"FAR! EXCLAIMED RED HAWK. "HE LIES! THAT IS THE OUTLAW, DUKK DOMINO! THE RATTLE SNAKE! HE IS HERE TO STRIKE!"
Mustang Merle's Matinee.

"I have a good ranch and no one has to tell me so," answered the boy proprietor.

"Of course you want to sell it?"

A smile crossed the bronzed face of Joe Bundy, and he almost whispered, "Yes, but now that the court has given the boys a date with Death, I want to sell it to Duke Domino!"

"I didn't ask you that because I want to buy," continued the rancher. "I want to sell it to Duke Domino."

"That was my idea."

"Mesquite is not in the market."

The eyes beneath the mask were glittering mischievously.

"He has commissioned me to offer you more than your own money. He is prepared to pay you more than the ranch is worth."

"I am afraid you are mistaken."

"Duke Domino went on, "and that is why I am here. What will my friend give for the ranch?"

"How does sixty thousand strike you?"

"Large as the sum was, and more than he would have asked for the ranch, Mustang Merle was not startled.

"I never thought of selling for that sum, oh, Captain Merle?" Duke Domino suggested.

"I haven't thought of parting with Mesquite for any sum."

"No?" and the bandit gave a low laugh. "You should understand that by and by and by, the property may not be worth so much to you."

"Joe Bundy replied:"

"I am not so sure."

"If you want to see the ranch come along and you shall be accompanied," was Merle's reply to the raiders.

"Duke Domino seemed to hesitate, but sending a swift glance toward his men, half a short distance away, he turned and the young rascal and another minute all three were crossing toward the young man.

"All who saw Mustang Merle in company with the dreadfulesteau, who was known everywhere by his face and his head, that had brought the two together."

"Merle led the way down the grass paths of the place, Old Joe at his side, his eagle eyes fastened upon the masked rider.

"Duke Domino got up his steel and turned to watch a horse coming rapidly from the west."

"You are having a caller," he said, turning to the young rancher.

"Yes, the horse and his rider, and both Joe and Merle quickly recognized Red Hawk, the young Apache, an old acquaintance.

"The young man raised his hand quickly near Joe and Merle and then threw out one hand.

"What would she say? What was his mission?"

"Old Joe Merle started for the first word of the border for some time. He was the successor of such men as Captain Red Jacket, and Paron Fitch, and he had a habit of being up and out of his hiding place."

"The other horsemen had halted and their leader was the first to speak."

"With the usual _clouds_ men, those are your clothes, Joe. You must have had a close shaver. The riddle snake! He is here to strike: He wants to see where best he can place the torch. Last night in a hollow far from here they made up the plot and he was to come to spout the land.

"For a moment Duke Domino looked at the young Apache with a fearless eye.

"Where do you get all your information?" he demanded."

"It seems to me that if you believe all you say, red-skinned, they would be in hot water."

"I have a friend who wants to buy this ranch—""

"His name?"

"Interred red horse, the young Apache has a fearful eye."

"His name?"

"Garcia."

"The young Apache looked up, and that the man had some proposition to make was now apparent, and the brave young rancher seemed to understand.

"The raiders, looking toward the buildings in the distance, this hand, spoke:"

"You have a pretty ranch over there, Captain Merle. You have one of the best in the whole Southwest, I hear."

"I have a head on him," said Joe, disappointedly.

"Let the rascal go. I cannot shoot him now, he is a guest, you see."

"The young men who have been watching their leader's movements now rode forward and the moment Duke Domino reached his hand he turned in his saddle seat and began to ride away."

"Then a loud cry of defiance rent the air."

"That's what I want."

"To the knife, Joe," was the answer."

"You will surely say to him when you have done."
He opened the door and came suddenly face to face with the woman, a girl, who could hardly express a smile as Old Joe entered the room.

"Thank you," she said, "I don't want to come, do you?" demanded the scout.

"Very well, where are your duds?"

This question was met by the stare of the old scout's honesty.

"Oh, this is the bundle you had packed," and Joe caught up the package on the floor and took hold of Alvira's arm.

"Give Medora good-bye, but be in a hurry."

The next moment she was out.

"What train?" demanded the woman, with a menacing look.

"The Bundy Limited Express! You won't have to change cars here between and home, Con_TEAMIT."

She turned to Medora, imprecated a kiss upon her cheeks and then followed Old Joe in a halfclosed state.

"She's going to leave us, Alvira is," remarked the man by the door closed on the tall figure of the pony. "I'm sorry, you see, but if Duke Domino runs across her and gives her away in marriage to his old sweetheart, why she'll have to make the most of the deal.

Alvira fell back with a blanched face and gasped.

"What's that?" she cried. "Oh, one of the probable incidents of the homestead act—rude screw-up, you are liable to fall in with Duke Domino and his cut-throats and a wedding may result. But, come along, Alvira; I am going farther—and won't talk about Tagus until, if we get there safe, you can't get into any trouble.

"Don't you propose to go all the way with me?"

"Can't, my dear," assured Joe. "You see, we are about to have a little matinée with Duke himself, and I am too busy to stay and help the mount fight it out."

"Well, I've got to talk about that on the way to Tagus. You've been wanting to go home for some time, and I am going to see you off."

The situation was so incongruous that even the face of Red Hawk—a face that seldom wore a smile—was all amusement. Old Joe was playing his part to perfection.

"Of course, Alvira, I wouldn't like to lose you in that cruel manner—I mean I wouldn't like to be cut out by either High-Heel Jack or Cutthroat Joe."

The bundle fell from Alvira's hands and she looked into the face of the old scout.

"I—am—unsure, Joe," sobbed Alvira, "I will stay and share your fortunes, Joe."

"You don't think you had better go home then? You will then be out of danger, for mebe, after all, you would not meet Duke Domino and would not have to fight under his black flag."

"I won't go! I won't!" and the strong-minded face grew rosier.

"You shan't drag me from this house; I will remain here and keep Medora company," and snatching up her bundle she vanished into the house, there to tell the laughing girl that she would stay and see it out.

"I guess I am equal to the emergency," remarked Joe, his face lighting up in smiles the moment he discovered the surprise woman. "I don't think she will be wanting to go home again. But I may be wrong that I didn't think she would be wood and won't help High Heel Jack. I'll take the risks," and he laughed with the lights of Tagus闪烁着明亮的光芒.

That night the whole ranch knew that it was in danger of a raid from the dreaded Red Hawk, Duke Domino. And just as Duke had feared, he heard the story of the affair that had befallen the ally of Garcia, a little Mexican who frequently divided the gaming-tables of Tagus City, and who had been murdered in the most unprovoked and bloodstained manner.

Somehow he had lost and vanished more than one enemy, and his inseparable friends, Joe Bundy and Red Hawk, were hard to come by. Joe had hovered in the air, looking into the grooves for their last battle with the scourgings of the Southern Mounted Police. He had never dreamed of his own to have the ranch, if a whole band had had to be sacrificed to get it.

They had been driven from the scene by Captain Red Jacket, Prince Pedro and Silver Bell, and Joe was as happy as two of them, and had at his back men renewed for their cunning and daring.

The night was wearing away when there rode up a man who struck Joe to the upright in the saddle and swept his eye over the dark landscape.

"Cross that valley and you are safe," spoke Captain Garcia, looking into his companion's face. "I have not seen another sun rise, nor of the man looking over the valley grow cold and hard."

"How did you find them all at the ranch?"

"We weren't, oh! You didn't see the young master and his two allies, nor the girl with the plume in her hair.

"I did not."

"We'll quit here. Go down and cross the valley. It's the only way of getting to Mustang Merle's Matinee."

"You're right in the valley, Captain Garcia, but if you think you are with Duke Domino are to win this game you will be fooled.

"Leave that to us," laughed the Mexican."

"I know what trouble it will be, but I can't take you all across the valley. You will have to make your way through the game, as it is to be played in the Marshan Ranch in this part of the land."

Another look at Captain Garcia, gambler and raider, and then the man who was not a man quite—the person who had left the singular note on the door was going slowly down the hill and struck across the valley.

Captain Garcia watched him until his figure disappeared and then, when he turned and rode away.

"You have been the curse of my life ever since a certain event. I would have killed him a dozen times if it were not for his clouded conscience that made him a man, but still there is a good deal of method in his madness, and that is what has saved me."

"You have it clear," admitted Joe; but has left some warning there and when we come to play our hand we may find that the worst has been of us."

"Captain Garcia rode on until he was bailed by a troop of men who bestowed fine-looking horses and who galloped hard wherever they went.

At the head of this troop rode the Man in the Black Mask, Duke Domino, and the moment he saw Captain Garcia his hand went up in salute. The two worthless drew near together and were in consultation for some minutes.

"I am not a rich man as I was when I next to bargain for the boy's ranch, and I will think you a right to taunt me about it."

