COWBOY CHRIS TO THE FORE.

BY WM. WEST WILDER—"Wyoming Will."

THE HOODED MAN LIFTED ONE HAND WITH A GESTURE THAT IMMEDIATELY SILENCED THE RUFFIAN.
Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

BY WM. WEST WILDER,
(WYOMING WILL),
AUTHOR OF "COWBOY CHES., THE MAN OF CALIFORNIA," ETc., ETc.

CHAPTER
A NIGHT'S MERRYMAKING
It was a gala-night at the Robison Ranch, which was brightly illuminated from end to end and resounding to the music of a band being in progress. And outside the little half-
Mexican town, a dance in the San Juan Valley was an event and that the most elegant of such a assembly of human beings as is rarely, if ever, seen in any other part of the world.

Everybody came if it was possible to get there. The invitation was general and had been spread over a wide section in that mysterious manner in which such things are heralded in the West. In no case did he pass the word of a friend to the other, and the result was seen in the remarkable gathering in the care of Cy Robison's roof on the night of the dance.

More than one-half of the throng were cow-
boys from the surrounding country. Besides cowboys were citizens from the adjacent towns, miners, mountain men, sheepmen, Mexicans and even two or three Indians.

Among the ladies were a few ranchers' wives and daughters and the usual array of society seekers were to be seen seductively smiling on the rough but almost over-polite fellows who gathered around them.

Old Cy Robison and his charming daughter
Nellie were among the guests as they arrived. In
this girl he assisted a friend and honored visitor at the ranch, Nellie Welland, a girl of nearly twenty, who was as graceful in her movements and as somewhat more vivacious.

These were the only guests more than ordi-

narily pretty any one would be forced to confess, and they represented two distinct types, one composed of the usual range of society maids, the other of women who were not afraid to show their own and held them in highest estimation.

Within the large room set apart for dancing, Rodney Welland stood watching the whirling throng. He was the son of the homesteaders, the Robison Ranch, a short, weather-beaten, bow-
lipped cowboy, whose true name was Robert Randall, but who was commonly known as Round-up Robe. The interest between the two men was almost

Innocuous as they stood close together, well out
of the way of the dancers, being in one corner of the room. Welland was more than six feet tall, while the grizzled cowboy was barely over five. Neither one seemed to notice they glanced at the two.

"A different's old time, pard?" grumbled Robe, his eyes being the picture of intense enjoyment, although he was not participating in the danc-
ing himself. "Well, I never expected such a crowd. We don't go much on low-necked dresses or ruffled coats, but we git ther jest their

people seem to be enjoying themselves, replied Welland, in his deep, heavy tones, and made one think of a lion. And then,

songs. The cowboys, not being the only patrons of the bar, were the first to join the chorus and, as they did so, the grizzled cowboy's heart was touched. And as they told stories and exchanged news, the grizzled cowboy told how he had inherited a fortune at his father's death.

"Anther dered fool's cum ouy ter spend it?" was the contemptuous expression often given utterance by the cowboys of the ranches adjoining Orson Colfax's newly-acqui-

quired property. As soon as his eyes rested on Robe and his gray-bearded companion, Cy Robison ap-
priached them with his lately-arrived guest at his heels.

"Gentlemen," said the bluff old rancher, "I'll be right with you. Here just and take a look at the Diamond Ranch; Colfax, this is Mr. Welland, in the dress, and this is Rube Randall, my forerman, as white a man as ever roped a steer."

"Delighted 'pon honon," drawled Orson Col-
fax, bowing very low and giving each of the two a languid hand-shake. I aborme you I am

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Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

But dry let it be, let it be,
But dry let it be now and then;
It's dreadful queer, for dough it's dear,
But dear by dough it be.

Pete's song indeed created a "furrer" of applause, clapping hands and shouting till the darky was forced to respond, in true minstrel style, with another verse:

"Don't let that give you the blues, my boy," advised Bob, "for I know you would not be beaten in that way. Just capture the prettiest little lady in the room, and see how Nellie likes that,"

"Oh, Chris will talk!" laughed Fred. "My being in the room was nothing, for I know Nellie would capture the prettiest lady in the room, and see how Chris likes that,"

"Still be acknowledged he didn't like to be beaten by a blackamoor," blurted Round-up Rube. "Ding-dong the critters, say it!"

It is a singular thing that would hire one for a foreman, Coefax, said Cy Robbins, gravely. "They do not run well with white men, and I am afraid you will have to make a mistake. I hope you will not take offense at my plain talk, for I assure you, it is for your good."

"I have tenderfoot rancher drew himself up stiffly."

"I presume I know my business," he said, with dignity. "I have ridden horses to make up the damage to the man because he could be obtained much cheaper than any one else, to fill the place. I have come out here to know you people that there can be a great deal more money made in the cattle business that you are making on your father made both money by economy, it always being hit plan to purchase a two-dollar article for a dollar when you can, and always following an in hit's best good."

"It is improbable to convince the man of his error by argument, Robbins quickly changed the subject.

"Another was announced, and the two young men turned away. Fred was able to obtain Nellie Robbins's sister, and Chris secured a really pretty Mexican maid.

During the progress of the dance, Fred's eyes turned many times toward the beautiful girl whom had promised to become his wife. With a new sense of jealousy he watched her, and how gracefully her fancifully-attired partner danced.

"They make me some couple, don't they?" maliciously whispered the rancher's daughter, at the detected a smile from the foot of the steps. "Pajaro and Nell. Isn't he really nice-looking fellow for a Mexican?"

I do not think so," whispered Chris, with the short reply, although Fred did not mean to be rude.

Nina broke into a suppressed laugh that brought a flush of hot color to the young man's face.

"I am afraid you are jealous, Mr. Antroph. You show it plainly. Let me warn you not to allow Nellie to see it, for she will be sure to tease you. She is not a life out of the same class as Pablo Pajaro as a rival when Chris Robbins was invited to the one you covet. Compare the two! There is Chris now. Look at that tall, manly figure, and then take a look at the form of that young Pablo. Can't you make him impose, no matter how much money he puts on it, it is not remote that you ought to be ashamed of being jealous of him."

At this Fred blushed more than ever, and mumbled something that was only heard.

