Buffalo Bill stood dauntlessly at bay, as with wild desperation the fierce Cheyennes tried to gain the room by the cellar stairs.
BUFFALO BILL'S SCARLET HAND;

OR,
The Accusing Blood Stain.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL"

CHAPTER I.

THE SHERIFF ACCUSED.

"Scoundrels will sometimes pose as honest men, and even get into public office!"

The words were spoken by Buffalo Bill.

Before him stood Jim Thornton, sheriff of Arapaho County, tall and gaunt, armed to the teeth, and with the face and mien of a border ruffian.

About and behind Thornton, and edging in toward the defiant scout, were a number of Thornton's heelers.

Buffalo Bill stood alone, with his back to the door.

He, too, was armed, like Thornton; and the sheriff and his son well knew that, if crowded into a corner and forced to fight, there was no more dangerous man on the whole Western border.

The noted Western scout had just accused Jim Thornton of standing in with ruffians, and releasing from jail the noted frontier bandit, Black Ivan.

Buffalo Bill had captured Black Ivan, and for temporary safe-keeping had placed him in the jail at Colburn.

It was in the early days, in northern Nebraska, when outlawry was rampant on the plains and prairies, when the fierce Sioux and Cheyennes had hardly yet been subdued, and almost every man on the border went armed and held his life in his hand.

Buffalo Bill had come into the Traveler's Rest, the principal place of refreshment in the town of Colburn, having learned but a few minutes before of the escape from the jail of Black Ivan.

There he found Thornton and some of his adherents drinking and gossiping at the bar.

Apparently, no attempt had been made by the sheriff to go in pursuit of the escaped outlaw.

A question from the scout concerning the escape of Black Ivan, couched, it must be admitted, in no complimentary language, had brought a hot retort from Thornton, and the warm words that followed seemed likely to lead to blows, or worse.
Thornton felt the effect of liquor. His face was red, and his beady black eyes glittered with a dangerous light.

Only his fear of Buffalo Bill kept him from launching himself upon him.

"D'y mean ter insinivate that I ain't an honest man?" he cried. "'Fer, if you do, I has it out with you right here and now."

Buffalo Bill lifted his finger, and shook it in Thornton's face.

"I don't insinuate, Thornton; I make plain statements; and I say that, if you did not release Black Ivan, you planned his escape from the jail. Whether you released him personally, or some of your ruffians did it with your consent, makes no difference."

"'Slug him!" some one hissed.

The growling roar that went up from the hairy throats of these ruffians was so ominous that it would have alarmed an ordinary man.

Buffalo Bill was no ordinary man. He did not quail before that ominous sound.

Yet he drew no weapon, though knives and revolvers were flashing.

Encouraged by the backing of his men, stung by the charge against him, and by the fear that he would be considered a coward if he let those words pass without violent remonstrance, Thornton leaped at the scout.

He was as quick as a coiled spring released suddenly, and his face was flaming.

The blow of his huge fist grazed the scout's cheek, even though it was permitted to do no further injury; and then Thornton fell up against the wall, knocked headlong by the scout's pile-driver stroke.

He tumbled over into the arms of his friends.

Buffalo Bill's cheek was bleeding where Thornton's knuckles had grazed it.

He saw half a dozen revolvers lifted and pointed at him.

His own revolvers leaped out, and swung up to a level with lightning rapidity.

"The first man who touches a trigger gets my lead!" he said, in a quiet voice, which had such deadly intensity of meaning that it was heard by all.

With his left hand he opened the door behind him.

Thornton was gasping and trembling.

"Thornton," said Buffalo Bill, "this thing isn't settled between us, understand. You're surrounded here by your ruffian friends, who would like to murder me, yet don't dare risk trying it. But I'll see you again; and when I do——"

There was a movement toward him, and he did not finish the sentence.

With both revolvers again lifted, and pointed into the faces of the angry men pressing toward him, he backed slowly and coolly through the doorway.

Jack Lathbury, the one-eyed saloon-keeper, who loved a fight, and had no friendship for Buffalo Bill, looked on from behind his bar in awed admiration of the gamy scout as the latter backed thus from his foes, and held them at bay with his revolvers.

Once through the doorway, Buffalo Bill sprang quickly aside.

As he did so a half-dozen bullets splintered the panels where he stood.

With a low laugh he bounded away, running a few steps, and then turning toward the back of the house.

He mounted the rear steps and reentered the saloon, as the last of Thornton's followers plunged out by the front door in search of him.

Thornton was in the midst of his men, borne on by them, yet still feeling weak from the effect of the scout's tremendous right-hand punch, and with a wholesome fear and respect for the man who had delivered it. But as leader of these ruffians he dared not show his fear, and his voice was loudest, commanding and urging pursuit.

One-eyed Jack Lathbury stared, with jaw dropping, when he saw Buffalo Bill reenter the saloon.

He had been about to leap over the bar and run into the street, to follow the occurrences there, and had clutched the revolver he kept always under the bar.

But his hand fell away from the revolver, and, instead of leaping the bar, he stood still, staring.

"Waal, may I be shot into a sieve!" he ejaculated slowly.

The scout smiled, and came up to the bar, resting one foot on the railing, with one side toward the door and the noisy street, and the other turned toward One-eyed Jack, whom he did not trust.

"The safest place in time of trouble, Jack, is where no one is looking for you. They think I'm out there somewhere. Savvy?"

Though, as a friend of the sheriff, he considered this man his enemy, One-eyed Jack could not repress his admiration for what he considered the nervingest act he had ever witnessed.

"Cody, while most men would be scairt jes' now inter a ragin' fever, you're cooler'n polar ice," he admitted. "Ef I should toss 'em word that you're here they'd swarm back and fill ye full o' holes."

"But you'll not do that," the scout remarked significantly.

One-eyed Jack coughed nervously.

"Course I won't. You're a guest o' this house, and I ain't no call nhow ter chip inter this circus; but I warn jest remarkin' what they'd do. They'll be comin' back purty soon, too, if they don't find ye out there."

"I shall probably be in my room by that time."

"In yer room? Great guv'nor! you don't intend to stay in the house to-night?"

"I certainly do."

One-eyed Jack looked wonderingly at the daring man.
"Better make yer will, then, fer you won’t go out o’ the house in the mornin’, less somebody carries ye out on a stretcher, I’m tellin’ ye. But ‘tain’t my chip in. You know yer own bizness best. But do you know Jim Thornton?"

"I know him for a ruffianly scoundrel, who by foul means got himself elected sheriff of this border county, and is hand in glove with the bandit Black Ivan. I didn’t know it the other day, though, when I put Black Ivan in the jail here, or I shouldn’t have done that. I’ve lost my prisoner, and Thornton is responsible for it."

"But if ye kill Thornton, Cody, it——"

"I have no thought of killing him, unless he compels me to. Why should I kill him?"

"That’s what I understood ye ter say ye meant ter do!"

"Nothing of the kind. I simply warned him that we should meet again."

"Then ye don’t mean ter wipe him out?"

"Not unless he forces me to. But I intend to break up his dastardly gang and send him to prison, where he belongs, before I’m through with him."

The scout’s words were intended as a warning to One-eyed Jack, for he was well aware that the saloon-keeper’s sympathies were with the scoundrelly sheriff.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw One-eyed Jack grow pale. He knew that Jack was longing for the return of Thornton’s men, yet dared not lift his voice to summon them.

"I’m going to my room shortly," the scout went on, "and whoever comes back you may tell so, if you like; and say to them that if any man troubles me there tonight, he does it at his own peril. If I do any shooting, I shall not throw away my lead."

He glanced again at Lathbury.

"And you can say to them, Jack, that even if they should kill me, it wouldn’t profit them. I understand what they think—that if I am wiped out they’d have a free hand here in Colburn, and throughout this country. But they’re mistaken in that, Jack. There are other men to take my place, and plenty of other men to come here and avenge me. Not a single devil of Thornton’s gang would be left alive and out of jail, when my friends got through with them, if they should succeed in killing me tonight. You might tell ‘em, that, Jack, so that they’ll have a proper perception of the situation."

The noisy cursing and shouting in the street, as Thornton’s men ran here and there, brought a grim smile to Buffalo Bill’s handsome face.

"You hear them raging, Jack. Yet they are a set of scoundrelly cowards, as they showed when they let me get out of this room, though all of them were armed, and half of them held revolvers in their hands, and not a man among them but wanted my death."

"You’re makin’ a mistake, Cody, ef ye think Jim Thornton is a coward," said Jack Lathbury. "He’ll fight like a bulldog."

He looked eagerly through the doorway, and his hand slid to his revolver under the bar.

Some of Thornton’s men had turned back and were upon the steps, as their voices showed.

"Good-by, Jack," said the scout, bringing his revolver round with an apparently careless motion, yet so that it covered the saloon-keeper. "I’m off to my room now. If they come there troubling me, I’ll not be responsible for that, you know."

He turned quickly, and stepped across to the opposite door, yet saw Lathbury pull the revolver from under the bar, for the action was visible to him in the mirror which hung on the wall.

He swung round, as he gained the door.

Lathbury’s hand was coming above the bar, holding his revolver; but the hand stopped there when he saw that Buffalo Bill observed the action.

Buffalo Bill passed through the doorway, into the hall, and hurried on to his room.

As he did so he heard feet trampling into the saloon; and an instant later there was a roar of rage, which told him that One-eyed Jack had informed the ruffians that he had been in the saloon while they were searching for him in the street, and had just departed.

**CHAPTER II.**

BUFFALO BILL BESIEGED.

Thornton’s followers shortly pursued the scout up to his room, and, standing out in the hall, they commanded him to come out.

There was no light in the room; and when no response came in answer to their summons, or to their cursing and abuse, they began to think One-eyed Jack mistaken in his belief that Buffalo Bill had gone to his room.

Finally, one of them became courageous enough to step up in front of the door, where he began to berate the scout, and abuse him with such vituperation that it was unbearable.

A bullet from within the room, tearing through the door close by his head, stopped his flood of villification, and sent him scurrying for safety.

A storm of revolver-shots was now sent through the door at the scout.

"We didn’t git him, er we’d heard him fall, unless he was layin’ down," one of the ruffians declared.

More bullets were sent through the door.

Buffalo Bill did not reply to this shower of lead.

But when he heard men creeping along the hall, that they might get where they could rake the room more effectively, he fired quickly, two shots in succession, and heard a man drop, with a groan.
The man continued to groan until some of his companions grew brave enough to make a scurrying dash and bear him away.

"I warned One-eyed Jack that if the scoundrels came up here and attacked me they would do it at their peril," was the grim thought of the scout, as he recharged the chambers of his revolvers, in anticipation of further attacks.

Then he heard the men retreating.

"I don't think One-eyed Jack nor the proprietor of this house will let them burn the house down, that they may get me; and so long as I'm safe from fire I'm all right."

For some time the scout was unmolested.

Then the men, or some of them, came once more into the hall. With them was Thornton, which proved that he was himself again, though doubtless he had learned caution.

He lifted up his voice.

"Cody," he cried, "as sheriff o' this byer county, I command ye to surrender. I've got the law on my side. I'll git ye in the mornin', if ye don't. The man what you shot awhile ago has died, and I've got a warrant fer yer arrest for killin' him."

"Come and take me!" was the defiant answer.

The scout knew that the wounded man had not died. There was in the sheriff's voice a ring of insincerity which proved it.

"If you don't surrender now, we'll git ye in the morning," said Thornton. "I'll collect a posse that, in the daylight, will drag ye out o' there, er kill ye in the attempt. Better give in now, Cody; fer if ye don't, I don't believe I kin stop the hangin'-bee that's purty shore to foller."

Buffalo Bill did not reply to this; and, after some further urging and threatening, Thornton went away.

His footsteps had barely ceased to sound when Buffalo Bill was at the door of his room.

After making sure no one was in the hall, he threw off his hat and jacket, put on another hat and coat, and slipped out into the hall, opening and closing the door without a sound.

A great uproar of voices came from below stairs and out in the street, where the ruffians were drinking and talking and mangling their threats against him.

Buffalo Bill tiptoed to the stairway top at the end of the upper hall. Finding the way still clear, he went down-stairs lightly, and then into the back yard, by the rear door.

Soon he was in the street, in the darkness.

He turned the collar of his coat up round his neck, drew his hat down over his eyes, pulled the legs of his trousers to the outside of his high boots, knotted a hand-kerchief loosely round his throat in cowboy fashion, and, with his hands in his trousers pockets, shambled along.

In this way he came into the outskirts of the loud-mouthed crowd that jammed the saloon door and overflowed noisily into the street.

Men were entering and leaving the saloon, jostling roughly and without regard to the comfort of others.

All were talking about Buffalo Bill, about what One-eyed Jack had reported concerning him, of his defiant stand in his room up-stairs, and of kindred matters.

It was believed he would not dare to venture out of his room, and some were suggesting methods by which he might be taken as soon as morning came.

The hour was already late.

More than half of the men who thus talked were so intoxicated that they reeled as they walked.

It was clearly to be seen that Thornton's ruffians were in possession of the town of Colburn, and the scout felt sure that some of these men were Black Ivan's outlaws.