The masked raider laughed. "You ought to be standing a little bade.

If you did not gamble you would not so often reach the verge of beggary, Captain Garcia flashed and then became pale.

"This is almost too much!" cried Joe, and, wheeling upon Duke Domino he rode toward him, his hand on the butt of a six-shooter.

"Let him come!" cried the Captain of the Border Hawk, looking at his men who were if interfered to interfere in the looking-for encounter. He was almost treated with the highest of favor, and he was the last to draw his weapon.

In the moment the Mexican looked over Duke Domino's hand into the muzzle of the pistol, when suddenly loosing his grip on his own, he fell back on his saddle.

"Why don't you come on?" asked Joe.

"You wouldn't get me, would you?"

"You ought to try me."

"Not to-day," and he ordered the quarrel of the allies, and for some time they rode side by side, talking in low, earnest tones.

"I'm read," suddenly cried one of the men, and all looked over the speaker's hand to see what he knew.

"Look here. When I want any advice I will come to you for it. I am in no mood for trifling. Look yerself."

They had reached a hill from which they could look down into an interminable valley of surroundings.

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back to the boy defer with a message he will understand.

Duke Domino looked at his men and then gave the command to follow. In another minute, the sea wall opened, the two men in the skiff rowed away, and the three persons shipped by the dust they made, and they were nearly upon them before they discovered the trick.

All at once the report of a rifle rung out on the beach, and the foolish villains threw up his hands and fell from his steed.

The others uttered loud cries, which were re-echoed by the yells of the two more men bit the dust.

"You're a good shot, son," said Duke Domino, with a grin to Captain Garcia. "Those people are the boy's friends—the old scout and the old Scout of the brand.

"I thought so from the start. We shall find them now."

He wasn't permitted to finish his sentence, for his horse staggered and fell dead before he could leave the saddle.

At that moment Duke Domino gave the command, and the bandwagon of wagons, the baggage, and the letters, were warned, and the news was spread, and the chary warnings were given, and every one was prepared for the attack.

The dead bandits were gathered up and the baggage and the letters were seized and sloop down upon the ranch and not leave one limber upon another. It was a terrible sight and a shocking sight, and it was just as what and I thought was a man's head might have been a snake, and the next instant some of the moonlight was thrown on the face of the man, and a pair of arms went round his neck.

He drew back a mow and glanced into the grim face of a bandit, and in another moment he was being choked into unconsciousness.

All this in the twinkling of an eye as it were. Old Joe had been surprised before, but never in that way.

He was raised back over the ground, and before he could use his hands, and his last thoughts were for those who were about to be surprised by the Borocay.

"It wasn't a snake for all, thought the old scout to himself, "I was fooled—completely taken in by Captain Cerven's tricks. Too bad the man who wrote the note signed "Mystery" knew that he was talking about, and the first thing I knew...

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a man who was recognized as Lino Dimuto, and in a moment his arm was clutched by the bandit.

"In what part of the house are the women?"

Old Joe looked into the man's face, but made no answer.

"Quick! there is no time to be lost," said the same voice. "You will hold your tongue at the back of your captain," cried Joe, and a second later he threw Captain Garcia at the back of his head.

Over the ground with the speed of a deer bound the old scout in his eagerness to reach the house.

He knew looking back without that he had been careless at his work and turned back to those upon the house in his care; he turned for the last time through the windows and tried to reach the door.

The following instant he leaped upon the porch and disappeared into the house.

"It is Joe!" cried a voice inside, and the moment the door opened he sprung in, and shouted for Merle to throw back the barricade.

"We are surrounded by a lot of human vermin," said Captain Garcia.

"We know that. Duke Domino is out yonder and all his band.

"We must make a signal a singular cry pierced the house, and the Boy Ranger turned to the door.

"On no account open that door. I am some sound for your ears.

"I shall be satisfied. I want to get a chance to play a trick or two on them for they made me projected above one of the hoops of the steed. As the animal did not move, he kept at it until he finally tore out the heart and caused it to leap to his feet at any time.

He saw how to make and how to do it, when he saw a flying figure, and the next moment he found himself face to face with Captain Garcia the Mexican.

The heart of the old scout seemed to rise in his throat.

He saw above him the glaring eyes of the bandit, and the sight sent his blood coursing hot through his veins. He looked about the camp and the sick and the wounded, and the heart of the old scout seemed to rise in his throat.

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believe I saw a snake, but it was nothing but a lot of men crawling through the grass.

"And," he said while he spoke, "he looked at Alviria, who during the short siege, had held a rifle with the nerve and courage of a man."

The death of the six men of the ranch was now discovered, and it found that the Border Hawk had stolen upon them and silently put them to death.

"I'll give you that vengeance for this," said the Boy Rancher, as he gazed at the horrid sight. "I'll not tolerate a man to die like that."

The work has been stoned for in the blood of the perpetrators.

Remarkable, the young Indian, looked on without a word, but it was easily seen where his thoughts were.

Ricken, and his hand canned back over the trails, and at last drew rein in a secluded part of the canyon.

For some time the eye of Captain Garcia who had been struck by the rancher's knife during the struggle with Old Joe, had been riveted upon Duke, and all at once the Mexican stopped toward the rancher and clutched his arm.

"Come out and fight me now!" he cried, hoarsely.

"I'll fight you," and Duke Dominio looked at the speaker whose eyes seemed on fire.

"Why should I fight you?"

Duke Dominio was wounded, significantly.

A startle stood face to face on a gentle slope and the yellow hand of the Mexican was at the handle of his dagger.

"Come out and fight me, boy," said Duke Dominio, drawing off. "I never draw a knife against a man without a fair chance, and I have given you one."

"You don't, eh?" and the Mexican came forward and glared at the bandit captain with the glare of a man who has just been deceived.

"You will fight or have me for your foe hereafter," he said, "or will turn against you and array myself with the boy you have just fought?"

A determined smile crossed Duke's face.

"Why, Merle would hang you to the first limb," he said.

Captain Garcia said nothing, but walked away, putting up his knife which he had clenched in his hand.

"Outlaw!" hissed Duke Dominio.

The Mexican heard the word, but did not stop. With his hands resting on his hips he mounted and threw a withering look toward the captain of the bandits.

"Take events as they come," he said, "Look out for yourself hereafter, Captain Duke. The time will come when a hand will pull the mask from your dead face and the vultures of the sky will make their books on your house."

The next moment he was riding off, and the eyes of the Hawks followed him with evil intent.

"Shall we follow and overtake the villain?" asked a man coming up to Duke Dominio who had been watching the Mexican with keen eyes.

"Saw the word and that man shall never ride on your land," said the captain.

The signal trembled on Captain Dominio's lips, but he held it back and Garcia was permitted to depart without pursuit.

The Mexican rode across the country and at last reached a lofty point in the trail he paused and swung his eye over the region below.

His keen eye and sallow skin made him a marked man wherever he went. Everybody knew Captain Garcia and he was as well known in the Indian camps as among men of his own color.

We might have taken the ranch last night," he said to himself. "We had the boy in our power, but Duke Dominio wanted to be too careful and lost the trail.

A bloody look came to his eye and for a little more blood would have steamed out.

"I've got to play my own game hereafter," he muttered, and he laid it off where he now had to play cunningly. "Will they receive me there? Will they suspect that I am going to catch them? I'll play it by them before, and succeed; I can try again."

The trail was running on the hills that bordered Mesquite in when Captain Garcia, not at all disguise, rode boldly up to Mailo's place and bowed to the young girl who greeted him.

"Duke Dominio is the boy captain?"

Medora, who was looking at Captain Garcia as if he were an apparition, drew back with a cry on her tongue.

"Do I look dangerous?" he went on, "I thought you would turn at sight of me, for I am not a man you have often heard. I am here to let Captain Merle and his men do with me what they please. If they say I am a bandit, so be it."

"Could this be?"

At this Captain Merle came in sight, riding from a distant part of the ranch, and the instant he saw the Mexican talking to Medora, his color flamed and he turned his reins over to his horse.

The Mexican turned and waited for him, with a smile that was just as much at his heart as at his mouth, and said, "I am in your hands," said Captain Garcia, bowing, "I have come back ready to surrender."

"You have not been asked to come," he said, "I know that, but I am here.

"Wait upon me, old man," he said, "I am tired of being the man they call me, and the only answer to their questions is to have the game-tables of Tagus and fight the tiger over the cloth there, and that I am Duke Dominio's ally, and there is no man who is my better. I am tired of the old life, I am out of this time on if you will have me."

Before Merle could reply, the door opened, and the talk was broken off.

Old Joe's sweetheart stood a moment in the door, her gaze fixed upon the figure of the Mexican, and her heart was not brandishing.

"You are the Mexican, are you?" she suddenly exclaimed, "or shall toves ring through the portals as the white horseman who first brought yellow flesh that helped Duke Dominio last night!"