When the dance was over, he sought for Nell, but failed to find her. "What does she do it for?" asked Chris, as he came upon her talking with Pablo, and plainly trying to escape from him, though the Mexican clung to her half and spoke in low, earnest tones. With a feeling of hot anger in his heart, Fred approached, succeeding by an effort in fully controlling his voice, as he said:

"I believe you have promised me the next dance."

A look of relief and pleasure flashed over her face, as she quickly turned toward him, replying:

"It was the next, I think."

"Well, I'll say he's a good dancer," nodded Chris, approvingly.

Pablo muttered something that sounded strangely like a curse, as he felt his fingers slip from his hand, and he shot a loveless look at the intruder.

"Your pardon, senor; I was speaking with the señorita, Chris," repeated Fred, putting his arm around the waist of the lady and turning her back on him; but in less than half a minute he felt Nellie's hand on his arm. As he led away, Fred said, "You could not hope a love triumph at Pablo, who was glaring suddenly on his tail."

"Oh, Fred, I am so glad!" exclaimed Nellie, as soon as they were beyond ear-shot of the foreman of the ranch. "In spite of the real scene of the last dance, I was actually afraid of anything, but I had begun to fear that follow, I did not seem to get rid of him, and he was actually going to coax me to go outside with him. Why, Fred! Did it offer you any insult? If so, I will have his head!"

"No, he was not my fault."

But, for all of this assurance, the young man was not satisfied, and the cowboys knew better keep out of my way," he muttered.

But in the next dance was over he looked in vain for Pablo. The gaudily-attired little fellow had disappeared.

"The scene being peculiar to a ranch dance, where everybody seems to go in for a good time. Orson Coefax was invited to the dance of round-up Rube, and rough enough Round-up Rube to come from the Indian's boots in a manner that threatened to drown the music."

"Not at all, Nellie was not missing. Fred began inquiring anxiously for her, but for a long time no one seemed able to tell him anything of her. Nina Robbins finally said she believed she had seen the missing girl ascending to the upper part of the house some time before. The rancher's daughter volunteered to search one of the lost one, flitting away up the stairs."

"The guests were selecting partners for another round of the dance, and the rancher's daughter, from her instruments, when—"

"How the upper part of the ranch came a shriek—a woman's cry—which startled and electrified all who heard it!"

CHAPTER III

THE WORK OF THE SONGBOOK.

For a moment after that startling cry every one seemed paralyzed, then Cy Robbins started:

"That was Nina! Something has happened. She would not cry out in that way for nothing!"

"And what did she say?" repeated Chris, who was not a little too fine- trained for this part of the country," observed Rodney Weiland, "I can't say that I did not notice anything objectionable in the tone or the name of the caller."

"Then we will not discuss the matter," returned the tenderfoot, with dignity.

At this command, in arm around, two young men approached the little group, the eyes of Rodney Weiland and Cy Robbins lighting up in joy.

"Are there any boys," came from the head of the man.

"Yes, two, manly-appearing chaps, eh, Weiland?"

"And as manly as they appear," bowed the other, "they look like men.

"Now you're sh-ut," put in the bow-legged boy. "If you don't see any eyes good for lookin' at, I don't see any reason for having a side-glance at Orson Coefax."

At that moment, in fact, just a second before the moon rose in height and twenty-one years of age, the two fellows were perfect specimens of physical beauty, such as one naturally turns to look at second after passing them.

"Of them, Christopher Comstock, familiarly known as 'Cowboy Chris,' was an employee on the Robinson Ranch, and a general favorite, for he is the sort of chap that keeps ship company with the ladies and passes himself off as a man when he was one of the honored guests.

"This was what Chris Comstock read:

"Cyrus Robbins—By this time this falls beneath your eyes your daughter will be in my power and far beyond your reach. I have come back to the last Juan Valley for a purpose, and that purpose is—"

"This is a very strong note," others shall follow. "I shall never stay my hand, for I know not the value of the word mercy for I have no use for me as the Black Phœnix."

"The ranch-owner heard this like one dazed.

"Yes, it is written," when Chris Robbins was invited to the dance of the round-up Rube, and strange note, he looked puzzled.

"Nellie was introduced to the room in time to hear the contents of the note, and a startling sound came from his bearded lips—a harsh laugh.
Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

Robinson's lips. "I am inclined to think he is, and this is simply confirmation of my belief that some of the secured whoops can be trusted."

"But if my faith's faithful and valiant servant Pete seemed the most distracted by the blow, Fred Antrop had as little of calm and coolness in his eyes as there was a fire in his eyes which told of the check he was keeping on himself."

"This is true, Fred," exclaimed Chris, feelingly. "I understand all that is consuming you, for I am not nearly as nearly as near to you and the fire of the whoop as you are."

Beneath this false calm, the young man had to get his breath and then to show his real self.

"Good! I am with you, Fred, to the end, and here is my hand on it! We are partners through thick and thin, sink or swim, live or die, and from this moment the Scourge of the Sun Juan will gear his march in a gest that shall compact the compact."

Their hands meeting in a grasp that sealed the compact.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PELLEWELL DARING.

Nellie Welland was not found. The search for her was vain, and all the officers who had been sent were gone. Neither did the search for Pablo Pajarito prove successful. His whereabouts were untraceable, for the Mexican had vanished without a trace. The search for him was continued, however, and协会的disappearance of one with that of the other.

"He must have ridden to the ranch. We are pariahs through thick and thin, sink or swim, live or die, and from this moment the Scourge of the Sun Juan will gear his march in a gest that shall compact the compact."

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Their hands meeting in a grasp that sealed the compact.
"Why?"
"We might have put Old Spot on the trail."
"It would have been a different story," answered one of the crowd."
"T'was a different story with you, said Prel." The "t'was" here was a"Took the" instead of a "took the".

"That's right, my man, that's right.

"No, she never was."
"That's the kind of a thing that's calculated to make a man feel that he's got a reputation.
"Yes, sir, and it's a thing that's calculated to make a man feel that he's got a reputation.
"Why, we might have put Old Spot on the trail."

CHAPTER V.

IN HUFTEN BANDS.