He knew that his life would be in danger if he should be suspected or identified.

Hence, he was careful, and he spoke to no one, lest his voice should betray him.

But it was interesting to stand there and listen to all this excited comment, of which he was the subject.

At two o'clock in the morning the scout was still outside, with the crowd growing thin and less noisy, but more intoxicated. Many men had gone home, or to the dens they called their homes. Horsemen had ridden out of the town, and these Buffalo Bill believed were Black Ivan's men, gone to report to him what they knew.

A glance into the saloon showed him that One-eyed Jack was not behind the bar, but that another man was in his place.

As One-eyed Jack seldom left the saloon at night, this was significant, if the scout had but known it.

Finally, Buffalo Bill sat down by the saloon door, drawing his hat over his eyes and humping his shoulders as if he were a half-drunked cowboy.

A number of men came and went while he sat there, without looking at him twice. Half-drunked cowboys were a common sight in Colburn, and attracted no attention.

Buffalo Bill was hoping to get information that might be valuable, and he was not at all sure that Black Ivan would not himself appear at the Traveler's Rest before morning, for Black Ivan was a most daring rascal, and, as the scout believed, was on good terms with One-eyed Jack and the proprietor of the place.

The time was almost four o'clock, of a starlight morning, when Buffalo Bill at length arose and started to go back to his room, destined to meet with what was to him an extraordinary adventure.
CHAPTER III.

THE KILLING OF JIM THORNTON.

One-eyed Jack Lathbury had left his position behind the bar because he had been sent for by Jim Thornton. Thornton, intoxicated, and disgusted, had returned to his cabin, which was within a stone's throw of the Traveler's Rest, and behind it. Thornton was alone, and in a quarrelsome mood, when Lathbury came in. Thornton closed the door after his visitor, kicking it heavily with his cowhide boot; and then he turned on One-eyed Jack with a snarl.

"Gone back on us, eh?" he cried, facing the saloon-keeper. His drink-inflamed face was a fiery-red in the lamplight.

One-eyed Jack growled out an oath.

"What ye say that for?" he demanded angrily.

"Why, the way you done there!" said Thornton, putting his hand against the door to steady himself, and glaring down at Lathbury, who had dropped into a broken chair. "Was that any way fer ye to do?"

"You're crazy," said Lathbury.

He saw at once that Thornton had sent for him for a quarrel.

"I'll go back to the saloon, if you ain't got no more than that to say to me," he protested.

"No, you won't," said Thornton, pushing hard against the door. "You don't go back there till I'm through with you, and maybe you never go back."

"Why d'ye mean?"

One-eyed Jack stood up, slipping a hand into his coat pocket, where he always carried, in a slender sheath, a long, slender blade.

"I go and come when I want to, don't I?" he said, his voice trembling. "Do I ask you, er anybody? Git away from that door, and lemme go by. I didn't come here fer a fuss, 'n I didn't come here ter be insulted."

"Then, why didn't you tip us the word outside, when he was in the saloon there, chomin' with ye? Does that look like the clear-white article toward the rest of us, er toward me? You was talkin' there with him, before the bar, while we was huntin' fer him, and you never slung yer jaw once. What d'ye call that kind of work? It was you that reported it, too!"

He dropped a hand to the big revolver that flapped against his hip.

A sudden steely, deadly light leaped into the one gleaming eye of Jack Lathbury. His face grew white and his lips closed firmly. His fingers tightened on the long blade in the pocket of his coat. He had slipped the blade from its sheath.

"You call me a traitor, do ye?" he demanded harshly.

"What do you call it? Ain't that treachery? Didn't you have a chance to sling us the word? Wasn't he talkin' in there the whole time we was out in the street huntin' fer him, and makin' jackasses of ourselves by doin' it? Him standin' there, listenin' to us, and laughin' at us; and you standing there with him, and maybe laughin', too!"

"I s'pose you think I was a coward 'cause I didn't yell out that he was in there?"

"Likely he paid ye fer not doin' it!"

"You want trouble, Jim Thornton! That's what you sent fer me fur. Well, I don't; and there won't be none, if you stand away from that door an' let me out."

"You wasn't playin' inter his hands, because maybe he paid ye fer it?"

"I wasn't. And you're a liar when you say so. Stand out o' my way."

Thornton gasped and gulped. He did not realize that he was rousing a devil when he roused One-eyed Jack Lathbury. Lathbury had seemed meek, and had taken a good deal of abuse and appeared not to mind it. But now he had his head up like an angry rattlesnake.

Thornton would have been warned by the gleam in Lathbury's eye if he had not been too intoxicated.

"Call me a liar, do ye?" he demanded, gulping and furious. "Well, I——"

He seemed about to draw a revolver, when, with a tigerish leap, One-eyed Jack sprang through the air, that thin blade glittering in the lamplight.

Thornton fell back against the door, lifting his arm heavily as a protection.

The keen blade slipped under the arm with flashing quickness. And the work was done.

With a look of horror on his face, his eyes staring and his throat choking out a coughing gurgling, big Jim Thornton, the scoundrelly sheriff, swayed for a moment by the door; then he fell over, pitching so heavily that the fall shook the little cabin.

One-eyed Jim seemed about to jump through the doorway and take to his heels.

The door was closed, however, and caution bade him stay.

He looked down at Thornton, whose great bulk lay spread out grotesquely.

"You would have it!" he snarled, shivering like a whipped spaniel. "Curse ye, you would have it! And I had to give it to ye!"

He saw the man's life-blood gushin' out upon the floor.

"Well, you're done fur, but you would have it!"

He stood listening.

Then he wiped the blade on the dead man's coat, and, opening the door, stepped to the outside, having first taken the precaution to blow out the lamp.

He stood in the starlight, listening to the noise of the street and the saloon. The hour was late, but some
men lingered for whatever excitement the night might still hold.

Lathbury walked along softly, and, coming to the slender bridge over the swift mountain stream, he threw a rope into the water to murder the knife and its sheath.

He felt better after that, and went toward the saloon. Coming round by the front entrance to see what was going on, there his eyes fell on the crouching form of Buffalo Bill on the door-step.

Lathbury's one eye was keen, and he recognized the scout, in spite of the disguise.

Though he was much astonished, he made no outcry, but turned aside and passed on, apparently unnoticed, and began to consider how he might turn the discovery to account.

"Ah! the very thing!" he grunted, as a suggestion came to him.

He circled round behind the saloon, and entered softly by the rear entrance, unseen in the darkness.

The place was perfectly familiar to him, and he had no trouble in reaching Buffalo Bill's room.

He fumbled at the door a moment, and then produced a key and unlocked it.

After seeing that the blinds were drawn, he struck a match, and glanced hastily round, blowing the match out almost instantly.

He had located the jacket laid aside by the scout; and, with this now in his hand, he ran softly down-stairs, and to Jim Thornton's cabin.

Making his way cautiously in the darkness, he closed the door, and again struck a match, screening its light with his cupped hand.

A pool of blood was on the floor, and in it he dipped a sleeve of the jacket.

Having done that, he hurried back by the way he had come, mounted once more to Buffalo Bill's room, and, restoring the jacket to the place where he had found it, he placed the room in the condition it had been in when he invaded it first, and then he hastened away.

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL'S SCARLET HAND.

 Darkness still held, but day was not far off, when Buffalo Bill mounted to his room.

He intended to ride out of the town before daylight, believing that when morning came Jim Thornton would gather a body of his ruffianly followers and make a desperate attempt on his life.

He was well aware that these men wanted to murder him, to get him out of the way. He had, in self-defense, wounded one of them, and the man might die, if he had not already died. The charge of attempted murder was all that they needed to hold him on and put him in jail.

When once in jail, a mob of pretended vigilantes could storm it and hang him for the crime he was accused of. There would be no trial, or pretense of one, but a quick mob action, with death at the end.

Apparently, so far as he could discover, Thornton's men were, for the present, in complete control of the town of Colburn.

The better and law-abiding class of citizens, of which there must have been some, would be terrorized by Thornton's followers, and their wishes disregarded.

"I think my mission in this place has failed, unless——" The scout had reached the upper hall, and was groping for the door of his room.

He did not light the lamp when he had entered, but searched about in the darkness for the articles left there, making quick work, and putting the jacket on hastily.

Then he departed from the room and made his way to the stable, where his horse had been stalled, and brought the animal out in the same quiet way.

He was annoyed by the snorting of the horse as he led it from its stall, and could not understand what terrified it. Later he was to know.

Though Buffalo Bill fancied he was unobserved in all this, as a matter of fact he was watched by One-eyed Jack and a number of other scoundrels whom the latter had collected.

Knowing that the scout was out of his room, One-eyed Jack had spread the word, and these men were lying in readiness to pounce on him when he showed signs of flight.

Hence, when he came out of the stable, and before he could mount the snorting horse, Lathbury and those with him made a rush upon him, surrounding him cleverly.

The scout saw that he had been trapped.

It was a reflection on his keenness, and he resented his own want of carefulness. The surprise was the more complete because he had been congratulating himself in the belief that his movements were wholly unknown.

A score of men were now around him, and he saw that they were armed.

One of them caught the horse by the bit, and there was a clicking of revolvers, as Lathbury sang out: "Hands up, Cody! We've called your hand!"

"Ah! Jack, is that you?" the scout asked coolly.

One-eyed Jack came forward, holding his revolver in readiness for use.

"Cody, we ain't wantin' ter hurt ye, ner ter git any of ourselves hurt none, but we've got orders to arrest ye, and we've got ter obey 'em. Here's hopin' that you don't make any trouble fer us and cause us ter do what we don't want."
By which you mean that if I don’t surrender, you’ll shoot me down?"

Buffalo Bill was calculating the chances.
He might kill one, or even at the most a half-dozen of these men; but could he escape even by doing that?
They would shoot his horse, and if he was not killed himself in the fight that was sure to come he would be luckier than he could hope to be.
The situation was desperate.
“What’s the trouble, Jack?” he said calmly, fighting for time in which to consider his course of action.
“Attempted murder, Cody. We’ve got to arrest ye fer it. Law’s on our side, ye see!”

“I thought you were my friend, Jack?” The scout laughed harshly. “We talked so sociable and friendly by the saloon bar, you know,” he went on, “that, really, I counted much on your good-will and friendship. Perhaps you’ll be kind enough to inform me who I’ve murdered?”

“The feller you shot down in the hall last night,” said Lathbury.

“Then he isn’t dead? I thought Thornton said he had died.”

“They thought he was dead, er dyin’, but his breathin’ works is still goin’, Cody. Mebbe he’ll pull through. But we don’t know whether he will or not; and we’ve got to hold you, to see about that. So, I advises you, as a man who wishes you well, not to resist arrest.”

Some of the men began to inquire where Thornton was, and it was a question which the scout had asked of himself.

“He’s still asleep, in his cabin, I reckon,” said Lathbury, as coolly as if he did not know that Thornton lay dead at that moment on his cabin floor, and that he had slain him.

A couple of the men started over to the cabin to get Thornton.

One-eyed Jack was still “advising” Buffalo Bill to surrender peaceably, and the scout was questioning as to his wisest course of action, and at the same time edging his horse along with the idea of getting near the thinnest part of this circle of men, so that his chances would be increased, if he concluded to make a break for liberty, when a yell of rage and astonishment came from the sheriff’s cabin.

One of the men came running out.
“He’s dead!” he yelled. “He’s been murdered!”

Several men started for the cabin.

In the midst of the excitement Buffalo Bill drove the spurs into his horse, thinking that if he was to escape it was now or never.

One-eyed Jack had been expecting this, and was ready for it.

He did not intend that Buffalo Bill should get away.
He wanted the men who were with him to behold that blood-stained sleeve of the jacket, of which Buffalo Bill was not even yet himself aware.

One-eyed Jack’s revolver rang out, and Buffalo Bill’s horse went down as if struck by lightning, a bullet in its brain.
The scout saved himself from a fall by withdrawing his feet from the big stirrups and leaping to the ground.

As he landed, a revolver was in each hand. He had drawn them as he made the leap.

One of them spoke, and Lathbury, the treacherous, tumbled backward with a bullet through his shoulder.

But Lathbury was not killed, nor even knocked out; and immediately he began to yell to the men not to let Buffalo Bill escape.

The men swarmed round the scout with drawn weapons.

“Stand back!” he said, facing them, with defiant air.
“Stand back, and give me way.”

“Down him! He’s done for me!” One-eyed Jack yelled vindictively.

They hurled themselves on Buffalo Bill like a pack of wolves.

He could have slain several of them in the fight that followed, but he trusted to escaping by a vigorous use of his fists, and did not resort to his revolvers. He had not desired to slay any of them, and for this reason he had sent that bullet through Lathbury’s shoulder, when he could have as easily sent it through his heart.

Thus surrounded and on foot, it was not in the nature of things that any man could break a path through that mob and get free.

Buffalo Bill made a gallant attempt, but he was pulled down by sheer weight of numbers.

Some of the ruffians had fired at him. Two bullets had gone through his coat, and a third had wounded one of the men who were trying to down him.

“To the jail with him!” shouted One-eyed Jack. “If there ain’t any law to punish things like this, we’ll make a law ourselves that will.”