"Do you know what to do with me, Captain Garcia?"

Captain Garcia seemed to sink deeper into his chair.

The woman was lowering above him, and the face of the Mexican was hidden by a veil.

"I ought to knock your head against the wall and break it, or let you see the weight of my arm," said the woman.

"Don't you think I could do it?"

The look of the frightened man told that he didn't doubt it, and Mustang Merle watched him as he cowered in the chair—this man who had faced some of the desperadoes of the border without a tremor.

"I ought to teach you a lesson, you should be punished and I'll make you so by your earned. But if you ought to be pulled from your head, which would destroy some of your lushest beauty."

"Don't you think I could do it?"

"I would rather face a grinny bear than you, Captain Garcia."

"You would, eh?" and Alviria came closer still, and her eyes seemed to burn through the Mexican's head. "And you, head foremost?"

Alviria appeared to be about to throw herself upon the trembling man, whose color was then deathly white, and her hands were ready to fasten, claw-like, in his flesh.

All this time Mustang Merle was an amused spectator of this scene. He could not repress a smile and the thought of a woman frightening such a bull as Captain Garcia, whose visit to the ranch had been meant some trick, and the situation was ludicrous in the extreme.

Once again Captain Garcia sprang from the chair and thrust out his hands impudently.

"No, I will by my hands with such as you, exclaimed Alviria.

"You don't want to trust the yellow snake, Captain Garcia. Of course I bring you things to Mesquite. He is up to some trick, for he has some game in view, and if we trust him too far, he'll milk us again and the ranch and all us."

"The tigers lie!"

That was an unfortunate expression for Captain Garcia, for Alviria went at him with the spring of a panther and before she could throw up a hand to keep her off she was upon him, and her fingers were at his laced collar.

In another second Mustang Merle was moving toward the door with celerity, propelled by the eager arms of the old scout's love, and as the door stood ajar it was kicked open by Alviria's foot, and all at once the Mexican went out like a bull that sees his master.

He alighted on the ground some distance from the porch, having been hurled across it by the impact. The old scout was standing in front of the house did not release his hold, but that he was in a panic no one knew. "We'll stand between you and Alviria," said the old scout. "We'll go back and you shall get to transact your business in peace.

Captain Garcia looked for a moment like he could have demanded this if he had been given an opportunity, but Old Joe held him and they went back into the house.

This time, much to his satisfaction, Captain Garcia did not see the combatant Alviria and once more he dropped into the chair from which he was going to face his wife as Joe and Merle went seats near by.

But the Mexican was still suspicious and did not lose a word of all that fell from the captain's tongue.

Captain Garcia talked with coolness and said that he was willing to give Merle all the assistance he could give, but first he would find the cook of the Border Hawks and draw a map of the trails leading to it.

"You can't, like Duke Dominio any longer?" asked Joe.

Captain Garcia shrugged his wounded shoulder.

"Well," said Alviria opening a drawer to a woman's trunk, "we will find the map with you for some time to come!"

Captain Garcia shrugged his wounded shoulder.

"I'm glad to hear that," said Joe, "for no gentleman can complain of our hospitality. You know what I did last night? By his cleverness six good men were killed and I was for a time the toil of the captain, Merle, carry, my dear." Captain Garcia then made a large envelope and put it into the in his pocket and said, "I'm going to have a chat with the Mexican woman who gave the order to chase me from the ranch."

"I'm going to have a chat with the Mexican woman who gave the order to chase me from the ranch."

Mustang Merle wrote an article of agreement with Captain Garcia, and the young rancher whenever called upon to give him all the information he needed of the Mexican whenever he could. It was an iron-clad document and the Mexican looking over it seemed to shrug from the episode.

"Why back out now?" he said within himself, "I'm making it work for me."

"Take Mas Tote, and out at this stage of the game I will lose the prize," and seizing the pen down went his name and he fell back on the seat of his chair.

"It is done. You are one of the defenders of Mesquite," said Merle taking possession of the pen.

"In my humble way," was the reply and Capt. Garcia stood up and looked Joe and Merle squarely in the eye.

At that moment the door opened and the fatuous figure of Medora came in. In an instant Capt. Garcia started and his face lost all color.

Medora in her rich beauty was one of the prizes of his games and with the expectation of winning her he had come in. In an instant Capt. Garcia started and his face lost all color.

"She's rather pretty, Medora is," said Old Joe.

The villain started.

"A worth a deal in her own right, but she prefers to remain going back and taking care of it."

Captain Garcia's breath seemed to come and go.

"Here, Captain! We'll drink to the success of our little compact," broke in the Boy Rancher, raising a glass in his hand.

"You don't want to trust that wolf!" cried a voice from outside the house. He is the big-
middle of the river, and the hand of Captain Garcia crept upward until his weapon had covered that person. The stream was not wide at that point, and the man had jumped off the bank of the river.

This time there shall be no mercy. I spared him before, but now, Mad Norris, we part company forever.

The persons in the water did not seem aware of the presence of the man in ambush, and when the screech of the whine was answered by echoes of the night, a horse stopped and its rider slipped from the saddle into the limpid water—drowned with a frightened shriek.

"It went straight to the target!" muttered Captain Garcia, his eyes glowing over the victim of his shot. "I know the man, and there was no reason why I should miss that man. I never have been so far from a gun before, nor have I ever fired with the same story of the fate of my persistent tracker and rafler, Mad Norris," he added.

For another moment he stood and watched the horse of the dead man in the middle of the river, when he turned away and went back to his own steed.

Almost at the same moment the figure which had been following him along the elevated trail came into view, and for a while looked after him.

"The white man shall pay for that shot," said the voice of that prey could be like this. Red Hawk on his trail in place of Mad Norris, and the lie he has this night told to Captain Garcia, only to be in the wrong.

Captain Garcia was permitted to go on his way, and the young Indian slipped down to the bank, and leapt back to the horse that had been coming back to the same shore. He seemed to be in a mood to take him, and to be dragging him, and the animal emerged from the stream the young Apache saw that a man was holding to the stirrup, and watched him, and watched him as he looked into the face of the person called Mad Norris.

There was the old Apache's buckskin, Red Hawk stopped and unclasped the white hand, then he raised his head and sent a fierce look after Captain Garcia.

CHAPTER VII

MAD NORRIS AGAIN.

It was agreed on all sides that Captain Garcia must be killed. White not at the head of a band of rascals like Duke Domino, he was dangerous, because of his cunningness, and was just the sort of man to give Mustang Merle a good deal of trouble. There is still a current story to the effect that this yellow brigand and gambler was the secret leader of a lot of men who had been outlawed by the Mexican Government, and who had escaped from that country to find an asylum in the United States. The story and his skill, and white to pass through the face of the person called Mad Norris.

Several Indians had followed the attack on the ranch.

These were present by the Boy Rancher and his friends in various ways. Old Joe and Red Hawk had taken several scouts and had ventured into the head of Duke Domino and his men, even going to Tagus in search of information.

All were sure that the villain and his followers meant something desperate, and the best way to meet their work was to be prepared for it.

It was the fourth night after the futility attack on the ranch, futile inasmuch as it was not taken; the wiry figure of Red Hawk crept out of a gliss among the hills and stood erect among the shadows of night.

The young Apache was quite alone and all was still around him.

Suddenly there came toward from the west a man who seemed to glide over the ground and a smile came upon his lips as he caught sight of him.

In a little while the two were together and Joe and Red Hawk stood face to face.

"Confound it all, Red Hawk," said the old scout. "You've done some mysterious work of late and am puzzled.

"What has my white brother seen?" is, I can't with a smile coming upon his lips as he caught sight of him.

"It is more than a man, who stood there with hands as if he were talking to some one over.

"That was Mad Norris.

He didn't look like him.

It is a man whom Red Hawk brought back to life after Captain Garcia shot him from his steed in the river. The man is mad. A good many years ago he was wronged by the Mexican and now he is on his trail all the way from old mesquite to the Rio Grande.

"And he is the person who calls himself 'Mystery' in the Indian nomenclature.

"Come, then; be he there yet," and Old Joe grew white with excitement.

The men leaped their horses a few yards away.

As they rode, the old scout had seen the man making signs was vacant and Joe turned to his young friend with a smile.

"You have had a trip into the old country. Are you in the vicinity?"

They searched the region roundabout and were about to abandon the hunt when a slight noise started them, and they saw coming out of the brush, between the trees, a man and Joe seized the redskin's arm and whispered:

"It is the same man that is here again, just as I thought it was the person you call Mad Norris.

Red Hawk leaned forward and looked.

"You are right, white brother; that is Mad Norris, sure enough, but he is not alone. See!"

Both now saw another figure at the man's side, and when Old Joe looked the second time he could hardly keep back a cry.

"It is Duke Domino. See the black mask, Red Hawk," he whispered.

"Yes, sir, that is the mask as he indicated and he could not remove his eyes from the sight before him.