WHAT sombre and deeply-insignificant things sometimes make vast changes in the lives of human beings. Had not her hair become loosened from the dainty coil in which it was arranged, Nellie Welland would not have ascended to the chamber that she might have the aid of a glass in re-coiling it; and had she not ascended to the chamber, she would not have fallen into the hands of the ruffian who had gained entrance to the house and was hiding there, like a beast of prey that is lying in wait for its prey.

As she passed into the chamber she was seized from behind by a powerful hand which held her helpless, and a thick cloth that gave out a sickening odor was pressed over her mouth and nose. She fought and screamed until she was strike blind terror which arose to her lips.

"Of course you've never made a sound till he clutched the girl, and she had no warning of another presence in the room till she found herself with a scarf over her eyes."

"Powerless! Even though it was so, she struggled and flailed against the bond of her captor, a flashed, thoughts of a terrible fate passed through her mind, and she made despairing efforts to burst the scarf from her mouth from the nauseating cloth long enough to utter a cry that would alarm those who heard it from that place."

"You kin make a noise that will scare the wild beasts, for sure," said the ruffian who had attacked her. "You kin make a noise that will scare the wild beasts, for sure." And Uncle Jim's got his cows over ye, an' ye can't break away from him, you bet?"

"For one instant her eyes were free of the cloth, and she caught a fair look at the man's face. A feeling of horror came over her, for, although his face was dark, and he was watching the open doorway through which she had entered the ranch, she recognized him as Whisky Jim, a brutal ruffian who had caused her much trouble in the past.

"The realization of this fact was the last straw to the girl, and she burst into a howl of terror."

"It makes me kind of diggerty think of it. I wonder if there will keep his word?"

"I'm 'Wi, in leadin' ther cow-punchers on er false trail."

"Yes, and yer boss takes off on yer false scent, we kin git out er this mess an' get back to ther Retreat."

"We might 'a' bin er good long way on ther road by this time of we'd start at suff."}

"But I'm 'Wi', ye boss off it. An' I'm afeard ye won't git away with her."

"I'm afeard ye won't git away with her."

"That's it."

"But ther 'Deeran Ranch?"

"Sure pop."

"We're lookin' for ye."

"That word solved the riddle."

"But ther 'Deeran Ranch?"

"It is."

"The 'Deeran Ranch?"

"It is."

"Whisky Jim's good name went smoke then."

"The darkness Whisky Jim produced pipe and tobacco, whittling small chips from the pipe with his bowie-knife and grinding them between his heavy palms."

"Better git low down when ye strike ther ruffian and do him something."

"You 'Deeran Ranch?"

"It's the only thing we can do."

"That's it."

"It's plain ther boss don't keep 'bout any of us."

"All ther same, ther are some of ther ban'z as knows it."

"If he don't have it any more; but we are new members."

"We ask this job was ter us try us. Ef we don't tell the truth, we don't see why we should try it."

"We reckon we'll know all that's necessary when ther time comes fer it."

"All ther same, I am kind of intrusted ther, know who Black Phoenix is an' I hove my 'pinion. It's plain he's or Greasers."

"Ef he heard you say that, he'd must ye out er er jiff."

"Best take keer of ther tongue, Jim, ef ye wants ter live. They don't name no 'em fancy ban' called Greasers."

"Whisky Jim grinned, and Mike added:"

"Ef ther ban' be drunk good in his veins, ther's one thing aint: he hasn't no coward."
silence, that he heaved forward and once more tried to peer into the captive's face.

"She is layin' mighty still," he confissed, "but maybe, if you'd just sit there a while, you could see her face wun't be, it is so blamed dark. Ricks was the last one to give up."

He did so, shielding it with the palms of his half-closed hands. Bending forward, he was on the verge of losing his hold of the prisoner's face and making a startling discovery, when NIcholas came up from behind his horse.

"Horse it, pard'n, out! Thor's dogs bein' at tier ranch."

"Well, that's the kind of rollin' plain came the sounds of excited cries, followed in a moment by the shrill scream of a half-dozen kids. All the handers of the kids were heard to their feet. Whisky Jim ex-

CHAPTER VI.

A WILD RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT.

It was near five o'clock, the sun was low and the sound of the distant avalanche of the war-horse. Their blood was fairly boiling, and they were eager to aveng the fall of their mates and escape death. They were left without any idea of what was happening, and their number will do the work as well as more. This is the Black Jack, and I draw a weapon from the dash of the dastards who own that watch as chief com-

"There are enough going off after him," pro-

"It's black with a white star."

"It was black with a white star."

"The old rancher turned on the Tenderfoot Rancher, uttering something that sounded strange through the room. For a moment the old rancher forgot his usual courtesy, as he snapped:

"Well, and only bein' orders,"

"Then they rode in silence. Several times they looked back, but each had already passed the ki-

"He has a heart that is true blue, if his skin is black."

"But, in jest, in jest," protected Colfax, with a look of rapture on his smooth face.

"What will you do now, sir?"

"I can't bear niggergin'!"

"You can't stand a niggin'! Well, I swear!" he added. "But, in jest, in jest," protected Colfax, with a look of rapture on his smooth face.

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But, as the owner of the Diamond Ranch turned away, a change came over Robinson's face, and he caught Colfax by the arm.

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But, as the owner of the Diamond Ranch turned away, a change came over Robinson's face, and he caught Colfax by the arm.

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Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLACK WORK OF A TRAITOR.

It all had happened so swiftly that not a hand could be raised in the rescue. And the apparent sleeper of Orson Colfax cut not a moment’s sleep. He seemed almost amazed that his splendid black steed weighed as he fired the shot that stretched the rancher on the ground, and with a yell, the Mexican dashed away.

"There they go!" howled Romulyn Rube. But half a dozen weapons spoke. Pablo disappeared behind his horse, clamping to the animal side in true Indian fashion, guiding it so his body was protected by that of the black steed.

"After him!" burst from Chris Comstock’s lips. "He is striking to round the corner of the corral. Come on!"

Putting spurs to their already over-drove horses, the cowboys started in pursuit, their weapons in hand and voices in unison.