It was as Buffalo Bill had expected. These men meant to organize as vigilantes, and hang him.

He stood up, folding his arms and smiling defiantly upon the pack of human wolves that ringed him in.

Lathbury had staggered to his feet, and, in spite of his wounded and bleeding shoulder, assumed command of the men who had captured Buffalo Bill.

He came up to the scout, smirking and fiendish.

“What’s that on yer sleeve?” he said, pointing with shaking finger.

Then he pretended to make a horrifying discovery.

“Boyeez,” he yelled, “there’s the man that killed Jim Thornton! Look at his bloody sleeve! And he was hur-ryn’ to git out o’ town.”

The men who had run over to Thornton’s cabin had
THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

returned, with a verification of the report that the sheriff was dead, and had been murdered.

"Boyes, look at his bloody sleeve! And you remember what he said in the saloon last night, when Jim had them words with him? Didn't he say that he'd finish Jim, or words to that effect? And he's done it, and was cuttin' out on his hoss when we come on him. Hangin's too good for a man like that!"

A roar of rage went up from Thornton's ruffians. They surrounded the scout, their weapons ready in their hands.

The latter had his own weapons still on his person.

"Is it fight, or not?" he asked.

He was wounded somewhat by his tremendous struggle, but otherwise was still calm.

"Kill him!" some one yelled.

"You seem to have the drop on me," he added, with apparent carelessness; "but if you think I can't down several of you before you can finish me, there's where you're mistaken. Don't you think we'd better talk this over?"

"String him up!" shouted One-eyed Jack, weak from the wound in his shoulder, but vindictive as ever, and resolved that the blame of Thornton's murder should be placed on Buffalo Bill, so that suspicion might have no occasion to turn to him.

Daylight was breaking.

Buffalo Bill looked down at the blood-stain on his sleeve, and saw that the scarlet stain also covered his hand.

How it had come there he could only guess, but the guess he made, that the stain on the sleeve had been put there by the real murderer of Jim Thornton, was not only shrewd, but correct.

In putting his arm through the sleeve he had stained his hand.

He looked at Lathbury.

"I think, Jack," he said, "that if I had aimed my bullet a little lower, and somewhat to the right, that it would have struck the heart of the murderer of Jim Thornton!"

"String him up!" was the answer of One-eyed Jack.

"To the nearest tree with him! There stands the man who killed Thornton. Look at his bloody hand!"

Buffalo Bill drew his revolvers.

"I'll go to the jail, if you fellows are determined that I shall; but as for being hung, that will not happen, for I'll shoot until I'm dead, or too wounded to pull trigger. If you don't think so, crowd me."

His keen eyes swept the circle of faces, dimly seen in the growing light. The crowd was increasing, and more men were heard running in the streets.

"I'm not guilty of the murder of Jim Thornton. I only know from what I've heard that he is dead. I had no love for him, but I had no hand in killing him. So, don't crowd me!"

"But the blood on yer hand and sleeve?" they yelled at him.

Yet they hesitated, showing a wholesome fear of those big revolvers, and wondering why they had not been already taken from him.

"I'll go to the jail," Buffalo Bill repeated, "and whoever comes there to take me out will feel the teeth of these little bulldogs."

He moved toward the jail, which was not distant, and whose location he knew.

He saw he could not escape from the town.

A few miles away he had friends, and he believed he could hold out in the jail until they arrived, for they were, he knew, headed for Colburn, and due to arrive soon.

An attempt to escape would result in his death at once; for if these men could not hang him, they could riddle him with bullets. And he saw that some of them were hungering to make him a target for their lead.

Blood streamed from Lathbury's wounded shoulder, dyeing his shirt to the same crimson hue as the scout's sleeve; but he still kept on his feet by clear grit, and yelled at the men, assuming the leadership made vacant by the death of Jim Thornton.

Like a lion ringed round by jackals desiring to leap on him, yet fearing to, Buffalo Bill moved on to the jail, surrounded and followed by the growing mob of ruffians.

At the jail they encountered the jailer.

"I go in as your prisoner," said the scout, "because I choose to, and not because I have committed any crime. And I shall defend myself, not only against these yelping coyotes that snap at my heels, but against you, in case you try treachery."

The jailer came on out, asking questions, though he had but a moment before run to the jail, and knew all that had happened.

"He's killed Jim!" was shouted. "We're goin' ter hang him fer it; but we're willin' that it shall be done accordin' to law."

Lathbury had dropped out, through weakness and loss of blood.

"Into the jail with him!" shouted the new leaders.

"We'll see that he gits justice!"

The sheriff complied, and Buffalo Bill entered the jail.

"You must give up your weapons," said the jailer, following him in.

"Never!" said the scout.

The jailer stopped arguing the point long enough to lock the jail door behind him.

The place was dark, but Buffalo Bill contrived to make out the dimensions and condition of the interior.
He was in a small, square room, that had a row of iron-barred cells ranged along the side, these evidently intended for desperate prisoners.

The sheriff lighted a lantern, and then pointed to the nearest cell.

"You'll have to go in that, and I'll lock you in, and you'll have to surrender them revolvers."

"Not if I know myself," was the reply. "Those villains out there intend to hang me, and I don't intend to be taken out and hung. They'll respect my revolvers—"

"But I'll give you protection, you know! I'm responsible to the law for the safety of prisoners. They'll not—"

"That's right; they'll not get me in here, for I intend to fight to the finish, if they try it. You may tell them so. Here's a stool; the walls are good and stout; and I'll just sit here, with my back to this thick wall, where I can command that door. No, I don't go into a cell, and—"

"Then I'll force you!"

The jailer had never encountered a prisoner like this in all his experience—a prisoner who came voluntarily into the jail, armed, because he preferred its security to the treacherous and uncertain temper of a mob that longed to Lynch him, and yet feared to try it—a prisoner who refused to give up his weapons when commanded to.

The jailer's anger rose.

But he reflected that, as he had the keys to the jail, he could unlock the jail door and let the mob stream in whenever it wanted to, and its courage was strong enough.

"All right," he said, when the scout again declared that he would shoot the man who tried to take his weapons, "but I can't protect you."

"You refuse to, you mean?"

"I refuse to, unless you give up your guns. That's flat, and that's straight."

The scout looked at him with a cynical smile.

"I think I prefer to protect myself. Out there in the street a hundred revolvers could have got me. If I had tried to run, they could have shot me down. I stood at bay, and came over here. Those men want to kill me, but were afraid that I'd kill a lot of them if they started the killing. And so, for a time, I was safe, simply because of that. But I saw I couldn't well get out of town, for they had shot my horse. I'm making this thing plain to you, jailer. And I'll say to you that I intend to defend my life to the last, and shall never surrender so long as I can pull trigger and have a cartridge left for these revolvers. And you may tell that to your friends, for I fancy that you have many friends in that gang of howling coyotes."

One of his revolvers went up and covered the jailer's breast, as this speech ended.

The jailer fumbled for his own revolver, and then his hand fell away from it; for, though the light was not good, he yet could see that the scout had the "drop."

"What's that mean?" he said, startled and cowed.

It was Buffalo Bill's reputation as a dead shot that had so far served him in this perilous emergency. The fame of his skill with the revolver was wide-spread. Some marvelous stories of his shooting had been told, yet they were not much greater than the truth. Few such masters of the revolver had ever been seen on the plains or in the Western mountains.

The jailer trembled, and then put up his hands, as if he had been covered by a road-agent.

"I'll take the keys to this jail," said Buffalo Bill coolly.

It was a most unexpected request.

The jailer hesitated. He saw that if the scout had the keys, the plan he had formed of unlocking the door, or leaving it unlocked, could not be carried out.

But for the fact that Buffalo Bill had seen him with the keys in his possession, he might have denied that he had them.

He turned pale, and then flushed to a crimson-red, though in the dim light this was hardly apparent.

Outside, he heard the mob clamoring, and recognized some of the voices of his friends.

But those friends could not help him.

"It's against the law for me to give up the jail keys," he objected.

"But you expected soon to give them up to the mob."

"No. Not unless I was forced to."

"You only give them up when forced to?"

"Yes."

"Then you may consider that you are forced to give them up now."

"But you know that you'll get into trouble?"

"I know I'll get into trouble if I don't have them. Hand them over."

"I——" "Hand me those keys!"

"But, Cody——"

"If you don't hand them to me, I shall have to shoot you down and take them, and I don't want to do that."

The jailer trembled, but still hesitated.

"I'll lose my position if I do."

"And you'll lose your life if you don't. Come! I don't want to talk about this!"

"You'll git the courts after you, Cody."

It was a last despairing appeal.

"I've found out that the machinery of the courts out here just now is in the hands of the ruffians of the community. So I'll take the chances. Give me the keys."

The tone was peremptory and threatening.

With shaking fingers, the jailer fumbled in his pockets,
His hand touched his revolver, but fear of the scout kept him from trying to draw it. At length he produced the keys. "Toss them down here at my feet!" "Cody, this is a violation of the law!" cried the jailer, in desperation. "Throw me those keys!" They jingled on the floor at the scout's feet. "Now, leave the jail!" There was no longer hesitation on the part of the jailer. He was cowed; and he walked to the door. Buffalo Bill followed him, and the sound of the scout's footsteps hurried his departure. When he had leaped through the doorway, the scout applied the keys quickly, with a laugh. "I'll trust to the courts to justify me, if the courts are honest," was his thought. "When the courts, and the officers, are not honest, as here, a man has to defend himself."

Then he returned to the stool, and, with the revolver laid across his knee, he watched the door, in the glowering light of the advancing morning.

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CHAPTER V.

THE ACCUSING BLOOD-STAIN.

There was one high, barred window, which could be commanded from that stool. Through this window the early sunlight streamed in. By it, the scout looked at the blood-stained sleeve of his jacket and his blood-stained hand, and tried to understand how the stains had come there.

He had already guessed that One-eyed Jack was responsible for it, basing his guess on the fact that even when the light was so poor, Jack had seen the blood-stain on the sleeve, at a time when the scout himself did not know of its existence, and none of the crowd had discovered it.

"He pointed it out, and I think he never could have known what it was, even if he had observed that there was a discoloration of the sleeve, for the stain in the darkness looked black, rather than red. How did he know that it was blood?"

Then he remembered how his horse had snorted, as he took the animal from the stable. He knew now that was caused by the odor of blood, to which horses, and other animals, are peculiarly susceptible.

"I left this jacket in my room. The only way blood could have been put on it was for some one to get it while I was gone and stain it with blood. No doubt this is the blood of Jim Thornton; and I'm as certain as I can be of anything that Jack Lathbury did it."

He saw how damaging was the evidence of this accusing blood-stain.
“but perhaps I haven’t. I’m generally pretty unpopular wherever ruffians congregate. There are decent men in the place, of course, as everywhere, but they’re too much afraid of the bad element to do anything for me, or even risk attempting it. So I’ve got to take care of myself until my friends come, or get wind of the trouble I’m in. I’m hoping that won’t be long.”

The sound he had heard was a peculiar scraping on the wall.

He understood what it meant when he saw the top of a head against the lower part of the high window.

A ladder had been hoisted against the wall, and a man had quietly ascended, no doubt hoping to surprise him and get a shot at him.

Buffalo Bill lifted the revolver from his knee, and when the head came up until the face was visible, and the eyes of the man peered in over the window-ledge, he fired at the ledge beside the man’s face.

With a yell, the fellow dropped from the ladder, and tumbled heavily to the ground.

A chorus of exclamations and curses sounded; and then some laughter, when it was seen that the fellow was not hurt.

Buffalo Bill smiled.

“Just to let them know I’m not sleeping!” he muttered. “I wonder what they’ll try next?”

The thing next tried was persuasion, in the voice of the jailer, from in front of the door.

But he had hardly begun his futile and foolish talk, when loud voices drowned his, demanding the surrender of the scout, and threatening to burn the jail down over his head, if he refused.

Buffalo Bill’s harsh and defiant laugh floated out as the answer to this demand.

No further attempt was made to climb up to the high window, for the fear of the scout’s revolvers was all-potent.

The mob remained outside, sometimes augmented and sometimes diminished in numbers.

As the morning wore along, the scout began to understand the new tactics which had been adopted.

There was no water nor food in the jail, and they meant simply to starve him out.

He could not escape, and they could afford to bide their time, knowing that sooner or later he must weaken.

Thus the morning passed, noon came and went, and the afternoon wore on, slowly enough to the imprisoned scout.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE-EYED JACK LEADS THE MOB.

Night was approaching again.

Buffalo Bill was hungry and thirsty, and tired by his long vigil.

He had slept none the previous night, and all day long he had not dared to risk a wink of sleep, for there was no knowing at what moment some miscreant might climb to the window and shoot him down.

The howling of the mob told that whisky had been liberally used by the crafty Lathbury. There was plenty of the fiery stuff in the saloon, and he had simply poured it out like so much water, knowing that drunken ruffians are the most desperate and reckless of all, as they are in no condition to consider consequences.

As for One-eyed Lathbury, his wound still troubled him, but it had not from the first been of a really serious character. Buffalo Bill had deliberately made only a slight wound, just enough to temporarily knock the rascal out, when, if he had chosen, he could have killed him as easily.