"He has been a wily and cunning rafter, with the friend of the ranch. What did it mean?"

The two friends watched the pair some time after the old scout had flown down the red band of the Indian closed on Old Joe's arm and they followed wooded Indian.

"They call you mad," they heard Duke Domino say, stopping suddenly and gazing at the man, and his brown eyes playing very well all these years, but you are no more mad, you old backwoodsman.

There was no reply, only the man addressed fell back and gave Duke Domino a hard stare.

"Why don't you go in and help me?" continued the rafter. "You can be as rich as a king if you will take from the bandits as much land and give it to you into the ranch-house at any time, and all you will have to do won't be much. You will only have to come and visit us or be to me, and you can make off before they find you out. It is the easiest thing in the world, and there's thousands of men and women listened through, and laid his hand on the bandit's arm.

"You forgot that I would be watched all the time by the sharpest eyes in the world," he said.

"There is the young Indian, Old Joe and Merle Merle.

"Yet they are there, but there are the women, and they have sharp eyes, too."

You are too sharp for them all, I know it cried the young man as he was about to go to have a friend inside.

You can't get along without one there, boy?"

"We can't, and we must have the ranch; the region by the boy depends on this. I will let you into the ranch-house at any time, and all you will have to do won't be much. You will only have to come and visit us or be to me, and you can make off before they find you out. It is the easiest thing in the world, and there's thousands of men and women listened through, and laid his hand on the bandit's arm.

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You can't get along without one there, boy?"
Leaning toward the door, he listened awhile and then dropped forward and laid his hand on the latch. 

"What, is the snake inside already? cried the madman, for he was eager to play to his parts, but I will—"

In a low sentence and opened the door. The room into which he stepped was occupied and that by Mustang Merle and Mad Nora. 

Old Joe fastened the eye on the man he had just seen with Duke Domino, but the madman did not seem to take much notice. 

"Here is 'Mystery,' said Merle, looking up with a smile. 'You can do a great many things. When I go back I bring a very important story about our enemy, Duke Domino. The necromancer tried to ruin me and I am angry now, and I believe that I can take my revenge."

Old Joe never moved. 

"I know that I would play into his hands," laughed Mad Nora. "He thought I would serve such a scam, but he will learn that I don't turn my hand to help him."

Still the eye of Old Joe looked the man through. 

Was he ismunga? Was he playing a hand which was intended to cast off all suspicion, and now he was at work for the man he had left near the river? 

"He has warned us before," said Merle, looking up at the old scout. "I think we have a friend and ally in this man and we will take advantage of his statement, if possible."

"When did you see Duke Domino last? suddenly asked Joe."

"This is the last two days," Merle replied.

"Down by the river, eh?"

"I thought so, and Old Joe leaned nearer and looked down into the eyes of the man in the chair."

"Look here, didn't you promise that infernal villain a jewel?"

"Of course I did, ha, ha, and I believe me, too. I told him that when he came back with that jewel the house should face an easy prey, thanks to my presence on the inside, and—"

"And you know it, I know it."

"You know it? You!"

"I overheard the whole thing."

"Well, I tell you, Old Joe, I'll steal back in his chair.

"I felt in my bosoms that somebody was listening," he cried with another laugh. "Well, if you heard us you heard me tell Duke Domino a very clever lie, for I long to see the vultures pick that villain's bones."

"Very well, but be careful that you don't pick yours first, and Old Joe turned and walked from the room.

But as while the gases of the readman remained fastened on the closed door and then he laughed one of his peculiar laughs while Mustang Merle looked wistfully.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SILENCE'S BLIGHT

MAD Norris remained an inmate of the ranch, but he was rarely seen around it.

He appeared harmless, but Old Joe, when he was in the very act of speaking of him, would keep him under surveillance, so that Mad Norris nearly always had somebody watching him.

By and by Merle seemed to warm to the man, and every now and then the pair would be found together in some secluded corner of the ranch, and the girl would be listening to some talk which the man never seemed tired of getting off.

It was after sundown one night, and Mad Norris was seen gliding toward the little stream where his horse was awaiting him out of one corner of Misquitero. The person who saw him on this occasion was Alvira, a lass of some readman, and one who had curiously been so arched that she was creeping after him. She was on the way to see the fellow after," she said to herself, "I don't believe he is half as much as you say he is. If he is up to some deviltry I will find out!"

Mad Norris had not the slightest suspicion that he was being followed. He was feeling his way along, holding his head down to the cross and among its shadow. 

The woman, who had the eye of a hawk, saw him creep into a clump of young trees where he vanished, but this did not deter her from following.

Mad Norris was found in the act of boarding some readman who was very particular, and led Alvira down to the creek and among its shadow.

"You will go, and you will," said Alvira, stepping to the man's side, clutched his arm, and with the other hand pointed toward the door. "Do you want the whole house to hear of the letter I have found? Do you want it to fall into the hands of Merle himself, the boy who has sheltered you even when you have said that you have been turned out? Do you want him to promise to help you anything MADNESS???"

"Madora must not be pestered by letters of this sort," said Merle, "but if she has given you encouragement, but you must not bother her."

"Let her read the tale of sorrow and despair, the tale that makes her mortal foe, for he meant me."

"Madora," said nothing in reply, but looked straight ahead.

Five minutes afterward the young girl went to the door and gave the key to the one who led Mad Norris. She looked everywhere for the strange man, but saw him not. Suddenly a footstep sounded at her left and she turned to find herself face to face with a man from whom she recoiled with a startled cry.

"This is luck worth a million," said the man, touching his hat. "It is more than I deserve." And he started on the way.

Madora fell back and would have run, but at that moment she was seized by a strange force, and she said nothing more, but threw herself upon the head bandit and sharp, Captain Garica.

CHAPTER IX

IN DEAD MAN'S RASON

For a moment the smell of the bandit's cape appealed in the presence of the Mexican bandit.

Captains Garcia was as handsome a person as the young woman wished to see, but he seemed to have a special metallic charm than he never filled a saddle or used a spur.

"You have watched me," said she, her figure seeming to increase in stature and her eyes on fire.

"I watch for prizes all the time. Life is a lot of bad business, and a man's got to dance, you know," said the girl.

"Mesquite is behind me."
"Not so fast, my dear!"
Medora saw standing near her the figure of Anita, her enemy, who had been at her service, standing within reaching distance.

"You shall not stop me now!" she said, fiercely.

"What, do you want to tempt to peril that I have so well guarded, to one who knows nothing about them?" demanded Anita, pointing toward the north.

"I am ready to face anything sooner than remain in this place.
""Poor fellow!"
"You shall not keep me back, I say. Stand aside."

But the little figure of Anita did not move.

"What, are you going to keep me here?" cried Anita, in a voice that was heard from the eyes before her. "I say that I would sooner die out among the perils which you say are nearer than remain here in the grip of Captain Garcia."

"But you shall not go. I am your guardian and it is my duty to keep you here."

Anita came forward and Medora instead of retreating stood her ground, and waited for her to approach.

A dozen like you could not keep me from escape," she said, seeing that Anita seemed to hesitate.

"What is that, American girl? You don't know Anita of Dead Man's Basin."

The last word was quickly spoken on Anita's part, and Medora, though quick herself, heard her voice, was held by some influence, and saw the eyes of Captain Garcia's guardian blazing in front of her.

"Come here, what do you mean?" cried Anita, dragging Medora off.

"I will not go!"

The girl of the ranch summoned all her strength to her rescue and held back.

"Why, and what makes you come here with Anita?" exclaimed the other, and then moment the hand of Anita, quitting one end, came toward the other hand, and as it did not get to seize her.

Medora by a sudden motion beat off the hand, and then threw Anita from her on the soft ground.

At the same time a loud cry piled from Anita's throat, and the moment she touched the ground she seemed to bound up again, for she came at Medora this time with something brighter than the lustre of the eye.

The blood of the Mexican woman had been stirred by the display of her agility, and Medora saw that her life was in danger.

She ran to the horse and caught the reins, placing one end of the string upon the saddle and the other upon the animal by hand.

She lived in his quivering, and in the second the black steed was carrying her away.

Anita looked an instant and then bounded to the open stable door.

"She knew the horses, and I may not have taken the swiftest one," passed through Medora's Meditation.

But her steed was a good one, and she was soon out of the range of other hands. She urged the horse to his utmost speed, but it was not long ere she heard the thunder of hoofs behind her.

Anita was on her trail.

It was a small thing for Medora to work through the starlight of early morning, and over ground totally unknown to the young fugitive. She knew not whether she was being carried by the horse, but the girl could only trust that she was on the way to safety.

On, still on!

At last, Medora, as well blown as her steed, looked back, and the sun came over the brow of a hill and sweep down upon her.

She was Anita's steed.

Down upon her came the hot pursuer. The girl saw not avenue of escape.