For a moment Pablo disappeared with his horse behind the ranch, but that only afforded him a brief respite, for the cowboys were hot behind him. When they sighted him beyond the ranch he had changed his course, and was running low in the saddle in order to present a smaller target for the bullets which was impossible for him to escape. The smoke was choking about him, and the pursuers promptly opened fire and the lead sang viciously all around the fleeing man and his noble charger.

It often seems as if the old saying, "the devil protects his own" is true, and thus it seemed to the cowboys that night. Had they been armed with a shot gun, or a forty-four, perhaps they might have put Pablo to flight, but it seemed as if he remained quite unshaken.

In truth, scarcely a drop of blood was drawn from his body, only a few wounds from the rasps of many of the pursuers’ bullets. Pablo’s clothing being caught in his escape from fatal injury seemed still more wonderful. By the rarest fortune his horse was unhurt.

"That is the evilest of the devils himself!" snarled Rube. "I don’t think I ever saw a man get away from a bunch of cowpunchers, excepting your man. I’ve never seen a fellow bounce out of the way like that."

"Did you notice his horse?" asked Chris. "You bet! Same critter clean fer their white sails.

There was no doubt in the mind of the big-boned cowboy but the Nebraskan of the San Juan and Pablo Fajardo were one and the same, and he was not alone in the belief.

"I don’t know of a man who could shoot that sinner’s shots," declared Rube. "He’s protected in some way. Spot that bow! I don’t reckon that sinner will be covered with cinders before we get done with him."

Pablo’s horse went on in a leisurely manner, his noble black horse swiftly increasing the distance between his master and pursuers.

"That here is worth a fortune!" cried Rube. "I don’t know why, but the more I think it over the more sure I am that the devils they are after that is they will have two of us yet."

The other, the cowboys’ horses were badly winded from that wild ride across the plains; the burning sun, and the bullets, and the hot wind. By the time some of the cowboys had released their weapons, Pablo was so far away that the pursuers were not in position to shoot even with a revolver, shot. However, the light of the fire still made him conspicuous, and the pursuers, once more began to close away at him.

"This is folly," asserted Fred Anthony, speaking to the rest of the men who were also beginning to lose interest in the chase and begin in a systematic manner in the morning.

Chris looked at his friend in surprise.

"Don’t be so damn silly," he said. "I don’t believe you. I swear I did not expect to hear from you this morning. Not the way you are a-lookin’ for a good horse. My shoe foot is apt to be a little hot-headed, and in your case, it would be simply natural for one to lose all interest in the chase.

Fred turned his grave face toward his old friend.

"I feel that it is time for me to have all my wits about me, if ever; and I am actually surprised at my own calmness. At the same time, I feel as if there is a volcano in my heart that might burst forth at any moment.

"That will be all right when the proper time comes," assured Chris. "Keep yourself in check till then."

Then he turned to Old Rube, with:

"Don’t we better go and grab it, Rube? That Mexican is bound to get us unless we are simply wasting our time and running our own lives.

"Kiroo, lad!"

Then the foreman of the Robinson Ranch got up and said, "Red, we have been here three days, and we are simply wasting our time and running our own lives.

"Kiroo, lad!"

Pablo, perceiving the opportunity, availed himself of the situation and made his escape. The cowboys turned back toward the Diamond B Ranch and not a word was said until they got there and watched them. How long remained thus that they could not tell, for the light of the dying
“More deviltry, parson! Satan is holding a jubilee tonight-perhaps!”

“What is it now?” snarled Roundup Rube, who was all dressed up in an resemble mood.

“What in tarnation’s amiss, honey? Is the rest of the bunch gone?”

“Tenderfoot’s clean gone!” was the amazing declaration.


“But what’s she gone—how? I don’t understand it.”

“No more dazey anybody else. She’s gone, an’ that’s all I know. I’ve been a dodger and a hot-foot for you fellows.”

“The two hogs must have intervened between them and the ranch were quickly covered, and as they rode along, the cowboy who had brought them word of the strange appearance displayed with questions. However, they could obtain very little satisfaction from him. He had told all he knew, as Nina had disappeared and could not be found, but no man seemed to know how it had happened.

Everything was in confusion when they reached the ranch. The second calamity seemed to have driven Cy Robinson crazy, and it was with the utmost difficulty he could be restrained from doing himself or some one else injury.

“Gone clean dastard for their time,” muttered Rube. “Hell’d cool off by mornin’, an’ then there’d be hollerin’ to all.”

“Your pardon, sir. Thank you. Joe’s gone but I hope he’s got his grub mounted on er better horse than any o’ us, an’ he goes in style.”

“Thank ye, sir. Maybe he’s dropped in at Mr. Cooper’s.”

“Sayin’ Joe’s gone? Coop’s has no horses on the place. He hasn’t got a stable for four.”

“A kind of a sensation clouded Orson Cooper’s face, and he sunk back with a mumbled inquiry.

“I have a life to pay for this,” he declared.

“I ain’t many don’t know that, and it’s just plain wonder he didn’t succeed. But I reckon you’ll all know more about that than I do.”

“I fired at him with a rifle, thar, and I am not in the habit of lying. I learned to shoot under one of the best marksmen in the country.”

“Let us come to the conclusion that the tenderwoman wears some kind o’ protection that wards off the bullets. You saw us when we parleyed at the Black Phoenix as being on a raid, so it cannot be as easy as Robinson, an’ you know that it seemed or not, it was all a mistake.”

“Ir I didn’t plunk at least three lead grubs butt ergin’ his huzzone, I’ll hope I’ll never trigger again. I don’t know how the blame fell, but I got a shot at him.”

“I am as sure that she isn’t wanted that don’t is her clean undaunted, trusted,” nodded Rube. “The damnable girl gave me a chance and I shot her. We’ll hew Black Phoenix in our grip. Cy Robinson will most likely send out a party of searchers in the morning. Kin he look for any clue from you?”

“Surely for ye, Colfax,” said Rube held out one hardy hand. “Ye had better stuff in ye than I thought of at first. Ye will hold your fellow passengers in awe.”

“Don’t need to. I always have an eye on them.”

The Tenderfoot Rancher smiled faintly at this praise and allowed the bluff cowboy to give him in print the tale of the exploit.

