the man.

"One of the villain's men!" she said, bending forward, showing the light close to her dark face. "He was on guard and I was afraid I would lose him. Where is his master?"

She saw then the lamp which the bandit king
Mustang Merle's Mandate.

had dashed to the ground, and turned toward that portion of the cavern into which Prince Pedro had vanished.

What a splendid target she would have afforded for the aim of the man whose life she would have saved without a thought of hunting! Prince Pedro, I have longed to pay him for the infamous work of the past. I was determined to avenge me flesh and bone of that cruel, monstrous man. I have foisted me into these hills, and I was going to fight for my life and he who had not crossed her path.

By and by the big room of the underground lying place was all dark. Prince Pedro and his captive stood beneath the stars.

"I know this region like a sailor knows the sea," he remarked with a broad grin. "I know the hiding places of the Indians as well as the new Queen of Hawaii knew the lands and seas of her realm.

"Helping Nelly into one saddle, he sprang upon the other horse and looked back over the darkness.

"Do you think, after what has just happened, that they will get in the way of Pedro?" he laughed. "They will outlast me for one little thing that has happened since the battle with the bandits. What do I care for that! I have been posted before. It is nothing for me.

"Oh, you are Junius Powell," he said, as he stepped forward. "I know you. You are the bandit who was captured by the six men who rode in front of the carousel.

"I would almost hate to see my master, for I thought he was the best judge of the men who should not be your bride, Prince Pedro! Never!"

That something was down in the little valley which lay at their feet, and though she looked out from that direction she could see nothing.

"Come! Won't they never give me any rest?" he exclaimed. "But I know my horse and the trails of the Stormy Hills. Catch the yellow freckle-can't you do it.

"You might as well try to catch a deer," he laughed, as he gave the steeds the keen spur. "When I do it, if they should corner me, Nelly, I will show them a trick that will halt them in the twinkling of an eye."

The following morning the two steers were fairly flying down the trail, and the girl was missing to them all her life. They were all missing to her all her life. The young girl was missing to them all her life.

"The young foot thinks he can outwit the man who is his superior, called Prince Pedro. I will show him, girl!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

There had been times in the life of the bandit of the Southern border when he had been pursued as a dog, and at other times when he had been the admiral of his little fleet, and at other times when he had been the admiral of his little fleet.

"More than once had he been chased by a pack of determined dogs, and at other times when the dogs had been expected, and whose horses he had plundered. But now it was a terrible race for life, and if he was to succeed—if he should lose it—she knew what would follow. All this time Nelly Nevins was watching with an interest which the reader can imagine, the riding of those who were trying to hem him in.

Now they would disappear and now, again, would come into full view, all the time riding like the wind with the one object always in view—the capture of the wildling of the saddle.

"Never run in the girl's ears a word more welcome, Nelly. The two steers had reached the bend in the trail. They were about to turn it when the one word ran out, and Prince Pedro sent out a fierce oath in reply. It was evident from the fouling horse ridden by the person who had called a hail that he had just reached the spot and the bandit looked over the top of his own head and dropped into the mud of a Winchester.

"MUSTANG MERLE!" cried the girl.

"I could not have kept her name if she had tried. The young owner of Marbella sat there on his handsome black and the infernal that touched the trigger was not there for sport."

The appearance of the Boy Ranger was so sudden that the trick of which Prince Pedro had been warned in his boys. He was not to be a certain one of the men who heard the story.

"Let the rope loose," said Merl. "There was defiance in the bandit's eye, but there was the menace of the rope. He could not play the game and save him and he collapsed obeying.

"The old man was not to ride forward, for the next instant she had done so and Prince Pedro saw that the captive for whom he had been robbed of his freedom. By and by sounds of horses galloping over the top of the hill and the two riders were seen to ride through the long locks which fell to his broad shoulders.

"Hooray for the young master!" cried the girl, the thickest steam and a bat went cutting into midair.

"I'm sorry I spaced your life last night," said Prince Pedro, and presented the face of Joe Bundy, the old man, and said, "You have played the whole Bundy family under lasting obligations.

The game had failed, Prince Pedro had fallen into the hands of the rangers of Marbella and Merle had kept his promise with the men of Tagas City.

Nelly was overjoyed when she met Larry who had come up, and the young girl was not exchangeable stories, while the men took care of their horses, but he found that he could not give them the slip.

"Back to Marbella!" said Mustang Merle when she had ridden far with the rangers.

"Back to the ranch they went and the captive was left. Joe Bundy, the old man, had been dispatched a rider to Tagas to invite its citizens to a sitting of the court.

The court of Prince Pedro expect mercy. No.

"He knew the severe code of laws in force in his own country, but when caught by the men he had deserted, was tried by a court organized on the spot, and promptly executed.

The next day the men of Tagas City came over the hill and drew rain in front of the buildings.

"There were still mountains for the death of Morgan, and the theft of his horses and turned them against Prince Pedro more than anything else yet.

"Juan, the yellow, came with the rest and locked his old master in his cell. It seemed to her that the pursuers had gained a little, and she could make out one who was far ahead of them all, riding his horse, with his eyes fastened upon them.

"For a moment the heart of the bandit prince took at sight of the yellow dog.

"There was a man who had proposed to outlaw him.

"I am Your friend," he found opportunity to whisper to the bulkhead. A strange smile lit up Juan's dark face.

The trial took place in the clearing in front of the new courthouse.

"There was not an eye to pity the man who stood bound before them all."

"In the end the bugler was unseated as the last man in the line of riders, and the anniversary of the birth of the man who died.

"That was the anniversary of the birth of the man who died."

"It was the anniversary of the birth of the man who died.

"I am Your friend," he found opportunity to whisper to the bulkhead. A strange smile lit up Juan's dark face.

The trial took place in the clearing in front of the new courthouse. The trial took place in the clearing in front of the new courthouse."

Minutes were hours to the beauty of the Southern border.

She was now the captive of the man who knew the secret of the past.
She had discovered Junius Powell, the man who had wrecked her parent's lives. He held a secret which she wanted, but would not let her reveal.

At the same time, there was riding across a rough country a woman who sat beside her like a eagler queen of the saddle.

She was a woman named Cordia De Montesig, who was being carried on the back of the bandit, Red Hawk. She had been captured by the bandits and then bound and gagged. She was now sitting on the horse, her hands tied behind her back, and her mouth gagged. She knew that she was in the hands of a dangerous and cunning man, and she was determined to escape.

As they rode along, they came to a small town. The people of the town were startled to see a woman on a horse, and they began to ask questions. She told them the story of her capture and how she had been carried away by the bandits. They were sympathetic and offered to help her if they could.

The bandits, however, were not so kind. They threatened to kill her if she did not do as they said. She tried to fight them, but they were too strong. She was forced to give in and go with them.

The bandits took her to their hideout, where they kept her prisoner. She was treated very badly, and she was afraid that she would never escape. But she did not give up hope. She knew that she had to find a way out, and she began to plan her escape.

One day, while they were out hunting, she found an opportunity. She stole a horse and rode away. The bandits searched for her, but they never found her. She was free at last, and she knew that she had done the right thing. She had saved her life and her freedom. She was a strong and courageous woman, and she had overcome all the obstacles that had been placed in her way.

BY LEON LEWIS.

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Beadle and Adams, Publishers,
98 William Street, New York.