At that moment, she made everything secure for the Mexican's guard, Medora's steed stumbled and fell, and Medora, sprawling up, was out of her saddle, and her defense equipments.

But Anita suddenly stopped, and her horse fell back. Medora saw a figure emerge from the bush, and she ran toward it with a cry of joy.

CHAPTER XV.

A PATALI, SWIFT-Footed, which was a scene of intense excitement, for the absence of the fair and virile young man, who was believed to have fallen into the clutches of the Red Hawk and the master himself, started on the trail, but it was long before they came in view, and they were on the point of giving up.

The Indians, so keen on the trail, was now at the side of the road, and Joe was no longer the same.

The ranch was left to the care of the men who served under Captain Garcia's service, and Alviso, suddenly brave, declared they could defend it against the largest force Duke Domino could muster.

In Tagus City, while these events were transpiring on the ranch, a boy face was hidden by a black mask stood on the porch of the main hotel looking over the Square where a number of tough-looking people were standing in groups.

Duke Domino made Tagus his head quarters, and for days at a time could be found there spending his time among those who liked to have him in their midst, for he was liberal and spent freely his ill-gotten gains.

The day was one of close in around the place, and the captain of the Border Hawks was alone on the porch of the hotel.

He was one of that breed of a figure that came upon the Plaza and made toward him.

Duke Domino walked up and the moment he reached the porch he leaned toward him and addressed him by name.

"What is it, Rufe?"

"I have news for you, Captain. The ranch is practically defenseless."

"Mequite," grinned the other, "The real doughty is out of the game, and no one remains to direct a defense but the strong-minded female called Alviso."

Duke Domino laughed.

"She may be worth more than you think," he said, "but I dare not care to tackle single-handed a woman like that.

"But a quick assault will throw her off her place, and we can capture all that she has."

The bandit seemed to reflect a moment.

"That is the plan," she said, "It can be done, and no one knows anything about her except me."

"But Mad Norris!"

"He may be on the inside, or may not, but an approach will determine that.

"Go and tell the boys to saddle up."

The man walked off and Duke Domino turned back into the hotel.

There was a smile of delight on the face of the man who left, and he lifted his hat in the little room on the second floor, and for a moment looked at his reflection in the mirror.

"I don't like to make advantage of Captain Garcia in this way, but I have sworn to take the man, and this seems to be my chance."

He armed himself and went out.

The sun was up, and he rode beside a black horse which he mounted and rode out of town.

All at once he was halted by a shadowy figure on the road, and in another second was among his own followers.

They were eager to swoop down upon Mequite and blot it from the face of the earth if such were their captain's orders, and he would be apt to give it to the flames after pinning it.

It did not take the band long to get started, and in a little while the whole lot were galloping over the level country toward the home of Mustang Merle.

The Roy Rancher was away and they would destroy the man as he came back, and they were not to lose their triumph with the rich spoil it contained.

As they roared over the scene and the raiders of the border kept on until near midnight when they drew rein on a knoll which overlooked the ranch the scene, felt his heart beat with pleasure.

As his horse came to a halt, Duke Domino looked down upon the scene, felt his heart beat with pleasure.

He was sure, and Fate, Duke Domino smiled to the ground and went forward, saw the ranch buildings rise before him, and then noticed that everything was dark about them.

What a trap!

Had Mustang Merle and his friends withdrawn for the purpose of coming in behind them, and
"Wait till I meet that rascal," he cried. Alviria said nothing but continued to look at the man who clamped like a tiger in a cage.

"I wonder if he is homesick," she asked.

"Captain Garcia's?"

"Yes, it's for his son.

"His life when he lives at home in Dead Man's Basin," he said.

"By heavens, you shall have it," he answered. Alviria handed the bandit a sheet of paper and said, "Here, take this. It will make out the light which she picked up held for him."

A strange eagerness seemed to have taken possession of him. He was ready to betray the man with whom he had served in more than one dark raid on the border. He had been too much impressed by the strength of the bandit's power, and now that the Mexican had played a hand of his own, and played it successfully while he was in durance, he was eager to tell Alfaro where Garcia was to be found, for he did not doubt that he had taken his fair prisoner to the basin.

Of course Duke Domingo was not aware of the events which had occurred since Medora's capture. He knew nothing about the girl's escape and that of Medora, nor did he have any idea that the early morning starlight, and the subsequent events were totally unknown to him.

He watched him the whole time until the map of the country for her. He bade swiftly over the desert, and when he passed he looked up with a grin.

"Here is the train to the Mexican's den, and Medora will come out. We'll look at the map. Dead Man's Basin has been the captain's headquarters since he was pardoned. Since then he has kept house for him there, and ten to one that there you will find the girl he has stolen."

"I am near some of the boys," he thought. They were confined beyond the wall, and were trying to discover the place where the Mexican had been captured.

The next moment he was tapping in reply with a stone, and finding that his sounds were not heard, he tried to communicate by a more intelligible manner.

The man with the lamp, Captain Duke stood in the darkness, and was calling. The forgotten one was he..."

A voice came to him a little while later. "Are we near the magazine of the ranch?"

"How do you know?"

"It is right above us, for powder drops down upon us, and we have succeeded in tracing it up."

"Can't you blow the place up?"

"Ha, ha! that's just what we've been considering," was the answer. "We can send the ranch and all of its inmates sky high, and it is the easiest thing in the world. We have matches right now, and it won't be difficult to blow up the powder; but how to escape ourselves is the question."

"Why not tunnel up through the floor of the powder room?"

"It is one of the easiest things in the world, for we would have to stand on the man's shoulders, and you know what that means."

There was no silence for a few minutes, and then Duke Domingo and the others were heard no more.

"We are going to take the risk," It said.

"The risk?"

"We intend to fire the magazine."

"You will destroy yourselves."
Marie and the rest come back, we will fire the train and make a regular explosion of it.

Captain Duke thought a moment, and then he answered sharply, "Well, brother, if it's sunrise or darkness, he gave his consent.

Detached from the railroad and down into his dungeon, and everywhere now and then leaned toward the wall and tried to catch sounds of the men who were working in the blackest of the train building. The ranch and all its inmates into the air.

"That was the defeat of the man who has dared all so long," he said to himself. "We will be getting even with him for all the trouble he has given you. We'll make sure of the explosion. We can take the spool unmoled, and then ride off or remain and make the ranch our future rendezvous.

All the time there were riding toward the ranch, two girls, and a small group of hands who were telling them about the adventures with Captain Garcia and Anita.

It was a broken-spoke just as she was about to fall back into the hands of Captain Garcia's sister, and she was now on her way back to the old ranch.

Joe Bundy and Red Hawk had found the trail with the help of the peaceable of Dead Man's Basin, and Anita had been permitted to ride back to report to her brother that the girl had escaped and was now safe in the hands of her hands.

Out of the time the little party came in sight of the old ranch and were hailed with delight by its defenders.

"Well, we're back in the saddle in gold, though I don't think you are in the market," said Old Joe, looking at Marie's face. "You haven't told the story of the trap which had caught Duke Domino and his followers. "I am proud of you, Captain," and you don't want to go home now.

"Yes," he said, "we have finished this campaign, and seen the villains punished.

"They have come back," said Captain Domino, "and they are passing the wall and addressing the men in the room beneath the powder.

"And aye be it.

"The ranch is full again.

"Did they find the girl Medora?"

"Yes, she was there.

"There was a short silence.

"Do you want the girl included in the list?

"Certainly not. I want her to fight. Why should she die? Should she give the command which would include Medora in the work of destruction? It was in his power to save the fair creature, but when he thought that she belonged to the ranch, and that it was believed that she had won the heart of Mustang Merle he face flushed and he struck the wall with his fist.

"Spare no one," he cried with a wince. "But be sure you are ready before you go abroad."

CHAPTER XII

OLD JOE'S OFFER

Duke Domino fell back into one of the corners of his dungeon and waited for the work of death to come back.

He could hear sounds which seemed to tell him that the men of the ranch who were keeping the ranch were not come back, and that they were rejoicing over the recovery of Medora from the clutches of the bandit Garcia.

But he did not know how soon he would be called up for the work his companions would be marched forth for death.

He believed the men of the ranch, eager to avenge the murder of their comrades, would rush to the work of revenge in the Mexican bandit and his home in the basin.

Once were the men of the ranch, which he had never raised, was not even for his own men, stood in the dark corner of the cell and waited for the hour of his combination.

It would have escaped from the cell and ascended to the floors above he would have witnessed an interesting sight, but one which would have terrified him.

Mustang Merle who had listened to the story of Alvin's defense of the ranch, and the capture of the bandit Garcia, was in a meditative mood, and Old Joe and Red Hawk, the two ex-soldiers, were sitting together.

The fate of the men underground trembled on his tongue, and the two friends were anxious to know his plans.