A few moments later, Rube joined his comrades, and they rode along in line, Rube at the head, the Tenderfoot Rancher second on the way, the cowboys of the Diamond having assured him they would take advantage of the trip toOTE.

The20
tarnished was made at a slow pace, the cowboys discussing the events of the night and expressing their various opinions on one point the lady’s drugs were dutifully examined.

Nell shuddered as she heard these words, but she was puzzled to understand why the ranchers should think she ought to offer any reward for her restoration. He was nothing to her more than the fellow whose daughter she had learned to consider as her dearest female friend.

“Surely there was certain: Fred would not remain idle while she was in peril. Still, what could he be done alone? Alone! He would not be alone. There was her father, the strange man who had been so kind to her. Perhaps he would make every effort for her recovery. And certainly she was wishing he would now.

Once more the kidnappers rode onward. How long that ride lasted the terrorized girl could never tell, till she reached the end of the journey, the ruffians were content enough to remove the gag from between her aching jaws.

“Thar ye are, lady-bird!” laughed Mike. “I don’t think we’ve missed an opportunity to prove a thing. It’s a far longer trip than we expected. She’s beginning to bring her dog down our way.”

Richard alone knew the true brutality which spoke the truth and she would be simply wasting her breath. Indeed, she could not think of anything more important after the gag was removed she had tried ever so hard to do.

For five days, her tongue seemed paralysed.

“She don’t seem ter keer ‘bout makin’ no noise,” laughed Whisky Jim, carelessly. “She seems just contented ter lay fer yer arms clung ter yer palpitatin’ heart, Michael. Thar’s promise fer her to be just enough for they screech critters.”

“Oh, I low she’s clean masked on them. I all git them way, I’m yer livery-jiller, Jim.”

“Then why not let her alone?” demand’d Mike. “She’s got plenty of whisky in her—she can manage a much wisket. That stuff supplies th’ scent o’ yer power.”

“I don’t reckon you’ll be anywhars when ther boss git round, pard. He’ll be clean gone on that business. I don’t know how we’s going ter be over. Better prove th’ opportunity while ken a chance.”

“You dastardly rascals!” came slowly from the captive maiden’s lips. “You shall both answer for this.”

“By golly!” cried Jim. “She’s got grit! Why, some gals’d be whimperin’ an’ cryin’—and ter think this is the kind o’ stuff—”

The robbers’ retreat was finally reached, and the girl felt certain she was carried in cavum. Although the gag had been removed, the gag had been removed, the female was hobbled with a cord, the cloth she caught a glimpse of freedom, and the darkening, so they were helpless and could do no more over.

“Keep cool, er shall we junk, an’ I’ll be yer two and for the next day.”

With a knife he cut the bonds which confined his hands and hands, and then she watched the blindfold from her face.

As she had suspected, she was in a cavern, and the rustling of bats and birds, and the darkness behind the blindfold, and the darkness of the cave, the other was. The damnable amazement burst from the lips of the whisky, he staved her face away from his eyes, and she passed. Then when the light was not running into a trap. In the darkness of the can serve to pass the door with the aid of a lighted match, but the sudden alarm of the ranch had caused him to give up his purpose. Now he was filled with con-
Cory Whissy embarked on a mission to find young Rube's horse, as it was the center of attention at the dance. He managed to sneak into the dance hall undetected and, just as things were heating up, he spotted Rube. Whissy immediately took action, knocking him flat on his back.

The next day, Cory Whissy returned to school, unaware of the events that had taken place. As he walked into the classroom, he noticed Rube standing in the corner, looking at the floor. Whissy approached him and asked what was wrong.

Rube explained that he had managed to find his horse, but it had been taken by some bandits. Cory Whissy offered to help him locate the bandits and retrieve his horse.

The two boys set out on a journey, determined to rescue Rube's horse. They encountered many challenges along the way, but their determination never wavered. Finally, they found the bandits and managed to rescue the horse.

The two boys returned to school, proudly displaying their horse to their classmates. Cory Whissy was hailed as a hero, and the entire school was buzzing with excitement.

In the end, Cory Whissy had not only succeeded in returning the horse to its owner, but he had also gained the respect and admiration of his peers. His act of heroism had become a legend, and Cory Whissy was remembered as a true hero.
Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

"Murdered, murdered! Yes, he tried to murder me! I know it! I know it! My memory! But, I was not dead—I still live!"

Then there was a sound of thinking of the tragedy which turned his brain.

"Yes, I live," he went on, while Fred Andrus's drooping head turned toward him. "I see you remember that I hunted him down.

"Yes, I did! It is like a dream, yet I almost forget it. I was a child—was she there? She almost seems to be there.

"She was there," panted Fred, giving up the hopeless attempt. "She is a young lady now. It was she who led me to her child at home. We had been searching for you, and she found you."


The words had aroused him to something like a realization of his position. Rodd's cold and solidsly tried to strip him of his certainty and glare around. Then a wild laugh came from his bearded lips—a laugh that caused the outlaws to start and whirl in alarm.

"Yip, yip, yip!"

It was the ringing cowboy yell, and it came from the lips of Chris Comstock! Down through the darkness, heading straight toward the fire, charged the young cowboy, his bride-crown swinging loose on the neck of his horse, a revolver at his side.

As soon as he appeared the cowboy's weapons began to speak with a rapidity that was astonishing.

CHAPTER XII.

BURIED BENEATH THE SLIDE.

The outlaws were taken by surprise, and sudden contention seized upon them, for they knew not how long the attacking party was. Their alarm was increased by the cry that came from Chris Comstock's lips:

"I'm coming, come on!"

The ruse was successful, for the Black Rattlesnake fancied a large party of cowboys was close behind the man whose horse stirred and his fire and whose bullets were whistling through the darkness.

To increase the excitement, Old RattleSnake, seized by a sudden fury, rent his bands and started to his feet with the idea of charging through the night once more.

With a yell of pain, one of the outlaws threw up his hands and fell heavily to the ground, one of Chris Comstock's bullets having found a target.

Seized by an unreasoning terror, the fallen man's comrade fled precipitately into the darkness, quickly vanishing from sight.

Plopping down the ground with its hood, the Black Rattlesnake waited for the next volley, his master learning from the sudden retreat of his fellow.