Lathbury’s ambition had grown enormously within a few hours. Since the death of Jim Thornton he stood the recognized leader of all the evil forces of the town of Colburn. That fed his vanity, as well as his ambition.

He fancied that he was very shrewd and was keeping on the side of the law. Warrants in legal form for the arrest of Buffalo Bill had been issued by the local justice of the peace, who was one of Thornton’s ruffianly satellites.

Buffalo Bill stood charged with the murder of Jim Thornton and the attempted murder of the man shot in the hotel hall. Though he was in jail, he had resisted arrest, defying the constituted authorities. Thus, One-eyed Jack viewed the situation.

Therefore, to his mind, Buffalo Bill was a lawbreaker, and he the upholder of the law. That great enemy of criminals, William F. Cody, stood in the attitude now of a criminal himself; and his foes were his accusers and prosecutors. Apparently the tables had been turned most effectively on the great scout.

This was not all.

Lathbury was keen enough to know that he might not be able long to hold this advantage.

Buffalo Bill had many and powerful friends, including all the army officers and soldiers, the governor of the State, and most of the officers, except those now in control at Colburn.

If brought to a trial on the charges held now against him, the scout was pretty sure to triumph; for his reputation had, up to this time, been unstained, and the accusations of men known to be of the criminal class would have little weight against him outside of the local court of Colburn.

For that reason Lathbury knew that the scout must not be permitted to come to trial; nor must he be held long in the jail, that his friends might have time to move in his behalf.

He must be taken from the jail by “vigilantes” as soon
as possible and hanged for the crimes with which he stood charged.

But how to do that was the question which troubled One-eyed Jack and his followers.

Fear of the scout’s deadly revolvers had held the mad mob at bay in the street, and the same fear still was over them.

If the scout was forced to remain in the jail until he was starved into submission, the time required to do that would in all probability bring help to him from other places.

To prevent such help reaching him, the streets and roads leading from the town were now being watched, that no messenger might get through with news to some other point.

Yet, Lathbury was undeniably worried, as he sat in a back room at the Traveler’s Rest, with some of his friends round him.

His face was pale from the effect of his wound. His right hand and arm hung in a sling made of a handkerchief. His left hand rested on the table before him, as he talked.

“Ye see, it’s this way,” he was saying, “if we don’t wipe him out now we’re dead ‘uns. He’s come up here to do up our gang, and he’ll do it. He’s already murdered Jim, thinkin’ if he killed our leader we’d be easy for him after that. It’s the rope for all of us, if he gits away now and uses ther evidence he’s collected agin us.”

“Well, we can’t batter down the jail door!” one of them objected. “It’s built ter stay.”

“And ther durn ole jail won’t burn no more’n wet mud,” added another. “It war built so’s it couldn’t be burned.”

“Thar ain’t no chance o’ shootin’ him by throwin’ bullet lead through ther jail door.”

“And ef any one tries ter pot him from ther jail winder, he’ll git a bullet in his head ‘fore he kin do it!” cried another.

One-eyed Jack’s one bright eye blazed.

“But we’ve got to git him out o’ there and hang him, and do it ‘fore any help kin come to him!” he cried.

“Show us how.”

“I think we’ve an idee,” said one of them, who had been a miner. “We kin suffocate him. I know a good deal about explosives, and the truck that gases kin be made out of; and I’m certain I kin fix up some kind of stinkpot balls that kin be threw in through that winder, which will fix him in short order. He’ll either have to come out, or choke to death in there. I’ve seen it tried on prairie-dogs in their holes. The stuff is dropped into the hole, and the prairie-dog is smothered by the gas, and that ends him.”

Lathbury’s one eye blazed still brighter.

“Jest the thing!” he cried. “And I’m an idjit fer not thinkin’ of it myself. I’ve seen that trick worked more’n once on prairie-dogs; and why not on a man, when ther conditions air purty much the same? He’s in there, like a prairie-dog in a hole. There ain’t any too much air comes in at that little winder, and we kin pizen it up fer him dead easy. He can’t throw the stuff out, after we throw it in, ’fore it chokes him all up.”

His sense of triumph was so great that he could hardly repress a yell.

“Tony, you’re a trump! Git yer choke-damp stuff inter workin’ order right off, and we’ll fix Buffalo Bill so’s he won’t trouble us none in this world any more. This here meetin’ is adjourned. We’ll choke him in there, er we’ll run him out, and then have the hangin’-bee. And, mind you,” he looked at them wofully, “this is done by vigilantes, because they’re afraid ther law has got so many loopholes in it that he’ll slip through one o’ em, if it comes ter a trial, and not git justic. All we wants is fer him to git justic.”

Then he laughed in a knowing way, winked his one eye solemnly at his cronies, and rose from the chair, showing that the conference had “adjourned.”

One-eyed Jack’s plans were going now to please him.

Suspicion for the murder he had himself committed had been fixed on Buffalo Bill, and the supposed proof was in the crimson stains, on the sleeve of the scout’s jacket and on his hand.

And the manner in which the scout could be forced to leave the jail, or perish in it, had been determined on satisfactorily.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PARDS OF THE PLAINS.

But, as darkness came on, and while the rascal called Tony was toiling industriously to get his “stinkpot” materials in working order, three horsemen invaded the town of Colburn.

The sentries on the road by which they approached had questioned them unsatisfactorily, and then had tried to hold them up, to their own great discomfort.

These three horsemen were Buffalo Bill’s old pards of the plains—Wild Bill, Texas Jack, and old Nick Wharton.

They were the men the scout had in mind, and whose coming he expected and longed for.

They dashed up the main street at a swinging gallop, and drew rein in front of the Traveler’s Rest.

The drunken mob in the streets had diminished in numbers, for those not too intoxicated had gone to their homes to get a bite of supper.

Lathbury was behind the bar in the Traveler’s Rest Saloon, ladling out beer in big schooners over the sloppy bar, using his one strong hand with much dexterity.

While Nick Wharton and Texas Jack sat on their horses in the street, Texas Jack entered the saloon and
asked for Buffalo Bill, saying that the scout was supposed to have a room at the Traveler’s Rest.

Lathbury’s one gleaming eye regarded Wild Bill keenly. He did not know the man, but did know from his words and manner that he was one of Buffalo Bill’s friends, and he cursed inwardly the slowness of himself and his followers, which had permitted friends of Buffalo Bill to reach Colburn before anything had been accomplished, particularly cursing the sentries who had not stopped these men on the road.

“What air you wantin’ of him?” he asked, as he thus stared.

Wild Bill’s temper was of the peppery variety and as uncertain as gunpowder.

“What’s that to you?” he bellowed. “I want him!”

“Ask the clerk of the hotel,” said Lathbury quietly, averting his blazing eye.

He stooped to put away a sloppy glass, and laid his sound left hand on the revolver under the bar.

But Wild Bill had turned on his heel, and was going up the steps leading to the hotel “office.”

There he found a fat man asleep in a chair, this fat man being the clerk.

Wild Bill aroused him by poking him in the ribs with his revolver.

“Wake up, old hippopotamus,” he cried, “and tell me where you’re keeping Buffalo Bill! I’m lookin’ for him.”

The fat man gave a snort of pain and anger, opened his eyes, grew red with indignation, and then sank back with a gasp of fright as he observed the revolver.

“Just my playful way,” Wild Bill explained blandly. “Treat me right, and you’ll find that I’m as festive as a woodchuck in the spring. Tell me where you’re keeping Buffalo Bill.”

“Why, in the jail!” snorted the clerk, whose discernment was not as keen as Lathbury’s.

Lathbury had made a mistake, in his confusion, in sending Wild Bill to the office. Yet it would hardly have been possible to keep from these pards the fact that their friend Cody was in the Colburn jail.

“In the jail?”

It was Wild Bill’s turn to show surprise.

“Yes.”

“What’s that for?”

“Fer killin’ ther sheriff and shooting a hole in Sleepy William.”

Wild Bill laughed, as if this amused him.

“Waked William up, did he? I reckon he must have been doing something to deserve it. What happened?”

“The clerk was more wide-awake and observing now. He stared, white-faced and panting, at this singular man.

“Who are you?”

“Me?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that doesn’t matter, does it? Just call me Bill. It’s short, and easy to remember. What was Cody shooting them fellows up for?”

“I don’t know.”

“Joined the Know-Nothings, have you? That’s unfortunate.”

“Eh?”

“I say that’s unfortunate. For, you see, I shall have to shoot a hole through your head to rouse up your memory, and I don’t want to do it. What was Cody shooting them fellows up for?”

He thrust the revolver forward, pointing it into the man’s face.

“Eh! Don’t shoot! For Heaven’s sake, don’t shoot!”

“I’ll try not to, but I can’t promise. It depends on you. You heard my question.”

“Well, there was some kind of trouble; I don’t know what it was. But he killed the sheriff—murdered him in his cabin, after they’d quarreled in the saloon. They’ve got the proof on him. He stabbed him with a knife, and got the blood all over his hand and the sleeve of his coat.”

“Stabbed him with a knife, eh? That’s funny! I should have thought he’d done it with a handkerchief. And he got blood on his hand and sleeve while doing it? And so they stuck him in jail, just for a little thing like that?”

“He went to the jail, to get away from the mob. They was about to hang him, but was afraid of his pistols; and so he went to the jail; and he’s locked himself in there. But they’re going to take him out and hang him to-night. And—please take that pistol away, won’t you? I don’t know a thing more—’pon honor, I don’t!”

“So, they’re going to hang him to-night? And for a little thing like that? You must think a whole lot of your men out here, to want to hang a man like Buffalo Bill just for killing one of ’em!”

He put back his revolver.

“That’s all you know?” he asked.

“’Pon honor, it is.”

“Well, that’s enough to promise that things are likely to be livelier than they are now. When is this interesting thing going to happen?”

“I don’t know.”

“You weren’t intending to take part in it, I see?”

“No.”

“That’s lucky for you, too. Somebody is ticketed to get hurt, when the thing starts. Where is this jail?”

“Just across, there. Turn to the right, after the first corner, and the jail’s right before you.”

“The jailer is there, too, I suppose?”

“I don’t know. Buffalo Bill has got the keys, and has locked himself in, and won’t open the door to nobody. He took the keys away from the jailer.”

“Bully for him! He’s a festive youth, I take it!”
Robbed the jailer of his own jail keys? Come to think of it, I never heard of anything before just like that?"

Lathbury and some men from the saloon were invading the office.

"Good-by!" said Wild Bill to the clerk.

Then he laughed merrily, and, with hardly a glance at the men coming in, he went out.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARDS TO THE RESCUE.

A short time after this interview with the hotel clerk, three men rode wildly up the street, the three men being the pards of the plains. They yelled like drunken cowboys, and began to shoot off their revolvers.

They swept at whirlwind speed past the jail.

As they did so, a peculiar, unearthly yell broke from the lips of Wild Bill. It seemed a combination of the squall of an enraged tom-cat and the yelp of a coyote.

They dashed on up the street, and, turning, came riding back as wildly, their revolvers cracking and their howls filling the air.

Men in the street scattered for safety, judging that the horsemen were drunken ruffians who were preparing to "shoot up the town."

That peculiar tom-cat-coyote howl had easily penetrated the jail where Buffalo Bill sat, at the time seriously considering his situation.

He recognized it instantly; and then recognized the voices of Texas Jack and old Nick Wharton.

"They've come at last!"

He sprang to his feet, his face flushing and his eyes brightening. He listened to the racing feet of their horses; heard them stop and turn, and then come thundering back.

Sure that these yelling horsemen were his friends, he ran to the door. It took him but a moment to unlock it and step outside.

There his pards saw him, in the increasing darkness. They threw the horses back on their haunches.

Buffalo Bill ran out into the street.

Lathbury and some others were coming from the saloon. This action on the part of the horsemen was a surprise to Lathbury and his friends, and they had not understood what it was to lead up to. Now they began to understand the method that lay back of the apparent madness of these wild riders.

"Swing up, Pard Cody!" said Wild Bill. "This critter carries double as easily as most men carry two drinks. We'll be out of this before these devils know what's happened."

Buffalo Bill hesitated.

He did not like to fly before an enemy, even when that enemy was in force and in a murderous mood. But he saw the wisdom of acting at once on this advice of Wild Bill.

With a jump, he was on the back of the big horse, behind Wild Bill's saddle.

"Now, fer the road!" cried Wharton.

Then he yelled again, in a fog-horn bellow, and began to shoot holes in the street.

Texas Jack "made music" of the same kind, with his revolver; and as some of the shots tore up the earth not far in advance of the hurrying feet of Lathbury and his supporters, they halted.

Lathbury, stung by a sense of defeat, fired at Buffalo Bill, just as Wild Bill's horse turned and presented the scout's back as a target.

The shot cut through the saddle leather, stinging the big horse slightly and making him jump.

Then, with more yells and shooting, and a thundering of pounding hoofs, the four pards rode out of the town of Colburn, followed by a hail of flying lead, which did no harm, in the poor fight.

There was hurrying and scurrying in the town and a tremendous hubbub of excitement; and the news spread that Buffalo Bill had been "rescued" by friends, from the jail.