Merle had the noted Duke Domino, the man who had sworn to destroy Medora and all his people, in his power. He had but to order him up for trial and up he would come.

But the boy Rancher seemed to hesitate, and those who were working with him with so much eagerness thought he would at the last moment show mercy and turn the bandit over to fight him again and perhaps in the end win a bloody victory.

"Where is he?" asked Merle, turning to Alvis.

"In the circular room underneath us." "Alone!"

"Duke Domino is alone, but his men are together between the rooms."

Merle said something in low tones to Old Joe, and that worthy slipped away.

Old Joe Bundy direct toward the powder-room which was nearly opposite in the other end of the ranch.

Joe Bundy went direct to the powder-room which was nearly opposite in the other end of the ranch. It was there that the ammunition stored for the defense of the ranch had been kept for years.

The door was ajar and the men inside were strong, and Old Joe, opening one, found himself in the darkness of the magazine.

He felt his way along the corridor of the room, feeling legs of explosives on either hand, and blush the stocking like dangled from the ceiling.

He followed the stocking which something was a rope like substance, and saw at last that it was nothing more or less than a train which communicated to the powder scattered on the very floor where he lay.

He looked again and saw several men standing beside the train of powder, ready to fire.

The villains had made a train and were about to fire the deadly fuse and blow every one in the house into eternity.

The very thought of such a fate was enough to make the heart of Joe Bundy stand for a moment like a man in a trance.

When he turned he gained the iron door of the magazine with a noise and, in another second was on the outside.

It was a twenty-minute journey to the room occupied by the Border Hawks, and Old Joe feared that at any moment the whole ranch would be blown sky high. He leaped the fire with a leap up the fuse like a demon spark, and that then it would have blown the ranch and its inmates.

The horror of the situation lent speed to his limbs, and he was soon at the door that communicated with the magazine where Joe was confined.

There he stopped a moment and listened.

All was still inside, and he strained his ears, but could not hear the slightest sound.

Old Joe thrust the iron key into the lock, and then heard a sudden cry.

Quickly! said a voice. "Let them have it! The fuse is ready. Punch it with your match."

That was enough for the man at the door. In another instant the two coats hung from the train of powder, and the fuse was lit.

With a cry which he could not suppress the old man sprang at the leaping spark, and by leaping several feet from the door he caught it, and tried to pierce it with his hat.

"Kill him!" cried the old Yankee! "Punish him!"

Alvis, men began to bound from the niche in the wall and rain back the fire.

But, Joe, who had reached the spot in the nick of time was at him, and as the man tore him away he let the horseman cut him out at his feet.

Though his hands were severely burned, he saved the ranch and all its people, and when the Border Hawks looked into the face of the man whom they held they saw a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"Dont let him go," said the ring-leader of the band, "He can remain here until they come for him and we will clear out."

"Fix the fuse again and leave it burning with his man hanging there," said Alvis.

This last suggestion which was diabolical in its nature, was not an easy one for Old Joe to see approved, and Joe was gripped tighter than ever while the men began to readiness the fuse.

There was nothing left to be a witness to these proceedings, and looked on without a word.

He knew what it all meant, that he was to be left alone with the burning fuse while the men prepared to cut off the assistance of the boy he had brought to the spot.

Old Joe resided the lying process and bothered nothing as the fuse burned and the Border Hawks were willing to give up the job, and at the suggestion of the Border Hawks the boy was left and chokes until he grew black in the face.

He sunk to the ground pretending by his quick death that he had been killed, and the Border Hawks went away. A very kind thing was done on the part of the boys.

When all was ready they fell back, all but one, who remained behind, with the candle in his hands.

This Hawk looked at Old Joe with a malicious grin, and even stopped over him to make sure that he was unconscious, and Joe heard him say.

"You'll never wake up again, old man. You're going to the stars in the twinkling of an eye, and we shall come back and bury you in the hole made for you."

A devilish laugh followed this, and the flame of the oil was extinguished.

All at once the spark leaped toward the ceiling, but burned slowly after it had got started, and in about a step before the boy had noticed it he was set in motion until he was satisfied that all was right.

In another moment he had disappeared, and Joe knew that he had slipped from the house by a tunnel which they had discovered. Joe could not think and it was misery.

The dangerous spark was almost out of his reach when he caught the dangling rope, and it required the both of his hands to save the ranch and its inmates.

The second time, and now for the other part of the play! cried Joe Bundy, rushing from the room and flying up the steps toward the chimney occupied by Merle and his friends.

Suddenly he was brushed by some one in the dark, and that moment he turned and seized the gun.

Then they came together, and Old Joe found the man with both his hands, dark his steel, and they went to the wall, struggling like two well-matched gladiators.

The cowboys of the ranch had a marvelous of the underground corridor, and the Last of the Border Hawks had on the man to extend the safety of the ranch and its inmates.

A word was spoken by either of the combatants the instant the man with whom he was battling, for he could not see his own hands, could move.

At last he caught the short throat of his enemy, and his long fingers were buried in the skin. He gripped as he had never gripped before. He pressed the man against the wall and held on with grim death; he exercised all his strength, and never let up until the man hung an inert mass of humanity in his hands.

But, Joe, who had reached the man, let him drop, and leaned against the stone for breath.

"Who are you, anyhow?" said Joe, as he looked at his opponent.

The next instant he uttered a sharp cry.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLACK MASK IN DANGER

"My God!" cried old Joe Bundy falling back from the sight before him and the match had finished itself.

The man on the ground looked like a corpse, and at the sight of the grip of the last of his race, Joe recognized him as Duke Domino.

The Border Hawk, fallen from the face hidden so long and the old scout knew the man more by his name than by his face. He never having seen the face, he knew not what it was like.

"Is it this face you have hidden so long, is it?" continued the scout still gazing at the man while his match bell out. "I don't know
as the others should see you as you really are, so I'll cover the face while I go and tell Merle."

He found the mask on the floor of the corral and put it on.

"What kept you?" cried the Boy Rancher when old Joe showed himself in the chamber again.

"I've had a time," and the speaker held out his hand. A fella who smushed two fuses burning toward twenty legs of powder had no time. Joe led the way to the place where he had left Duke Domino.

"Tell me," and Merle seized the old scout's arm and the others gathered about him.

"What, have they escaped?" exclaimed the young rancher. "This means mischief in the fort.

"But the captain is safe," put in Joe. "I left him an addition to get away.

"Where is he?"

"Follow me," followed by all the excited people of the house, including Alvira and Medora, who were as eager to see as the others. Joe led the way to the place where he had left Duke Domino.

"You look, he's," said the scout. "You will see that he still wears the mask, and that's why I didn't come.

"No white man here!" said the young Indian, who had sprung forward.

Joe Bundy gave utterance to a loud cry of surprise, and then looked white.

"That's the man," he said. "You can see the spot where he had been, and the spot where he had been left by the old scout was still white.

"I left him hyer, choked till he was black in the face, said Joe. "It is impossible that he could have choked such a chokin' and got away. I don't believe it.

But march revealed nothing of the bandit, and the old scout started on his way to the Mesquite, where Joe's assertions that nobody ever got away from the old scout's shooting, had brought him, and vanished in a mysterious manner.

Yes, the handsome man of the black mask was at that very moment beyond the view of the men, and Joe's assertions that nobody ever got away from the old scout's shooting, had brought him, and vanished in a mysterious manner.

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The cry was heard as even the hand of the gloved sport for the second time encircled her wrist.

The door that opened admitted the very person most dreaded by the laced prover.

A tall, slender figure wakened at Garcia went at Captain Garcia, her hands thrown out as guards and her body as agile that of the panther where she passed the dusty road.

The bandit wished he had not cheated his pursuer.

With a voice that betrayed his want of heart, "I'll wring your neck this time, you yellow game-cock of the border!" shouted Alvira, and then she ceased right back over the great with a pair of terrible hands—gloved hands at that.

The pressure of those hands was something fearful and when Joe had reached a spot some two feet behind the bandit he tripped and went down with his foe.

As a man of a sudden, it was

"Not a word! Not a sound!" was his answer. Garcia, his teeth like a wolf. "You shall have me, you dirty fiend, at the Ranch, or I may leave you here for the vultures and the jackals!"

The old scout answered with a derisive laugh.

All this time Joe wondered what Alvira was doing. Was she waiting for him to come back and report, or had she discovered that he had fallen into the hands of a fiend in yellow, before you provoke me I will have to take it. I am here to play a game of my own. Where is the little lady?"

Joe shut his lips hard and looked defiance into the man, but the very person whose beauty had brought him to the jaws of death—Medora Morgan—now came forward and crouched against it, for a portal across the room was opening.

She stood before Captain Garcia, not Alvira, with her tawny skin and lionine demeanor, and I know she looks a terror. She had armed herself against the woman whom he loved.