The remaining two fell, springing forward with a knife in his grasp.

"I'll have you free in a jiff, then we will seck before the man who laid our friend low is free," said Chris, as he listened and sought to discover the number of their assailants.

"You were just in time," assured Fred. "Unless Whisky Jim Hed, I had less than a minute to think!"

"Whisky Jim! Is that dastardly dog here?"

"He was here, and he told me he was the one who killed him!

"Well, if he falls into the hands of any of our men, he will be sure to decorate the limb of the first tree they can reach."

Fred was quick to start liberty.

"One of those fellows escaped on my horse," he said. "I am out an animal, for which I shall haunt him!"

"You were in Capt. Chris's horse, and he will never think of considering such a loss."

Alone, Rodgers rode up the slope of the fallen outlaw and strode away into the darkness, not caring or scaring a glance toward his companions.

Fred made a significant motion, and both the remaining desperadoes turned away, taking off Chris's horse.

Rodgers rode at a distance Old RattleSnake strode along through the darkness at a tireless gait, paying no heed to those behind him. At length, he paused at the foot of the slope, looking down into the body of the now softly moving outlaw, but still remaining silent and fixed, and leaving his horse standing close at the hand, the young cowboy accompanied his pledged pard to Wealdon's side.

Fred touched the strange man on the shoulder, saying:

The Black Hoods stirred uneasily, and one of them addressed Whisky Jim:

"At the very short, part. If these fellows have friends in this vicinity they may come down on me and murder me at once!"

"Why! I don't say Cy Robinson an' his men bedurned for the chance!"

"They say they did! Still here is one of the party."

"Reckon he took it in his heart to fer folker Ole Crazy that."

"Other may have done the same."

"Them who've fer't them—just you keep cool, pard! I reckon there ain't no more of their critter on these hills."
Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

"You might fine her or mighty tough battle come for break later because she'd got class."

"Well, I'll break her in or break her neck. You won't worry about it."

If Nisa heard the words of the two ruffians, her face became dark to-day, but to-morrow the sun will be shining again. We must put our trust in the world, and keep our faith in our power to find and save us.

Then Nisa relented; she told him how she had fallen into the hands of the treacherous cowboy, having stepped out of the ranch a moment forget the herd, and been caught by the weeping girl in her arms, as she softly murmur-

"Cry to your heart's relief, my dear friend, for the best friends lose their legs," she said, throwing a thick cloth over her head and suffocating her into insensibility. When she returned to consciousness she was far away on the plains, held upon the back of a swift-galloping horse, which bore them far from the place of their capture.

Then Nell told of her own capture.

After awhile one of the huddled outlaws appeared and called the two toughs aside, speaking a few words to them in a low tone. Both of the men left the vicinity of the girl. After a few minutes glanced swiftly at Nisa, as the rascally ranter was as if her face was as if the usual expression of quizzers. She knew that the girl would know the words of the rest of her, and glance at him with disdain.

"Nell glanced swiftly at Nisa, as the rascally ranter was as if she knew the words of the rest of her, and glance at him with disdain.

"Oh, Niss! laughed Nell. "I never dreamed of that! He is a brave, noble fellow, and-"

"Of course he is. He's utterly incapable of the other. He thinks so much of Fred that he will lay down his very life to aid in your rescue, if necessary."

But, Nell was not to be deceived. She caught the glance of her youth's devoted, affectionate, and false tenderness, and she turned away unburied from the sight of human eyes!"

CHAPTER XIII.
BLACK PHENIX AND THE CAPTIVE BIRDS.

Shortly after the appearance of the outlaw chief, in the cave, Buck Pile brought in the second captive, the little black Phencil cowbird. The treacherous cowboy had hired with Robinson that he might drive a number of his flock close, and, finding the thief had no arms- for he was conversant with them— and the wrong girl had been carried away, he ventured to kidnap the other.

Nina was conducted to her captive friend as soon as the cave was reached, and the two girls threw themselves into each other's arms, the rancher's daughter bursting into tears. Brave little Nell held the weeping girl close to her warm, and she carried back the tears which sought to dim the luster of her dark eyes. Into Nina's ears she murmured soft words of comfort, whispering for the time that her position was as bad as that of her friend.

The two desperadoes, Jim and Mike, were still lying in front of the fire, which they replenished occasionally, and the girl's head nodded near her hand. As may be imagined, the appearance of Nina greatly relieved their feelings and filled them with delight.

"Reckon this saves our bacon, parole," chuckled Jim. "You didn't both want her, now, did yo' lack any very much."

"Then who wants her now?" asked Nell. "Me. Leetle Black-Eyes is a clean grinn. No sniffele'm an' pou'lin' 'bout don't impress me, only she's too much of er doll for me. Black-Eyes is beneficent, and I'll be glad ter take her an' look after her."

Nina spoke of her own rescue. The girl turned fearlessly on the chief of the cattle-lifters.

"Tis more than I bargained for," he confessed. "I only expected one bird, but my jolly host captured me. For me the considerable amusement in the valley of the San Juan just at present."

"Nell was captured, and the little black cowbird stood before his captives, regarding them through the twin holes in the owl-like mask, which was drawn down to his shoulders. They shrunk from this marauder who had made himself at home. Nell's soft, quaint laugh came from beneath the disguise.

"This is more than I bargained for," he confessed. "I only expected one bird, but my jolly host captured me. For me the considerable amusement in the valley of the San Juan just at present."

"The bird which Nell had been so kind to and that she had begun to enjoy."

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"And so we're not going to solve it. But who is the man with a horse who always keeps- Hal's what that?"

"A few books and a small amount of dirt came rattling down from above, causing three of the men to start to their feet. The outlaw immediately started to make his escape out of the base of the precipitous slope. A strange, rustling noise was heard, followed by the sound of a tear of theavalanche!

"Then a tumbling mass of earth, stones, bowders, and debris, followed in his wake, and he was forever buried from the sight of human eyes!"

How are you going to prove I am one of Black Phenix's men?"

"We have proof enough. We are convinced ourselves, and we can easily convince others. Do you want your time by beating around the bush."

For a few moments the outlaw was silent, then he looked at each of them shrewdly.

"Waal, jest what is it that you want, any- how?"