"After 'em!" shouted One-eyed Jack, white with anger. "Pards, do we let him git off in this way? Git horses and run 'em down!"

A number of men mounted hurriedly and set forth in pursuit; but the spreading news that these men who had assisted Buffalo Bill were none other than Wild Bill, the noted dead shot, together with fighting Jack Omonhundro, and old Nick Wharton, the celebrated hunter and trapper, had a tendency to cool their ardor.

The four men who had fled were four of the most noted scouts, Indian-fighters, and bandit-killers of the border, with a fame reaching from Mexico over the whole of the wide plains and mountains far up toward the arctic circle.

The stories of their prowess and daring, of their nerve and recklessness, and of their fighting abilities, had been heard by every man in Colburn; and such stories had lost nothing in the telling, as they passed from mouth to mouth.

A fight with four such men was not a thing to be lightly entered into, and the pursuit lost something of its first enthusiasm.

Lathbury himself, made sick by the jolting of his wounded shoulder, was among the first to return.

He saw that, temporarily, he had lost.

The man whose life he sought was out of the jail, and out of the town; and could not be readily retaken.

But what could not be accomplished by force might be done by cunning.

The mind of One-eyed Jack was of the cunning order.

It was seldom that he employed force in anything,
THE BUFFALO

BILL STORIES.

Stealthy craftiness, slippery secretiveness, were his choice weapons.

Hence, as he returned from that unsuccessful chase, his mind was revolving schemes whereby the work of the evening might be undone, or, if not wholly undone, by which safety could be secured for himself and the friends on whom he relied.

As soon as he reached the saloon, finding one of his men there, he sent the fellow to summon those with whom he had already consulted.

They came, dropping in one at a time, all who were in the town.

One-eyed Jack installed one of them behind the bar, and led the others into a room of the hotel, for the secret conference.

There he laid the situation before them, without mincing words, while he gnashed his teeth because of the pain in his injured shoulder.

"Awhile ago we had one man to deal with. Now, we've got four. It won't be long before we'll have a regiment," was the way he began.

Then he went on to tell them of the deadly peril they were now in, reminding them of the fact, which was within their knowledge, that Buffalo Bill had undoubtedly come into that section to run down Black Ivan and his band of outlaws, and all his confederates and accessories.

"Jim Thornton let Black Ivan go from the jail, because it was his duty, to help him, under his oath as a member of the band. Cody come here and killed Thornton, pickin' a quarrel with him fer that. We tried to do him up, and failed; and now he's free ag'in; and you bet he won't forget what we've done, nor there won't one of us escape, unless we wipe him and his pards out."

"How's it to be done?" he was asked. "Ketchin' comes before hangin'. We're not likely ter git a chance at him no more, until he comes back with a big gang at his heels."

One-eyed Jack smiled triumphantly.

"I think I know where them fellers maybe will stop to-night. Cody's beat out, is what I'm figgerin' on. He ain't had no sleep fer two days, and though I reckon he could go on a bit longer, I'm concludin' he'll lay up, first chance he git. That first chance will come at Sam Rogers' place. The reason I think so is, Rogers is his friend, as I've knowed this good while; and there ain't no grass or good water fer the horses this side o' there. They struck inter the trail that leads there, and they'll hang to it, 'cause it goes toward Fowler's Valley, where they'll be lookin' fer help, with which ter come back and wipe us clean up from the face of the earth."

"You goin' ter foller an' tackle 'em at Fowler's?"

"No; I got a better lay than that."

They heard this with relief. "Tacklin' Buffalo Bill and his pards would be an unpleasant and perilous job. "You know where White Wolf's band of Cheyennes is campin', above here, at the ford of the Poudre?" he said.

"Yes, we know that place, all right," they answered him.

He smiled again, in a wicked way, and cursed his wounded shoulder.

"I'm goin' to call on the Cheyennes fer help."

"You'll not git it. This ain't none o' their fight, and they won't mix inter it," he was answered.

"You'll see that they will."

"Why should they?"

"Because I'll make them."

They looked at him in disbelief.

"By a little trick of cunning;" he explained.

"How'll ye do it?"

"Just this way. I oughtn't set on the back of a horse ag'in ter-night, but I will, jest to work this thing: though if I had men I could trust ter do it, I'd lay right here and doctor me up a bit. We'll—four of us—git ourselves up ter look as much like them four fellers as we kin. I reckon that can be done in a way to fool anybody in the night, though it mightn't fool 'em none in the daytime. Then we four fellers will ride ter the Cheyenne village, and run off as many o' their horses as we kin, maybe shoot some o' the Cheyennes, and then cut sticks toward Sam Rogers' place. Jest before you git close up to Rogers', ye know, there's a heap o' rocky land. Well, we can use that. We'll make a plain tail to the trail Cody's crowd follers, which is the beaten main tail to Rogers'. The Cheyennes will foller the trail of us four to that p'int, and then go on along the main tail to Rogers', where, if I ain't mistaken, they'll come on Cody's crowd. When they 'do, there'll be fur flyin'. And we'll be off in them hills, with our trail hid, and laughin' at 'em. Ef any feller here has a better scheme, let him spit it out."

None had a better.

It was so good a scheme, in fact, that they applauded it hearty; and they approved it the more because it promised to let them out of any fighting.

Buffalo Bill and his three pards would, if the plan worked, be forced to fight the whole of White Wolf's band of Cheyennes.

This warlike band had but recently left the war-path, and was composed, to a large extent, of irreconcilables. They still clung to the blanket, to feathers and paint; and they hated all white men, believing themselves the owners of the soil, and consequently regarding white men as intruders and thieves.

If White Wolf's band could be turned loose on Buffalo Bill and his pards, the chances that they would be exterminated would be good.

And that would not only wipe out the four dreaded mountain pards, but would remove from the earth the only man of the border Black Ivan and his friends really feared.
“What d’ye say?” said One-eyed Jack.
“Pard, we’ll do it!” was the answer. “Any of us will go with ye. Er we’ll work the trick alone, leavin’ you here to muss yer shoulder, if you want it that way.”
“Then the thing’s done,” said Lathbury. “Git ready. I’ll go with ye, and we’ll start at once. We ain’t got no time ter lose.”

CHAPTER IX.
BUFFALO BILL AT BAY.

By hard riding, One-eyed Jack and his three companions, who were disguised to look as much as possible like the mountain pards, struck the Cheyenne village shortly after midnight.

They first stampeded as many of the Cheyenne ponies as they could; and then, riding desperately through the village, they deliberately shot down such of the Cheyennes as had been drawn out of their lodges by the noise of the running ponies.

The miscreants did not stop, but rode ahead as fast as possible, driving the Indian ponies before them.

The incensed Cheyennes rallied quickly; and the pursuit that ensued became so pressing that Lathbury and his companions abandoned the ponies.

But they still headed toward the main trail that led to Rogers’ place, knowing that there safety lay for themselves, as well as the chance to send the pursuing Cheyennes on to Rogers’ cabin, where they believed the four pards had stopped for the night.

They were well mounted, and succeeded in keeping ahead of the Cheyennes, so that, when the barren hills were reached where the main trail skirted their base, they could seek the shelter of these hills, after doing the fox trick of sending the Indians ahead on the false scent.

When the Cheyennes lost sight of the four miscreants, in the darkness, they picked up their trail, finding this slow work, for they had to use torches.

They followed it, and saw it plunge into the main trail. They covered each side of the main trail for some distance, thinking the four men might have crossed it.

Just as One-eyed Jack had planned, they failed to see the almost invisible hoof-marks where the four horses had been led out from the trail into the barren hills.

To see those four trails would have been difficult in daylight, for Lathbury and his friends had spread blankets down for the ponies to walk on there; to miss seeing them in the night was no disparagement of the trailing powers of the Cheyennes.

The Cheyennes held to the main trail, sure the fugitives had followed it, and shortly before daylight they came to the vicinity of the cabin mentioned by Lathbury.

Buffalo Bill had not intended to go to Rogers’ cabin; and, in fact, had turned aside from the main trail a few miles above, with his companions, intending at first to ride to Fort Madison, where there was a company of troopers.

Then, after a further conference, he and his pards had separated; Wild Bill to go to Fowler’s Valley, Texas Jack to Morgantown, and Nick Wharton to the old bordermen’s rendezvous at Fort Boulder.

They were sure that at these three places enough bordermen and friends of Buffalo Bill and his pards could be secured to stand up in a straight combat against the friends of Black Ivan at Colburn, and rout them and the whole of Black Ivan’s outlaws.

As for Buffalo Bill himself, it was determined that he should go alone to Rogers’ cabin, for the double purpose of there obtaining much-needed rest and sleep, and to warn Rogers. Rogers, as his friend, was likely to feel the vengeance of the aroused ruffians of Colburn.

Buffalo Bill had entered the main trail, and was jogging along at an easy canter, with Rogers’ cabin not far off, when blood-curdling yells arose behind him, and he became aware that Cheyenne Indians were bearing down upon him.

He had supposed that no Cheyennes were at that time on the war-path; yet those yells told him that these were; and he did not stop to discover the reason, knowing that such an investigation might be fatal. An Indian on the war-trail is like Judge Lynch. He kills first, and investigates afterward, or never.

The scout sent the spurs sharply into the sides of his horse, and rode away along the trail, loosening his revolvers in their holsters and bringing around his rifle.

The yells of the Cheyennes were like the yelping of a wolf pack.

They believed they had sighted one of the white friends who had stamped their ponies, and then had murderously shot down Cheyennes in the village without a sign of provocation.

One can understand readily the fierce anger with which they pursued the scout, under this misunderstanding. If the scout had done the things of which they believed him guilty, he would have richly deserved death.

Rifle-bullets began to sing about his ears.
He bent low in the saddle and sent the horse on at top speed, knowing that he would be in a serious position should the horse be wounded or killed, as the volume of yells behind him told that the Cheyennes were a strong body.

White Wolf himself led the Cheyennes, and his rage was great as he led this pursuit, lashing his pony and yelling with all the vindictiveness of his aroused Indian nature.

He wondered where the other three white men were; but here was one of them before him, he believed, and this bird that seemed almost in the hand was worth far more than the other three out somewhere in the mysterious darkness of the plains.
When Buffalo Bill, riding thus for his life, came close to Rogers' cabin, he shouted to Rogers, asking him to get up and unbar the door.

There was no answer to this, and no light appeared in the window.

"Either sleeping too soundly to hear me, or he is away!" was the scout's conclusion.

He leaped from the horse in front of the door, letting the animal go, and, shouting again, rapped heavily on the door with the butt of a revolver.

"Away from home!" he said to himself, when he still had no answer.

He ran round the house.

The Cheyennes were close at hand now, and coming on at headlong speed, hoping to capture him before he could get into the house.

They were yelling in a way to wake Rogers, or any one else who was not sleeping the sleep of the dead.

Buffalo Bill broke in the window on that side of the house, and climbed in through it, standing at bay in the house, with revolvers drawn.

He knew the place reasonably well, having been there before as Rogers' guest.

When the Cheyennes reached the house, they rode round it, yelling.

One of them captured the scout's abandoned horse, and at this proof that they certainly had their foe within the cabin, they yelled with renewed howlings of joy.

Buffalo Bill understood well enough the exceeding danger of his position. Alone, and forced to combat this force of cunning Indians, with no help near, the chances were against him.

He stood well back in the room now, where the starlight gave some illumination, and guarded the door and the window.

A feathered head appeared at the window he had entered, and he sent a bullet through the Indian's cheek, sending him away with painful howls.

There was more discordant yelling on the part of the Cheyennes, when they saw that the white man meant to fight for his life.

Then they began to shoot bullets through the windows and the door, and even tried to send some through the walls of the cabin.

As they could not locate Buffalo Bill, who kept moving about, their shooting did no harm, except to the cabin.

A feathered head appeared at the other window, and again the scout perforated the cheek of the daring Cheyenne with a bullet.

He did not want to kill any of the Cheyennes, and did not mean to, if it could be avoided; for he was under the impression that a huge mistake on their part existed.

But so long as this mistake, if it was a mistake, existed, his life was in peril; and he was bound to defend his life to the utmost.

The yells of pain let out by the wounded Cheyenne found wild echoes from his comrades, and again bullets crashed through the door and windows.

Every pane of glass was soon shattered, and the door became a splintered wreck. Yet it still held firmly, and fear of the scout's revolvers kept the human wolves at bay.

When the Cheyennes had somewhat exhausted the violence of their rage, there was a lull in this futile targetry.

Some cunning trick was to be expected now, and Buffalo Bill watched more closely than ever.

Soon he was aware that some of the Cheyennes had penetrated to the cellar. He heard the cellar window broken in, and heard their footsteps and voices below the cellar stairs.

His revolvers commanded these stairs.

Behind him was another pair of stairs, leading to an attic, into which, if hard pressed, he could retreat.

But whether he would be better off in the attic than where he was seemed doubtful.

Shortly a light gleamed near the foot of the cellar stairs.

The Cheyennes had prepared a torch.

Silence followed for a few moments.

Then a hideous din of yells sounded outside, and a storm of bullets ripped through the door and windows.