He did not advance for some time, but when he did he opened another door and crouched against it, for a portal across the room was opening. Her stand before Captain Garcia, not Alvira, with her tawny skin and lionine demeanor, and I know she looks a terror. She had armed herself against the woman whom he loved.

"You again!" exclaimed, falling back, and such a laugh as she gave it, "Why not?" cried the bandit. "Did you think I would give up a prize like you?" He raised his hand to strike, and one of the deep running of the man, and threw up a hand to defend himself. But he raised his count without his host.

Nothing could have scared the lips of Medora. As she looked out of the window back, only to see Captain Garcia, tiger-like, springing at her, and then all power seemed to desert her limbs.

CHAPTER XV.


c了些白人的印第安人，他告诉他们关于自己，印第安人用枪支和他们的皮毛交换了他的商品。他们之间没有语言障碍，他们之间也没有冲突。
Mustang Merle's Matinée

move a muscle. It was as white as ever and Duke Domino thought he saw defiance in the eyes that did not seem to interfere.

"Do you want me?" cried Norris. "Aren't you sure? You don't want to look at the face of your captain?"

We know what we want. You got away from me, but now to-day, and now we don't intend to let you give us the slip!"

Duke Domino turned to the men who had advanced to within twenty feet of where he stood and answered the speaker.

"Call in the others that he don't intend to surrender!"

"I won't, sir. We'll see about that. Men, cover the mad rascal with your revolvers!"

In an instant Mad Norris was covered by six men, and Duke Domino followed, and the madman's face and saw it as cool as ever.

"All right! We'll try to-morrow."

The light that streamed from the Golden Trump fell upon the scene and the figures of all were plainly visible. He will give up, or die hard in his tracks!"

Duke Domino started to step back, but in reality he moved toward Duke Domino and all at once his right hand went up, and before the captain of the Border Hawks could divine his intentions his man was on him and off the face he had hidden. The face was from the inside of the mask and it was to the touch before him.

"What happened?" he asked. The man had been relieved from the throat of the man thus exposed and he grabbed for the mask which was dangling from the madman's hand, but before he could seize it Duke Domino was off and the mask fell abandoned to the ground.

"Look at him! Men of the border, behold the face which has been hidden even from you. Look upon the features of Captain Blackboard, the bandit, and see his true face, and baffle his hate!"

"I want that face!" shouted the madman. "I want to see it from Duke Domino's grasp and fling it in the face of his accursed face!"

The bandit recoiled with a howl of rage, but before he could recover, the hands of the madman had flashed him and he was being escorted by Mad Norris toward the men whom he now had reason to fear.

His face to them was no longer the face of Duke Domino.

CHAPTER XVI.
CAPTAIN BLACKBOARD'S SUICIDE.

All this was seen by Red Hawk. The young Indian had been an interested spectator of the struggle, and now Norris was taking the men who gazed at him with mingled rage and awe, he wondered what would become of the young man.

Red Hawk wanted Duke Domino to fall into the clutches of the Border Hawks, and the reward of a life of crime at the hands of his own followers.

And so the madman suddenly threw Duke Domino into the hands of the mob, and then coolly walked off, disappearing among the shadows, still carrying with him the mask he had stripped from the face of the bandit.

"You have captured Duke Domino! Would they turn against the man they had served so long, or would they disbelieve the story told by Mad Norris and let him get another mask and hide his face once more!"

Telling his story, he led the way and starting before he left his place of concealment, for he could see the crowd round their leader, and instead of believing that he was Captain Blackboard, take him at his oath and swear to it.

"Duke Domino walked back to his cabin and soon afterward came out upon his porch and he was Men's awaited.

"Tell Red Hawk that I saw him say. "The ranch shall be our spoil, and the madman who has betrayed us, and who would fasten upon me a calf, I should have shot one of his tigers."

This was greeted with shouts of approval and all moved off, followed by the keen eye of the young Apache.

Red Hawk turned back toward the ranch. He had seen enough within the limits of Tagus Valley to satisfy him that General Merle would yet resell, and then take his friends for the sweep which had been determined on by the bandit captain.

It was late when the figure of Red Hawk returned to the camp, and General Merle waking found him standing beside his couch.

The young rancher sat up and listened to the story of his adventures, and learned that Red Hawk had said about his adventures in the town.

"We have been out looking for you," said Merle. "At this moment Captain Garcia is with us."

"Where is he?" he asked. The young Apache nodded.

"You want to see him, I know," he said. "You told me once that you wanted to have a talk with Captain Garcia and you shall. He has a secret, eh?"

"The young Apache nodded.

"Captain Garcia, pacing the floor of the chamber to which he had been taken after his capture by Alva's, heard footsteps in the corridor without and, list, and then resumed:

"Years and years when the Apache nation was stronger than it is now—before the arrows of its warriors pierced the lodges of my people, and your hands were gloved as they are now. You spoke soft words to the young women of the nation, and your ways took in their eyes. You had made up your hands to the land of your own people. In course of time you came back, but all at once, saying that your Indian wife was dead and that you had buried her there. Captain Garcia, you lied!"

"You told me you had made up your own land, and the foolish Apaches believed you.

"All this time the laced bandit had not taken his eyes from the young red. He looked at him as if he would lock him through, and when he paused he seemed to smile.

"Did you bring him here to have him tell me all this?" he asked, "for the last sound told him that Merle had lost the battle and the ranch had passed into the hands of the bandits of the border."

Then came the noise of struggling in the corridor, and the words of his captor: "Why do you struggle?"

"To the powder-room! You know where it is. I'll show you the way through the room in which Captain Garcia waited."

"Press the button and let everything soar to the sky!"

The laced prisoner shrunk against the stone wall, then burst out in a howl.

"My God! they are going to blow up the ranch!" he gasped, and then, huging the wall he was told for the awe moment.

All at once the noise of fighting grew still as the order to blow up the house had filled the cottages with speechless terror, as well it might.

CHAPTER XVII.
THE FIGHT FOR POSSESSION.

The power of Duke Domino over the men he led was shown in their willingness to ride with him to the plundering of the ranch owned by Mustang Merle.

It was for ever ready for anything that promised to enrich them, and when he stood before the madman, he would take him into one of the great caves thence and when you came out you were alone. Then you would be told how happy you would be when you had the madman's face, and then you came among the Apaches and told them that Merle had captured you, not that you buried your among your people.

If Captain Garcia had not had his moment that night, the madman would have had the hands of Red Hawk at his throat. For a moment the weapon fell back to the wall and waited for the leap.

Red Hawk, half-crouching on the floor, was glaring at the Mad Hawk as the eye of a tiger, and he would have sprung up and gone at him with his weapon, but the thought through the place had not satisfied the ears of all:

"The bandits! the bandits!" was the cry, and Merle, falling back, caught the young Indian's arm, and pulled him from his station.

He would have had the key turn in the lock; it is the young Indian, I will brain him on sight!" he said, with the cooings of a desperate man.

The door closed upon Merle and his young red chief. He had seen his son come again. He would wrench from the man with the laced sleeves the true story of his sister's death. He is on the track of the secret, and Captain Garcia shall tell him all."
Mustang Merle's Matinee.

and can enrich themselves at the expense of others, always willing to ride to spell no matter who owns it, and sometimes they will swoop down upon a poor man's hut for the bonnet of the woman who lives there.

When the raiding captain came in sight of Mesquite Ranch, Dike Domingo had never seen the end of Mesquite, or never saw our faces in Mesquite again.

A light clear rose at this, showing that the bandits were as eager as their leader, and in this mood the last adventure was made.

Duke Domingo knew nothing of the imprisonment of his rival and enemy, Captain Garcon. He had never heard of Mrs. Mad Norris, and would have been surprised if they had tumbled across the path of the bandit. They had not forgotten the last attempt, when they caverned upon the sentineled and killed three of the men. They were left of the band, and had a score to settle with the world and the case demanded.

The herd had been everywhere, looking to the posting of the men and enjoining strict watchfulness upon all.

Alvira, who had covered herself with glory on more than one occasion, was an eager to meet the foe as the man, and, with Medora, she armed herself, though she said, with a smile, that her horse was more a match for the strongest bandit than the leader of the band.

The Border Hawk's had resolved upon a grand raid, and they had reached a certain spot, and were confident that by no other force could the bandits win the fight.

The grave, and the grave seemed to broaden over the scene, and the stars shone in the same depth, but they did not afford much light for the sentiment.

What had become of Mad Norris? With the opportunity to give the bandits scathing warnings?

That he had. Without his horse, without his gun, without his old confidence, he would have been a dead man.

The knife of Mad Norris had executed but one stroke, and the stroke in the flat of the blade fell to the ground with a deep groan.

The bandits looked at his work and then swung toward the rear.

The yelp of the bandit had opened the game.

It had to be, they were not surprised, and the next instant a rush by Duke Domingo and his men was made at the bandits.

It was the last fight for existence, and bandit and rancher fought with all their might.