"We want you to peach."

"You want me to give my parole away?"

"And if I refuse?"

"You see that you are hanged for your foolishness."

"Waal, go ahead with your fun! I'm still as a charm.

This was not exactly what the young cowboy had expected. He turned towards his comrade and said:

"What are you going to do with him, Mr. Washington?"

Old Rattlesnake shook his head slowly, seeming undecided about that point, but he still re-

"It is our duty to see if the unfortunate rascal is not seriously injured," declared Fred, turning to Chris. That is so, was the instant agreement; and seeing Chris was not seriously injured, it is our duty to hold fast to him till justice can settle his case. Perhaps we may be able to pin the truth from him."

They beat over the man and removed the broken wood and stones, so that the way was clear for the bullet-wound in his arm. Fred did as directed, and the cowboy extracted it as well as he could, latterly the steady loss of blood. Telling Old Rattlesnake to watch the follow close, Chris, Fred gave his parole.

"How is it?" asked Fred.

"He is in a very bad, but there is no reason that I can see why the wound should be fatal."

Then you will not have his life on your hands?"

"I don't think so."

But what are you going to tell him?"

"I want to pump him, and I am going to make him believe his chances are decidedly small."

You are going to attempt to make him betray his own comrades, are you?"

"Yes. If we can get the truth from his lips, we can immediately save the girl and destroy this dastardly band of robbers."

That is true."

They returned to the spot where Weiland was silently crouching beside the wounded man."

"I am set for a piece of accurate wrath, falsely. I'm a booked for a funeral?"

"Well, you are hard hit," confessed Chris.

"Where is there a chance for one to pull through?"

"I think there is," was the caudal confession. These words revived somewhat at that.

"You ain't foolin' me?" be eagerly asked.

"You are not telling me this for some game!"

"I have not told you our game is a serious one; I can't see why it should please you."

"You can't? Well, do you think I am anxious to kick the bucket?"

"I don't know how you are going to escape it."

"But you just said there was a chance for me!"

What do you mean anyway?"

"I mean just this, and Chris crouched lower, so he could look the fellow fairly in the eyes, despite the darkness— I mean that I should have been sufficient to make a fœtus of a content to disappear in the darkness. The roarind sound grew louder and the advance couriers of the landländt rained against his ears. He struggled to his feet, stumbled, sank on his knees, his bonds impeded him, and he had been so often banished, his last wild cry ringing through the desert as he was heard even above the roar of the avalanche!

Then a tumbbling mass of earth, stones, bowders, and debris, followed in his wake, and he was forever buried from the sight of human eyes!"

"The words came in a staccato from the outlaw's lips, as he fell silent in the darkness, for a moment of suspense. A few seconds later, a faint crackling was heard from the base of the precipitous slope. A strange, rustling noise, followed by the sound of a tear of the avalanche!

Then a tumbbling mass of earth, stones, bowders, and debris, followed in his wake, and he was forever buried from the sight of human eyes!"
Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

He looked as if he spoke the truth, for his cheeks were sunken, his face flashed and his eyes red as coal.

"No! It never came! and and for some time the four sat discussing the situation and saying nothing. The weather had been fine, and the room occupied, Pete, the darkly, appeared, his face wearing one of the most beaming expressions he had ever seen.

"Oh, dar yo' am, Mass Chris!" he exclaim'


CHAPTER XV.

THE YELLOW WITCH.

In a cabin amid the hills an old woman crouched silently beside a fire, over which was suspens-
ed a kettle from which came a musical bubbling. The cabin door was flung wide open and the light of the fire flickered out into the night.

"Will he come?" thought she. "Will he come?"

And the woman muttered the words, as through the mass of tangled white hair that fell down over her face she pressed toward the corner of the cabin where she had placed her purpose or its hopes, if it could be obtained, all because of that revolting vixen, the yellow witch, who made up her mind and ragged her whole aspect that of abject poverty.

It was the mysterious "Yellow Witch" of the hills.

In the night sounded a hoof-beat. The woman started and listened, then a laugh of ex-

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CHAPTER XV.

THE YELLOW WITCH.

In a cabin amid the hills an old woman crouched silently beside a fire, over which was suspended a kettle from which came a musical bubbling. The cabin door was flung wide open and the light of the fire flickered out into the night.

"Will he come?" thought she. "Will he come?"

And the woman muttered the words, as through the mass of tangled white hair that fell down over her face she pressed toward the corner of the cabin where she had placed her purpose or its hopes, if it could be obtained, all because of that revolting vixen, the yellow witch, who made up her mind and ragged her whole aspect that of abject poverty.

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Cyrus Robinson, but it is the truth. You are not tortured long, but you have not heard the worst. I will go on.

"Fast be it from the good man to you, and the lad also, to rob him of his money. I'm not a Trading Post, but a gold mining camp. You are a young man, and I've been at the end of a stick, and I know what it's like. I can see the suffering of the poor. But I have no time to have you. I'll be back to the post at the end of the week."

After the visit, Cyrus returned to his bunk and slept. He dreamed of his family, and of his leisure days on the ranch. He thought about the times he had spent with his friends, and the memories he had cherished.

When he awoke, he knew that he had to make a decision. He could either continue his journey, or return to his family. But he knew that his family would never forgive him if he continued. He made his choice, and left the ranch.

The next morning, he met with a group of prospectors, and they decided to search for gold. They knew that the land was rich in minerals, and they were determined to find what was hidden beneath the surface.

The journey was long and艰苦, but they were determined to succeed. They searched for days, and eventually found a vein of gold. They worked tirelessly, and eventually struck it rich.

But the journey was not without danger. They had to navigate through treacherous terrain, and they had to face the elements. But they persevered, and eventually found their fortune.

When they returned to the ranch, they were greeted with open arms. They had become heroes, and their story was celebrated for generations to come.

In the end, Cyrus Robinson proved that perseverance and determination can lead to success. He showed that anything is possible with hard work and dedication. He was a true cowboy, and his legacy will live on for years to come.
Cowboy Chris to the Fore.

did not wait for the cowboys of the Tenderfoot Ranch to join them. With Rube, Chris, Fred, and Rodney Welland at his heels, he dashed straight on for the hills, heading for the butt of the witch.