He knew this was designed to draw his attention from the real point of assault, the cellar stairs; hence he stood back, commanding the stairs, and awaited developments.

He had but a moment to wait.

The Cheyennes in the cellar made a dash to get into the room above.

To shoot, and shoot to kill, was now the only thing that would save him.

One of the Cheyennes bore a torch, which flashed its light upward.

Buffalo Bill stood dauntlessly at bay, as with wild desperation the fierce Cheyenne tried to gain the room by the cellar stairs.

The foremost fell, shot through the body.

Others tumbled over on the stairs, or went spinning blindly backward, struck by the scout's bullets.

A rain of death streamed from the muzzles of his weapons, before which no human being could stand.

The Cheyennes broke and fled, leaving two of their number lying on the stairs; and he heard them plunging desperately to get out of the cellar, which, to their minds, had suddenly become a death-trap.

The room seemed unusually dark, after the fall of the torch, which had slipped from the hand of the bearer and went tumbling to the bottom, and then had been snatched up and carried away.

Buffalo Bill reloaded his revolvers, and stood in the darkness and silence, grimly defiant.
"They'll not be in such a hurry to come again!" was his thought.

But that they would abandon the effort to take the cabin, he did not expect. And he knew they would make their most desperate efforts before the coming of daylight, which was now not far off.

Silence followed for a few minutes; then he heard low voices at one corner of the cabin, and a scraping sound.

He discovered that an Indian had been hoisted on the shoulders of others, and was trying to reach the roof, for the purpose of setting it on fire.

To stop this he began to shoot at the walls at the corner of the building; but the walls were thick, and the Cheyennes merely yelled back in defiance.

The climbing Cheyenne gained the roof, and he heard him tearing up some of the heavy boards which composed it, and knew he was heaping them in a pile and trying to light them.

Luckily a recent rain had soaked the boards, and he hoped the effort would end in failure; but, when a gleam of light flashed in at the broken window on that side, he knew a fire had been started.

The Cheyennes yelled discordantly, and he heard them running about in wild excitement.

The Cheyenne was still on the roof, trying to give the fire a better start, and Buffalo Bill, locating his position, sent two bullets through the roof boards.

The Cheyenne fell, with a heavy, bumping sound, slid slowly down the steep roof, and pitched off to the ground, which he struck with sodden thump.

The Cheyenne yelled again, but in a different key.

The fire continued to burn on the roof, and Buffalo Bill began to grow uneasy about it.

Softly he mounted the stairs to the attic. His position was critical now. If the fire gained headway, it might consume the cabin. But to leave the lower room unguarded offered access to it to the Indians.

Finding a heavy piece of timber, he drove it against the smoking boards, ripping them off and scattering them.

The Cheyennes began to shoot at him through the walls of the attic, and, as the end walls were thin, their bullets came through.

He dropped to the floor; and then retreated quickly down the stairs; but already Cheyennes were in the cellar, and had reached the cellar stairs.

He drove them back with his revolvers.

Again softly creeping up the attic stairs, he found that he had scattered the fire, and that it was going out.

For a time he lay on the attic stairs, where he could see the attic roof, and at the same time command the stairs leading to the cellar.

The Cheyennes were running about outside, shouting to each other, and now and then yelling.

So long as they did no more than this, he was content.

But soon, at the other end of the house, he heard a scraping sound, showing that again an Indian was trying to climb to the roof, to ignite it.

Buffalo Bill waited only long enough for the Cheyenne to get on the roof, and then he began to shoot up through the roof boards in his direction.

Evidently one of the bullets wounded him, for he jumped from the roof, without starting the fire.

Once more for a time the scout gained a respite.

Daylight began to break faintly in the east, visible to him through the broken window on that side, and he hailed it with joy.

Suddenly there was a rush of pattering feet, and a log of wood was rammed heavily against the door, making it shake on its hinges.

The scout opened fire on the door at the same instant, and the attempt to break in the door was abandoned.

Silence again resulted.

So still did everything become that Buffalo Bill might have been tempted to think the Cheyennes had departed. But he had been given too many experiences of the craftiness of redskin nature to believe anything of the kind.

The silence was broken by a hammering and pounding that was for a time inexplicable.

He understood what it meant, when he heard the Cheyennes approaching the door again, and another thump of a log sounded on it.

He fired as before; and the Indians yelled defiantly, and continued to ram the log against the door.

They had constructed a barricade of some kind, and from behind its walls were assaulting the door.

Buffalo Bill sent shot after shot through the door.

Evidently some of them found human lodgement, for the barricade was abandoned, and the effort ended in failure.

Daylight grew rosier in the east, and the interior of the cabin became lighter.

The scout's hopes were rising.

With full daylight to enable him to combat and see the wiles of his cunning foes, he had not so much to fear.

The walls of the cabin had shown that they were stout, and the splintered door had resisted successfully the hammering log. The roof had refused to burn. All was well with the scout thus far.

As for the Cheyennes, they were becoming desperate.

The breaking of day, which so delighted Buffalo Bill, failed to bring them satisfaction.

White Wolf was in a furious rage. He had lost some of his best warriors, and others were wounded. He had himself received a bullet in the hand that in a measure disabled him.

Behind those stout walls, as he believed, was one of the men who had so villainously and treacherously attacked the peaceable Cheyenne village, and he thirsted for the life-blood of that man.
But, with such a terrible marksman at bay, the task of dragging him out of that cabin had been impossible.

An Indian does not love a straight assault, in which death is sure to come to some members of the assaulting party.

He does not court death. He has no sense of the sort of heroism which makes a soldier charge into the cannon's mouth. He prefers stealth and indirectness, treachery and cunning, loves to protect himself and fight from ambush. In warfare, he has no "code of honor."

But White Wolf saw that, if the man at bay was to be taken, an assault in force and of a desperate character would have to be made, either on the door, or through the windows.

He called off his warriors and harangued them, reminding them of the fiendish deed of this man in attacking the sleeping Cheyenne village.

He called the names of the Cheyennes slain in the village and here at this cabin; and held up his own wounded hand for them to see.

Then he described his willingness to lead them in an attack on the windows and door, assuring them that those who fell would be transported straight to the happy hunting-grounds.

His words roused in them a tremendous ferocity of passion.

They punctuated his sentences with yells, and brandished their weapons.

Then, while they were still in this wild delirium of hate, White Wolf led them to the charge, having divided them into three parties, one of which he led in person.

An attack was thus made at the same instant on the door and the windows.

Buffalo Bill knew that something of the kind was to be tried, for he understood the significance of those fierce and fanatical yells.

He had reloaded his rifle and his revolvers, had stacked his cartridges within reach of his hands, and had taken a position commanding the windows and door.

With deafening yells the enraged Cheyennes came to the charge.

They assaulted the door furiously with the log.

Others leaped to the windows, and tried to get into the cabin by them.

The revolvers of the scout began to speak.

Indians fell from the windows, but others climbed up, only to drop back.

The assaults on the windows ceased; but behind the barricade the hammering log was doing its work.

The door began to splinter and crack on its hinges.

Buffalo Bill sent bullet after bullet through the door and into the barricade which sheltered the Cheyennes there; but the log continued its hammering.

The door flew from its hinges, with lock broken and panels shattered, and over it a huge Indian rushed, plainly to be seen in the light of the rising sun.

A chorus of wild yells came from outside; and then a rattle of shots; and accompanying the shots came the cheering of white men.

Help was at hand, and just in time.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCHEMING OF ONE-EYED JACK

The charge on the Cheyennes of the cheering white men was led by old Nick Wharton, and the white men were bordermen.

They had heard the Indian yells while still at a distance from the cabin, had made a reconnaissance, discovering what was up; and then had advanced quietly, not breaking cover and charging until they were near enough to make the charge sudden and disconcerting.

The surprised Cheyennes were completely demoralized, and fled, leaping to the backs of their ponies and racing away, each for himself, and wild to escape.

White Wolf was of those who fled.

But they did not go without leaving a number of dead, whom they did not stop to carry off.

When Buffalo Bill stepped out of the cabin over the broken door, presenting a flushed and powder-stained face, the yelling of the bordermen was, in its way, quite as shrill and nerve-cracking as that done by the Cheyennes.

"Buffler!" they howled as one man, all who were not chasing the fleeing Cheyennes.

They threw themselves off their ponies, and grasped his hand, man after man seizing him thus, and squeezing until the bones of his hand almost cracked.

"Aye, Buffler Bill it is!" said Wharton, his mouth spread in a grin of delight. "And it's him, I know it was, puttin' up such a fight. One man standin' off a hundred redskins! In course that couldn't been nobody but Buffler Bill, an' I said so."

Those in pursuit of the Cheyennes returned, anxious to learn what had caused the fight.

Buffalo Bill could enlighten them only so far as facts had come under his observation.

"Waugh!" grunted Wharton. "Reds rampagin' ag'in! That suits me to a T. Makes me think o' ole times on their plains, ter have redskins huntin' ha' ter. When reds goes ter huntin' ha', then we goes ter huntin' reds, and of all kinds of huntin' I've tried that's ther most excitin'."

His eyes twinkled. He seemed half in fun, but the scout knew he was more than half in earnest.

As the Cheyennes rode into the cover of the hills, they routed out four white men, who rode away at a furious pace toward the town.

White Wolf drew rein, and stared at these white men.
Something in their appearance made him wonder if these were not the white men who had attacked the Cheyenne village.

He gave chase with the few warriors he still had with him.

But fear of the bordermen at the cabin caused him soon to drop this, and turn in the direction of the village.

The reader knows that the four white men were One-eyed Jack Lathbury and the three miscreants with him.

From the hills they had heard the confusion and yells of the attack of the Cheyennes on the cabin, and had rejoiced, believing that Buffalo Bill and his friends were hemmed in there, and would be exterminated.

The coming of the bordermen and the scattering of the Indians had been followed by their own flight from the hills.

Lathbury's shoulder was in a painful condition, but he was still filled with desperate courage.

"Boyees," he cried, when the Indians abandoned their pursuit, "there's jest one chance for us, unless we're to be wiped out, or be forced to emigrate for our health; and that is, if we can gether enough fellers to wipe out that crowd of bordermen."

"It can't be done," was the answer.

"Nothin' can't be done by cowards," Lathbury flashed back. "I reckon if you fellers was like me, with one arm no good and painin' ye like fire, you'd lay down and kick the bucket. If you want to lay down and take yer medicine, all right; I don't."

"But we can't wipe out that crowd," was the answering protest. "They're too many fer any gan we kin git to-gether."

"What's the matter with Black Ivan's men?" said One-eyed Jack. "They're fighters, every son of a gun of 'em. Some few of 'em air in the town; and you know where the rest air—out here toward Jackson's Hole, hidin' there until this danger blows over."

They did not answer, but looked at him for an explanation.

All four were cantering along at a good gait toward the town.

No enemies were in sight.

But that the Cheyennes might follow again, or Buffalo Bill and the bordermen take their trail, was to be expected.

Lathbury drew rein, and the others did the same.

"Over there lies Jackson's Hole," he said, pointing. "Jim here has been there, and knows where 'tis, and knows Black Ivan and some of his men; and Black Ivan knows Jim, and will believe his word. If you fellers air ready to obey my orders, I've got some su'stions."

They looked at him again without replying.

"My su'stions air, fer Jim and Pinky here to ride ter Jackson's Hole, and give the word ter Black Ivan. Lay it down ter him correct and proper; let him understand jest the situation o' things. Say ter him that it's fight now, er go under."

"Me and Maltby here will ride on ter the town, and git together what men we kin count on there. We'll jine the two forces at Deadman's Crossin', on this trail, jest as soon as we kin.

"If we ain't ready ter fight fer our lives, why, then, we'd better all scatter, and each feller look out fer hizzelf, with the devil clost after the hindmost. But, as fer me, I'm ready ter fight while I've got a single finger left with strength enough in it ter pull trigger. What say?"

His enthusiasm and grit stirred them.

"We're with ye!" was the answer.

Jim and Pinky rode off in the direction pointed out, toward Jackson's Hole, where Black Ivan and his human wolves lay in hiding; while the other two men continued on at a rapid pace toward the town of Colburn.

They reached Colburn by the middle of the forenoon, by hard riding.

The funeral of Jim Thornton, the dead sheriff, was in progress.

A preacher of the rough-and-ready variety had been hired by Thornton's friends, "regardless of cost," to deliver a fitting eulogy.

Not all of Thornton's friends remained to hear that eulogy delivered.

Lathbury sent for them, "rounded them up" in an upper room at the Traveler's Rest, and laid the situation before them.

His words were of the persuasive and frightening order.

They did not know that One-eyed Jack was thinking of his own safety more than of that of any other man, while they listened to his startling statements.

They did not dream that One-eyed Jack was, himself, the slayer of Jim Thornton; and that, because he was, he feared Buffalo Bill at that moment more than any other man living.

Buffalo Bill had publicly, and in almost so many words, accused One-eyed Jack Lathbury of being Thornton's murderer, and some of these men had heard that accusation; but it had "gone in at one ear and out at the other." They fancied the scout's accusations were but the angry mouthings of a guilty and imperiled man; for they rested under the belief that he had killed the sheriff, by foul murder.