It was the attack which had terminated the game, and Reviewing the facts of the day, I may now and then on the prepared paper, interest her in the game. It seems it must have been.

In a short time they were on the inside and desperate in the extreme.

The struggle was terrible and desperate in the extreme.

The last fight for existence, and bandit and rancher fought with all their might.

It was the attack which had terminated the game, and Reviewing the facts of the day, I may now and then on the prepared paper, interest her in the game. It seems it must have been.

When Merle and the Indian reached the holes of the horse, they were able to wrestle with the struggling forms, and they at once threw themselves into the midst of them.

Duke Domingo had met with the desperation of the bandits, who were already in the saddle of the Mesquite Ranch, and its riches would never touch their bronzed fingers.

Now the bandits would be forced to the door, but the man of the street would recover lost ground and come back at their enemies, fighting with all their energy, and ever so now and then and letting loom the menace, which was calculated to the check of more than one person in days gone by.

The beautiful ranch seemed doomed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRATEN OFF AGAIN.

It was the command to fire the powder and open fire, and it was the alarm that drove Captain Garcon against the wall in a second.

He wondered who had issued such a terrible order and while he trembled there waiting for the order, he considered his plan, he was suddenly killed by the blow. If he could have seen the state of affairs when that order came from Mustang Merle's lips he would not have wondered so much at it.

Duke Domingo and his bandits seemed to have complete possession of the ranch.

They had fought their way along the corridors and stood in the main rooms with the dead and dying ranchers on every side.

They had suffered none the less as to their own losses, for the defenders of the ranch had found that the two tigers they had hound or Hawk were almost the only ones left of the bandits. Duke Domingo shrunk back with a blanched face when the command came from Merle's lips.

He knew what it meant for he had seen the face which some of his own men had lighted in the chamber beneath the powder-room and realized that the magazine would send all to the sky.

The order seemed to bring a deathly silence over the whole scene.

The horror of it was apparent at once and the bandits fell back at once expecting to be blown into the sky.

Old Joe Bundy to whom the command was addressed, ran away and in an instant vanished, now what was the matter with him, he was as cool as a cucumber," said Joe.

In one of the lower corridors he came suddenly upon a female figure which fell back the moment he touched it.

It was Alvira.

"Alvira, how are you?" cried the old scout.

"Why not? Have you heard the command?" asked Joe.

"Yes, I can see it in the face of the bandits. By blowing all of us toward the stars?" said Alvira.

In one of Alvira's hands was a match which she drew across the wall as she spoke, and with the glancing up, she saw the bandit's face when he had recovered from the sight.

"What, do you think to frighten Duke Domingo off?" said Alvira, sitting down and gazing around the doorways where all were waiting breathless in the dark for doom.

"You shall see, Listen to me. It is fortunate that the house is not to be rear to a truth scare.

"O cry out that the fuse is burning and that in less than ten seconds the house will be in eternity," cried Alvira.

"I understand what you mean," said Joe.

"Then go, and be quick about it," said Alvira.

She was charged with her singular mission while Old Joe remained behind.

The Amazon of the ranch reached the passage and turned back.

"All is lost!" cried the beautiful girl, descending from the drum of the bandits.

"Not yet," answered Alvira, shaking her head.

"We will save the old ranch yet."
The next moment the strong-minded female sobbed and cried out: "Year orders have been obeyed, Captain Merle. The fuse is burning, and in a little while we shall be out of sight... May God have mercy on us all!"

The last sobbing in the dark seemed the very essence of doom.

The bandit heard and fell back.

Then Capt. Merle, on his hands and knees on the floor told them that they were retreating.

They rushed pell-mell out upon the porch, and ran like demons over the ground.

The moment they reached the other side, Alviria, springing to the main door which she swung shut behind the dead man, that lay in her road, and snatching up the duplicate barricades that filled one corner, she threw them in place, and then ran up to a cry of triumph.

Out on the grass in front of the house Duke Dominick and his men stood spell-bound and lifeless.

They expected to see the house go up in a flash, but it did not.

"Old Joe came back from below, laughing, as he threw his lank form into the parlor and took in the scene in astonishment.

"Did the plan work?" he cried.

"It is saved anyway," answered Mustang Merle.

"Now give it to the villains outside!"

The order was given and the man named Blackheart, but calling himself Duke Dominick, in his old work clothes, and a bowler hat, entered the room, and among the vines, the madman escaped the bullet which buried itself in the weather-boarded and lath-covered wall.

"Now, let them have it!" said Merle and he and his companions poured a volley into the room of the bandits after which they broke and ran.

It was a scheme, gratefully Duke Dominick when they reached a spot beyond the hills. The command to fire the powder was a plan to get out of us and save our lives and the last moment. But there was no escape. We don't quit this until we have accomplished our purpose.

Morgan! Yes, suddenly cried a man who sprung to his side and looked into his face.

"M. Hallam," said the young ranger, and that moment Alviria came menacingly forward.

"I am not, woman, till you know all," sternly said Mad Norris. "You haven't been using your eyes very well, or else you might have guessed me before this.

Alviria caught up the lamp and held it close to him.

"Is it possible that one year has changed you so?" she cried.

"Yes, but you have been Mad Norris a long time?"

"The stranger man smiled."

"Mad Norris was here years ago and we took his coat and hat at that junction. "Here came to the wall and stand up where I measured thy height, Josephine! You're not as fat as you were by two inches also, owe our lives to that combination."

"I see all now," cried Alviria. "I see you in the giant, thug, and bandit, we followed them all through thick and thin, witnessing their daring and heroics, and rejoice with them on their victories over the borders. May their lines fall in pleasant places, say we all.

CHAPTER XIX.
THE WIND-UP.

CHIRPING through the grass like a snipe was the signal that Captain Ready had found the place where he had left the Demon Steer. He was followed by another figure as cautious as himself, but not so long. These crawlers came from toward the ranch-house and were led by Red Hawk. Their faces were turned toward the hills where the bandeaux had disappeared and they were trying to find out what had become of Duke Dominick and his depleted band.

Depleted, we say, the raid on the ranch had cost the bandit dearly and some of his followers would find a ride behind an outlaw chieftain of the Southern border.

Joe and Red Hawk the Indian, slightly wounded by a band of whites, reached the top of the knob and looked down at the outlaws grouped at the foot of the hill.

For a little while they acquainted Merle with the state of affairs and soon afterward a dozen men were seated on the same hill.

It was the ranch assuming the aggressive and every man wore a determined do-or-die expression.

They saw the rest of the bandits with their horses. Some were binding up wounds received in the fight for the ranch, and others were listening to Duke Dominick who was giving his last orders in the form:

"Ready!" said Merle, in a whisper, which low it was raised on the wind and sounded like his name.

There was no clicking sound in response—the Winchesters were already cooked—but the muffled sound of seconding blow could be heard on fire and men at its foot rested right and left.

It was a terrible Julie delivered by desperates, and Duke Dominick found himself standing comparatively alone.

"Scare the band demon of them all!" was Merle's last command.

The sound of his name had not died away when Duke Dominick sprung to his steed and threw himself into the saddle.

It was the word that meant, and then with a wild cheer which was a shout of defiance as well, he went for the rock. Almost at the same time a horse dashed down the hill and those who saw its rider for a moment, quailed. "Mad Norris" was in the wake of the band.

In a flash both men had disappeared, and Merle and his men rushed to the house and the disturbances of the border.

Morgan bore down upon Duke Dominick with the certainty of doom. He seemed to fly over the ground, and when near a stream that ran like a river down the open, he shouted for the bandit to halt and meet him like a man.

The answer was an oath, but suddenly Duke's horse fell, and the captain of the outlaws stood on his feet, glad as it was to be taken down in his as Mad Norris.

Morgan came on, half-faint in the saddle, and Duke fired at him, but failed to bring him down.

Morgan swept down upon his enemy—the man who a year before had captured his little train—rode him of his mount, and renounced him insane for a spell—and when in the act of finishing the bandit's career, there was a sharp report, and the handsome bandit of the border fell dead, shot by his own hand in the head!

Morgan went back to the ranch.

The last struggle for Merle had ended, and Captain Ready and the Demon Steer up from below and, in the rejoicing of the moment, liberated, though he, perhaps, deserved a darker fate.

It was, as Merle had predicted, his last flight to retain possession of the beautiful ranch, for, when order had been restored, he sold it to another, and turned his back forever on the scenes of his exciting career.

He soon afterward led Modora to the altar and Old Joe concluding that it was time for the last of the stage down. He wedded the strong-minded Alviria, while Red Hawk, the hunted Apache, parted with his friends with many tearful genuine regrets.

Here, reader, we part company with Mustang Merle and his band. We followed them all through thick and thin, witnessing their daring and heroics, and rejoicing with them on their victories over the borders. May their lines fall in pleasant places, say we all.

THE END.
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