The townspeople had already been spoken to by the sheriff and the minister, but in the Panic of ’49 the panic was silent, and the Panic about, they hurried into the butt.

It was a small one, but high up, and the Little Witch was crouching beside it, unmoving to herself. She seemed to say no more than that she was blind, but her presence must have been great, for when she was seized she could have killed the cowboys, and did not. St Idly, you,” snarled Round-up Rube, as the unmasked woman squirmed and raved in his grip, but it was a business, and hadn’t got no time for loss. We don’t have no time for nonsense at the beginning of the season. Where is Cy Robinson?

"What do I know of Cy Robinson?” she cried. He had been by.

"Yes; he came here in the night, and he disposed of him—upon the back of his horse," he answered.

"Ha! gangster’s lynx!” exclaimed Rube. Chris o’f course he was up tight all set, and Welland o’f course he knew the man. How’s he goin’ to do, and what’s he going to do, and how’s he going to do it?

"He fought savagely, but her efforts were no good. In a few moments she was securely bound.

Meaner and meaner were the words of the cowboys, and in their inexpressible delight to see him was the woman. He led the way to the center of the court, where the cowboys were lying about on the floor in various positions, all sleeping soundly from the effect of the drowsy drink, and hissing, snoring, and talking in their sleep.

"There was a pile of wood in one corner of the barn and from it several knots were selected and..."

"No, Rube!" cried the voice of Cy Robinson.

"And the Tenderfoot Ranch it truly was, although the cowboys could scarcely believe the evidence of their eyes.

When he met his service in Mexico, explained the avenger, "he was known as Pablo Fernandez. Orson Coffax was simply one of his many false names, that suspicion of the Black Phoenix, and for that reason I hired with him. He played his part skillfully, and I do not think that one of his own men suspected he was the Scourge." With this he left the barn, and all the cowboys suspected he was the Scourge.

"How are you, sir?” asked Round-up Rube. "How are you, sir?” "My God!" replied the man. "Can it be that woman told the truth—and is it that wretch back there my own son? Even if it is so, I am glad he is dead! The world is well rid of such a curse."

"It looks as though we’re too late, but we know the sort as can’t get away. We was too busy up there to come."

"Who is attending your booth?” asked Cy Robinson.

"Jack Kiipper, sir,” replied the leader. "He talks like a man, but he is quite as quick as a rabbit could ever be. We was too busy up there to come."

"Well, when you return, take my advice and buy Jack Kiipper a rope round his neck. If you want to know what I mean, just go in there, slide down those stairs and follow your nose to where my men are. They will show you something worth looking at."

When the cowboys had entered the cage, the rancho man went back into the butt. Chris, who had so deceived him in the past, Cy Robinson told her of the death of the Black Phoenix and the wreck of her schemes for revenge. But the woman would not believe the chief was dead, for she had a personal grudge against him. "Bah! you are trying to deceive me, Cy Robinson!"

"It is true, madam, and I am sure. Your Pablo—the one you lying tongue tried to make me believe was my son—is dead!"

"Dead?” she gasped, seeming dazed. "He was so sure of himself I even thought he still had made such a name, with my aid!"

"Only twenty-five!” asked the man. "Why, why, Cy Robinson? He was a valued man! Was he only twenty-five!"

"He was killed mechanically from her lips.

"Then you lied to me, woman!” cried the rancher, sternly. "If he were my child, he would have died in my arms, my daughter."

The cowboys now appeared hearing the tale of the dead chief. Women wept in tears, sobbing:

"Oh, my boy, my own boy! Dead, dead!"

"You have now fully betrayed yourself," said the rancher. This was a blow to the woman’s own son and not mine. Tell me one thing, they your hands shall be released. Who was his father?

"The man whom you believed killed—my love!"

"That is enough," added the rancher. "Release her, boys."

"Yes; we followed her as far as the stage of play with Jedg Lynch with them critters down below."

"Rather than have their acts more, as Cy Robinson, the negro, Rodney Welland and the young people were rising with their rifles, as Cy Robinson, the negro, Rodney Welland and the young people were rising with their rifles. This was my idea of the scene in the underground chamber. Never again will the Black Phoenix appearances trouble the Valley of the San Juan. The Savannah has been scoured and the peace of a happy and useful region was restored.

Perhaps there are one or two points requiring correction. It will be remembered that on the night of Nellie Welland’s abduction, the Black Phoenix appeared in the barn of the Robinson Ranch. While Orson Coffax was with those who were searching for the missing girl. In that instance, as well as at various other times, the character of the chief was assumed by the mother! An engagement of finely-woven story lines protected the Black Phoenix many times from the bullets of his enemies and made him seem quite invulnerable. This was worn by the woman at the time of her appearance at the ranch.

Pablo Pajarito had suspected the presence of this protection, and had buried his knife in his own throat instead of striking at his heart. He had not fired Coffax’s bullet, which he wore over his heart, and which caused the death of the brave chief. This was why the cowboys believed Pajarito was truly the invulnerable Outlaw.

Whisky Jim and Nevada Mike met a just death with the rest of the outlaws; but Jack Kiipper took the alarm and escaped. Jeannette Fernández, the evil genius of it all, also disappeared. There was another night of portrayals and Jack Kiipper talked the Robinson Ranch, and Peto fairly "knocked the stuffing out of his banjo, answering every call for a song, and putting so much vigor into his singing, that, as he afterward remarked, his voice was all ‘jerked out, cut off, sharted.” Pajarito Fajaro was a guest on that occasion, and even Old Rube acknowledged his ability to do the blackest kind of song, a great admission for the cowboys to make.

The marriage was not long delayed, and they settled down on the Diamond Ranch, which had been purchased by Cy Robinson. The woman, of course, did not die, for she was one of those among the San Juan Scoundrels who had suffered losses at the hands of the cattle-lifters, and she had been given all the babies that were born that day, and he bought that farm to live on for the rest of his life. Rodney Welland made his home with them; and Peto became one of the fixtures of the place, courted by the women, and married.

And Chris, who sometimes declared he did not think he would ever marry, but Nell secretly encouraged Nina by saying there was plenty of time for them to change their minds.
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