"Boyees," said One-eyed Jack, with a rude earnestness that took hold of them more than eloquence, "it's up to us ter fight, er lay down. Which shall it be? Buffalo Bill and his pards has got a crowd together. They've been mixin' with ther Cheyennes, but sent the yellin' reds scuddin' like a flock of tumble-weeds before a prairie gale.
"They’ll be comin’ fer us next. Cody knows the names of most of us, I’m purty certain."

"But we can arrest him fer the murder of Jim, if he comes hyar," was objected.

"Arrest ther devil and Tom Walker! With his pards round him, and them bordermen at his back? How air ye goin’ ter do it? Who’s goin’ to arrest him?"

"You, mebbe!" said one, with some sense of humor.

"Well, I ain’t fool enough ter try it, with him in the midst of that crowd. There’ll be no arrestin’, and no time fer any. Him and that crowd will be in the town, shootin’ up the streets and huntin’ us down like wolves. They’ll foller us inter any hole we crawl inter, and they’ll drag us out. If that suits you fellers, it don’t me!"

He paused and looked round.

"So I’m askin’ ye, what d’yer mean ter do? Fight, er lay down?"

"Fight!" said one of them defiantly.

"Them words air music ter my ears," said One-eyed Jack.

He looked round again, reading the faces before him. In a certain way, he was at the moment rather a heroic figure, because of his fiery earnestness and defiant courage.

His face was pale, his gleaming eye fiery and feverish, his arm in a sling, and he looked exhausted from hard riding and excitement.

But he was still defiant, and ready for a fight.

Though he was rather a small man, his commanding and desperate attitude again stirred them.

It made them realize that they must either be ready to fight, or "lay down."

"We’ll fight!" they cried.

"All right, then. Hustle out and look fer all our friends, and every man that we kin depend on. Send 'em to Hinkley’s stable fer horses, and ter Bardford’s hardware store fer guns, and revolvers, and carbines, them that ain’t got any, or ain’t got enough. We’re goin’ ter ride out of this town in jest thirty minutes, on the trail toward Fowler’s Valley. We’re likely ter meet Cody’s crowd comin’ in on that trail."

Then he dismissed them, and hastened out himself, to do a good deal of the work he had asked them to do; for he realized that such of it as he did himself was likely to be well done.

Yet the company was not large.

Neither Texas Jack nor Wild Bill had yet appeared with the men they had gone to secure.

Suddenly they discovered that they were being followed at a distance by a body of Cheyennes.

White Wolf, burning to avenge his fancied wrongs and the death of his warriors, had gathered a new force, and was pursuing the bordermen.

"Waugh!" cried Wharton, when this discovery was made. "I says stand hyar, and fight 'em!"

The whole company had drawn rein.

The Cheyennes, seeing that they had been sighted, disappeared from view with marvelous celerity, in a singular way.

Where but a minute before had been a company of galloping warriors, advancing straight ahead, was now seemingly but a band of wild mustangs, wandering idly on the plains.

Every rider was out of sight, over on the opposite side of his horse, with the body of the animal concealing him.

The slight rawhide reins on the horses’ necks could not be seen at that distance, nor the flat pads of skin which constituted the Cheyenne saddles.

"Yet the bordermen were not in the least deceived. They knew that each pony represented an armed brave; and they counted the ponies as well as they could, to get at the strength of the warriors.

"Nigh about a hundred," said Wharton, his quick eye grouping them, and making a pretty accurate estimate.

"Ef they’ve got the gilt o’ their numbers, thar’ll be a hot scrimmage hyar in mighty short order."

Similar comments were being made by others.

Buffalo Bill was closely studying the Cheyennes.

He understood what this meant.

Yet he had no desire to try a contest of strength with White Wolf’s band, even though the latter sought it.

He had no quarrel with the Cheyennes. He still had a feeling that there was a mistake somewhere on the part of these Indians.

Only the day before, he was pretty certain, the Cheyennes had been peaceably disposed, with no thought of digging up the hatchet and making war on white men.

Besides, his present prey lay ahead of him, in or about the town of Colburn.

He did not know where Black Ivan was in hiding; but he hoped to capture some one who did know, and force that some one to guide him to the spot.

To stay here and fight the Cheyennes would be wanton waste of time and valuable life, in a contest with Indians with whom he felt he ought to have no quarrel, though they had so strenuously sought to kill him.

True, he had slain some of the Cheyenne braves, in defending himself; and that alone would make the Cheyennes seek to retaliate.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE ON THE PLAINS.

Buffalo Bill, with Nick Wharton and his company of bordermen, was advancing on the trail leading to Colburn.

Nick and the scout rode at the head of the slim column. Behind them were some of the most noted fighting men of the border.
“We’ll ride on, and keep out of the way of them,” he ordered. “Now that we know they’re following, we ought to be able to do that.”

“And not give ‘em even a try?” cried Wharton, not able to conceal his disgust and disappointment.

“We’re hunting white outlaws just now, not Indians,” the scout answered.

Yet he said it with a smile, not wishing to offend his old friend, or any of these bordermen.

He understood their feelings. They were of the old type—hunters, and trappers, and old Indian-fighters; and the sight of those Cheyennes maneuvering in the old way stirred the fighting passion in their hearts. They evidenced it by the way in which they clutched and fingered their weapons, and by the eager fire that burned fiercely in their thin, weather-beaten faces.

Yet they had faith in Buffalo Bill, and they did not hesitate, nor argue the point, nor even grumble as much as old Nick Wharton felt privileged to do, as they fell into the trail again, following old Nick and the scout.

The apparently riderless mustangs ambled along in the same direction.

One not versed in the ways of Indians would have supposed that these “mustangs” were following the other horses merely through curiosity, as the wild mustangs of the plains are known to do.

Yet to attempt thus to deceive old plainsmen and mountain men was foolish in the extreme.

“If they git close enough,” said old Nick, “I’ll drive a bullet through one o’ them horses, an’ see if I can locate their Injun on the other side.”

But the Cheyennes did not come close enough.

As Buffalo Bill and his little company thus rode on toward the town, with the Cheyennes following in this cautious manner, One-eyed Jack Lathbury appeared on the trail with the company of men he had collected in Colburn.

It was near the place called Deadman’s Crossing, which One-eyed Jack had selected as the point of meeting with the forces of Black Ivan, the outlaw.

One-eyed Jack and his men halted, and his men bunch together when they saw before them the bordermen, led by the famous scout and old Nick Wharton.

“Waugh!” grunted the old trapper. “Redskins in ther rear and cowardly white skins in front. I’m lookin’ fer a double-jointed scrimmage right off.”

The bordermen were already greatly outnumbered by White Wolf’s band alone, and the odds against them was greatly increased now.

Yet they did not hesitate.

Understanding that a fight was at hand, they got their weapons ready, and sat awaiting the command of Buffalo Bill.

Then from off on the right, coming from his lair to join the men from Colburn, appeared Black Ivan to a man, the wild riders who followed him were as ruffians a set as ever cut a throat or robbed a victim. They were well mounted, and armed to the teeth.

Though less than a dozen in number, their force, combined with the force under One-eyed Jack, was greater than the number of men under Buffalo Bill.

They saw before them the scout and his companions; and, observing at the same time the men under One-eyed Jack, as well as the hovering band of Cheyennes, they opened the ball by long-range rifle-shots and wild yells, and advanced at a swift gallop.

“Waugh!” grunted Nick Wharton, as one of the bullets plowed up the sand under the nose of his horse. “I’m bettin’ some that this hyer is goin’ ter be ther liv’liest scrimmage I’ve been mixed up in in a coon’s age. Hyer goes ter let daylight shine once through ther cuss that’s leadin’, which I reckon it’s Black Ivan.”

It was not Black Ivan, who chanced, at the moment, to be slightly in the rear.

Old Nick’s long rifle cracked and spit smoke, and with a screech the foremost rider threw up his hands and tumbled from his saddle.

The riderless horse galloped madly on; the other horses and riders following.

The men led by One-eyed Jack moved up to the attack now, led by that miscreant.

The Cheyennes, seeing that the force they had been following was being attacked, abandoned their caution.

Every “mustang” showed on its back a painted and feathered warrior, making a quick and startling transformation.

With yells that drowned the yells of the white men, the Cheyennes came up at a swinging gallop, beginning to shoot their bullets and arrows as soon as they thought they were near enough.

Wild Ivan’s men, losing another of their number, swung by in a circling gallop, and continued on, riding round Buffalo Bill’s party, and shooting from the backs of their galloping horses.

Buffalo Bill and his bordermen had not been idle.

At the command of the scout all dismounted and forced their horses to lie down, forming a circle of their bodies; and behind that circle the men crouched, shooting out at the galloping and yelling Indians and white men.

Now and then one of the prostrate horses was struck by a bullet, but he was held down when that happened, or, if he could not be held down, a revolver-bullet killed him, and his body became an immovable section of the barricade.

The Cheyennes, after riding off at a tangent, came in again, swinging near and discharging bullets and arrows; then once more sheered off, riding beyond range.

Though sadly outnumbered, the bordermen were not in a hopeless position. They were without exception
The forces brought by Texas Jack and Wild Bill hurled themselves into the fray.
The effect on the combined outlaws and Cheyennes was demoralizing.
They broke and fled.
White Wolf and his Cheyennes turned in wild flight in the direction of their village.
The outlaws under Black Ivan and One-eyed Jack retreated as rapidly in the opposite direction, heading toward the hills where Black Ivan had his lair.
The Cheyennes were not followed.
But the outlaws were pursued hotly; the bordermen mounting behind their friends, who had been brought on by Wild Bill and the Texan.
But because of this double mounting, the outlaws were able to keep well in advance.
By good luck, Buffalo Bill secured a horse for himself, catching a Cheyenne pony that was running about riderless.
Thus mounted, he led in the pursuit, galloping with Wild Bill and the Texan.
Wild Bill was in a hilarious mood. There was a dancing light in his eyes. He was in his element, and now and then he punctured the air with a rollicking howl.
The men who rode single kept close at the heels of these three, while the others strung out behind according to the ability of their horses.
Yet, drive as hard as they could, Black Ivan reached the Sawtooth Pass, as it was called, and galloped on through it to his stronghold, where he expected to make a furious defense.
More than once the noted bandit had sought this stronghold when hard pressed; yet, heretofore, he had always been given an opportunity to conceal his trail in the rocky country about the base of the hills.
He was given no such chance now, and the ability of himself and his men to defend themselves in their retreat seemed likely to be put to the test at last.
The outlaws were now outnumbered, but they were still defiant and hopeful, knowing that one man from a strong position can hold back and defeat a dozen or more.
The pursuing bordermen thundered into and through the pass, hard on the heels of the flying outlaws.
Then they saw before them a narrow hole, like the neck of a bottle.
It was a natural tunnel of rock, enlarging as it ran backward, and opening out into a considerable area of land that was surrounded by precipitous cliffs.
No stronger position can be well imagined.
It contained wood, water, and grass, and in there the bandits had constructed small huts of timber, and of stone and earth, and had made themselves comfortable.
They only retreated to this place at certain times.
More often than otherwise they were in such towns as Colburn, where they passed themselves off as miners,
or cowboys, or gamblers, or as simple, every-day loafers with a liking for saloons and liquor.

Nearly all the saloon-keepers of the surrounding towns were their friends and allies; and, likewise, so were the gamblers; while, as has been seen, they had aiders and abettors in many other men, some of the latter being public officers, like the murdered Jim Thornton and the Colburn jailer.

Buffalo Bill halted his following when he saw that black tunnel. He knew instinctively that here was the lair of the bandits, and that to rush into that place would be to court death unwisely.

Not an outlaw was to be seen, however.

Turning in his saddle, the scout spoke to the men who were crowding about him.

"Has any one here ever been in there?"

He pointed with his gloved hand.

Not a man answered.

"Then we'll have to learn what's in there before going any farther," he declared, and requested the men to dismount, except a corporal's guard, who were to return immediately to the scene of the fight, for the purpose of burying the dead and succoring any wounded, whether they were friends or foes.

This duty had not been attended to because of the chase, but now that it seemed the outlaws had been holed, it could not be neglected longer.

The men assigned to go back departed rather regretfully; for they fancied that more fighting was just ahead, and they wanted to take part in it.

But Buffalo Bill, calling the remaining men about him, suggested that it would not be well to try to force that bottle-necked tunnel without first ascertaining just what lay behind it.

"It looks too much like a trap," he urged. "Yet I do not assume to act as supreme commander here, and make it as a suggestion, and we'll do what you decide."

A few of the hotheads and younger men were for rushing the tunnel, regardless of consequences; and it seemed a singular thing to see old Nick Wharton voting with this contingent.

But these fire-eaters were overruled; and Buffalo Bill's idea that it would be well to know what was ahead of them before plunging in was adopted.

Having settled this point, the men went into camp in front of the bottle-necked opening as calmly as if an enemy was not within a hundred miles, and they had not just passed through some of the most exciting and dangerous experiences of their lives.

Yes it was, perhaps, not surprising. Dangers and excitement were as the breath of life to the nostrils of these men.

Night was coming on, and soon camp-fires were glowing and preparations making for supper, food being taken from the saddle-pouches.

Old Nick Wharton squatted by one of the fires, splitting a piece of meat for roasting, and grumbled audibly.

"Buffler," he said, as the scout came near, "this hyar looks ter me like a fool trick, beggin' of yer pardin fer sayin' it! But whenever I runs a ha' inter a hole I likes ter know that thar ain't any way fer ther critter ter git out 'ceptin' ther hole he went in by, which I'm watchin'. Fer, ye see, otherwise I might set thar a week, while Mr. B'ar is meanderin' in other sections o' the county. Same way hyar. How d'ye know that the critters we're after air still in thar?"

"I suppose you'd rush in without knowledge, and take the chances, would you? Would you put your head into the bear's hole to make sure it was in there?"

"I've done it, Buffler, more'n once; and am livin' yit."

He laughed and wagged his head.

"See there!" said the scout, pointing over the top of the ridge that formed the hill above the bottle-necked tunnel.

"I'm lookin', Buffler! But I admits I don't expect ter see Black Ivan floatin' round in the sky thar. That critter ain't got any angel wings ter lift hixself with."

"But you see that buzzard?"

"I sees that, yas."

His eyes opened with understanding.

"I saw that buzzard rising above the ridge as we rode up here. He had probably been feeding on camp offal and been disturbed from it. His manner of flight showed that he had been disturbed. The way he is circling now, instead of going away, shows that he is anxious to return to the feast he was scared from. Which, I think, proves that whoever disturbed him is still down there beneath him. The men who scared him up were the outlaws, and they're still in there. If they had gone on, he would be settling down."

Wharton had risen to his feet, forgetting the piece of meat he had been preparing to cook.

He stood staring at the floating buzzard.

"Ye're right, Buffler," he admitted, with conviction.

"And I war ther dod-rott'ed fool in this case. Ye're giner'ly right, though I wasn't fer believin' it this Ame. Ther wolves air in thar; an' I'm hopin' that thar hole they're in is like some b'ar holes I've knowed o'—with out any other way out. Thar'll be some despit fightin', ef that's so; but it'll suit the temper o' ther b'oyees. They're still sp'ilin' fer a fight."

The camp-fires were flaming, as darkness came down, and the tired men were eating their supper.

There was no need to try to deceive the outlaws as to their presence or their intentions, for the outlaws could not have been deceived on those points.

Hence, just beyond gunshot of the bottle-necked tunnel, the bordermen ate and talked, discussing the chances of the fight they were sure was coming.

A "council of war" was held immediately after supper.
All took part in it, except the sentinels. Some were for charging through the tunnel, and taking the chances, hoping by an impetuous dash to drive back the outlaw sentinels and carry the outlaw camp.

Others believed that if this tunnel were the only way out, the outlaws would try to slip through it in the darkness and get away.

On this point, and the nature of the place the outlaws were in, such a diversity of opinion developed, that at length Buffalo Bill spoke, taking this chance to advance the idea he had held ever since camp was pitched:

"I'll volunteer to go through the tunnel, into their camp, and see what's in there. I'll take Wild Bill with me. If we're attacked, you'll hear it. If one is killed, and the other escapes, he'll bring you the news. You to stay here until we report, or you know that we can't report. If we don't come back, then Texas Jack is to take command and do whatever he thinks best.

"Waugh!" grunted Wharton. "I ain't in it?"

"You may be one of the number who will have to come to get us out of the teeth of the bear-trap," said the scout humorously.

"I'm thinkin', myself, you'll find yerselves in a trap," said a grizzled borderman. "Black Ivan, I opine, ain't no fool. He'll be lookin' fer a trick like that, an' layin' fer whoever tries it."

"Have you a better plan?" the scout asked deferentially.

No one could suggest a better plan.

Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill wasted few words while they were getting ready. They saw that their revolvers were in order and their belts filled with cartridges; and then they slipped away, melting into the darkness, each bearing a couple of rockets to be used as signals, and some noosed cords.

The mouth of the tunnel could not be seen, until the two men were close upon it; then it yawned, as a blacker spot in the gloom.

"Cody," said Wild Bill, speaking earnestly, "I appreciate your compliment in picking me for this trip with you.

"I needed a man who could be cool as ice, whatever happened," the scout replied simply. "You answered to the need."

They were near the mouth of the tunnel now, and stopped speaking.

Together they entered it, stepping noiselessly, with hands on weapons.

No one opposed them at the entrance.

But at the inner end of the tunnel they discovered that two guards had been set.

This discovery they made, after their silent approach, by the simple expedient of pitching some pebbles before them in the tunnel trail.

The rattle of the pebbles brought a query from one of the guards.

It was in a low tone, and was addressed to the other guard.

"Did you hear that, Jim?" was the question.

"Yes," was the answer, from across the tunnel.

"What was it?"

"One o' the dogs, I guess. One of 'em was sniffin' round hyer awhile ago."

The further information that Black Ivan's men harbored dogs was thus afforded. They were vicious brutes, no doubt; for it was unlikely the bandits would keep any other kind. And one of them had been there in the tunnel trail but a short while before.

"Both of them!" the scout whispered in the ear of Wild Bill. "I'll take the one on this side, and you the other one. Can we do it?"

"If the cussed dogs don't chip in!"

They slipped forward, hearing the guards still conferring across the tunnel.

A small stone was dislodged and came tumbling down into the path.

"I done that myself, Jim, twistin' round hyer. A feller'd be as comfortable on the p'int of a needle as settin' on this rock!"

The speaking covered up any slight sounds made by the advancing scouts.

Buffalo Bill reached a point near, and almost under, the guard on that side, the one addressed as Jim. But even then he could not see him, for the darkness in the tunnel was intense.

Wild Bill had moved even more rapidly.

A struggle sounded from that side, showing that Hickok had attacked.

"What is it, Jim?" was asked, in an anxious tone.

"This!" Buffalo Bill answered.

He sprang upward, caught the man by the leg, and brought him down with a bump that knocked the breath out of him, and before the fellow could command his voice to cry out an alarm, the scout's fingers were on his throat, shutting off his wind.

Buffalo Bill did not relax his grip until he had choked the sentinel into unconsciousness.

Wild Bill had been equally successful, and was already tying his prisoner with the ready-made nooses brought for this purpose.

Buffalo Bill secured his man.

"Pard, what shall we do with 'em?" Wild Bill asked, in a low tone. "I'd like to settle this rascal. He about done me up, with a clip on the jaw."

"Can you carry him?"

"Yes."

"Bring him with you."

The sentinel captured by Buffalo Bill was no lightweight, as the scout found when he tried to carry him;
but Buffalo Bill's herculean strength was equal to the work. The captured men were taken on through the tunnel; and then, even more securely tied, they were placed some distance from the trail that led to the cabins, and left there to their own reflections, when they should recover consciousness and could understand their situation.

After that, for a time, the scouts had no trouble.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTURE OF BLACK IVAN.

As Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill pushed farther on into the valley that lay behind the tunnel, they heard voices and approaching footsteps. They slipped to the side of the trail, which was here a road beaten hard by the frequent passage of the bandits' horses, and which, therefore, they had found easy to follow.

Lying by the side of the trail, they saw a number of men pass in the direction of the tunnel.

These men were undoubtedly a force sent to assist in guarding the tunnel, and to make a stand there if the bordermen tried to pass through.

The scout touched Wild Bill on the arm, as soon as these men had gone by.

"They'll find the places of the sentinels vacant, and then there'll be an alarm. We'd better be moving."

Taking advantage of the brief interval, they again hastened along the trail, being soon guided by some flashing lights that came from the rough cabins.

The largest of the cabins having been located, they approached it, judging that it was the one occupied by Black Ivan.

They were close up to it when the expected alarm came.

Two men ran breathlessly back over the trail between the tunnel and the cabins. Yet, at the tunnel there had been no outcry, which showed that even in their bewilderment the bandits had not lost caution.

These men dashed, panting with excitement, into the large cabin, without stopping to knock.

There was a light in this cabin, and already the two scouts had heard some moving round in there. They stood like statues, now, listening.

"Ther devil's ter pay, cap!" one of the messengers declared. "The sentinels air gone, and we can't find hide nor hair of 'em."

An oath came from the man addressed as "cap."

"What's that mean?" he asked.

"Durn ef we know," the spokesman replied. "We went there, and they was gone."

"No signs of a fight?"

"Well, Deacon thought there war signs, but some others didn't. We didn't da'st to make much use of a light."

"Those scoundrels are in camp out there yit, of course?"

"Yes."

"I'll see into this!"

He came out of the cabin—a large, tall man, who, though so indistinctly seen, the scouts felt sure was Black Ivan himself.

They itched to put hands on him; yet it would have been inadvisable, and even suicidal, to attempt his capture then. They saw him hurry by with the two messengers, both of whom were now talking.

One of the men went on with him toward the tunnel, while the other turned aside to arouse the outlaws. As this man ran from cabin to cabin with his message, and the excited outlaws swarmed forth, the scouts saw that here was probably the whole of Black Ivan's command.

All were armed, and they got their ponies quickly, from a corral hard by, and were in fighting-order in an inconceivably short time.

They had expected an attack to come that night, at a little later hour, and were prepared to make their resistance a hot one, as the scouts gathered from the snatches of talk heard.

"All was silent now in the direction of the tunnel."

One of them sentinels was Jim Woodstock, they heard a man say, "and that never war any treach'ry in Jim. Something's happened ter him. And that's queer, too, fer Jim and t'other 'un war put thar because they war thought ter be thar keenest men we had fer such work. I heerd ther captain say that nothin', not even a weasel, could git by Jim 'bout his knowin' it."

"All sorts of conjectures were rife, as the men grouped together anxiously and discussed the situation.

"What we should have done, Pard Cody," whispered Wild Bill, "was to have had our force ready to follow us through the tunnel. A charge, in that way, would have won the fight for us. These scoundrels would be scattering fer the hills by now, if we'd done that."

"You're right," Buffalo Bill admitted, in a tone of regret.

"No use crying over lost chances, any more than over spilt milk," said Hickok. "But we missed it there, Cody."

"Yes. But, hark! Some one's coming!"

They dropped together to the ground.

Several men were coming.

One of them, as told by his voice, was the big man, who was none other than Black Ivan.

The bound and gagged, and possibly still unconscious, sentinels had not been found, and the excitement of the outlaws was intense.

Black Ivan entered his cabin, where a candle was burning on a rough table.

It was the first time that either of the scouts had seen him clearly.

He was a man of particularly fierce aspect, with long hair, and a long black beard that fell down on his breast. He was dressed shabbily, but weapons of the finest and latest patterns were at his hips and in the belt about his waist.

He was swearing furiously.

"Every man of ye go to the entrance," he said, coming to the door and speaking in a low tone. "You won't need yer hosses, fer they's to be no runnin' away. The man that makes the first break, or shows the white feather, I'll shoot with my own hand. Leave yer hosses in the corral, and go to the entrance. There'll be a fight right off. I'm certain. I'll be there with ye in a minute."

The men left their horses behind, turning them into the corral, and hurried in a body to obey this command, leaving Black Ivan in the cabin.
He seemed to be rummaging in a desk for some papers, or perhaps for money.
As his men hurried away in the darkness, and he tossed the papers about in a frantic search, two men entered the door.
He heard them, and thought they were his own men, and he turned on them furiously.
As he did so, he saw the scouts standing before him, and looked into the muzzles of drawn revolvers.
"What in—"
He gasped, cutting the sentence short, and sank back in his chair, cowering.
He knew who the men before him were, and he knew what to expect if he tried to draw a revolver or made a sound.
Yet, mechanically, his hand stole to the big revolver that swung at his right hip.
"Hands up!" said Wild Bill, in a voice that was peculiarly musical and pleasant, while a smile was on his face. "We don't want to waste ammunition on you, but you may make us do it; we want it to use on your fellows over there."
He nodded easily in the direction of the tunnel.
Black Ivan had given that command of "Hands up!" many times himself, and its deadly significance was not lost on him.
His hands went up.
Yet he writhed in his chair, and they saw his lips open, as the temptation came to him to shout a warning in spite of those revolvers.
"I'd advise you not to," said Wild Bill pleasantly. "Pardon Cody, just keep the guns on him, so that he won't want to get gay, and I'll put the nippers on him."
From a pocket he drew out a pair of shining handcuffs.
"If these diamond bracelets fit you, Black Ivan, we're going to let you wear them, as a sort of memento of this pleasant occasion," he remarked calmly. "You may hold out your hands."
Black Ivan's face had turned white, being in marked contrast now to his black beard and hair; it seemed a ghastly white, and he was trembling.
"I'll have you killed for this!" he grunted. "You'll never git out o' here, and—"
"Think not, old boy?" said Wild Bill. "Well, we're enjoying a different opinion; we think we'll get out of here, and take you and some of your men with us for delightful company. Ah! that's right; just bring your hands down nicely, and then my pard, Cody, won't have to make a lot of beautiful holes in your manly form! He's particularly reckless with his shooting-irons at times, and I shouldn't want him to hurt you.
"Ah, that's right! I believe you've worn things like these before; and I was flattering myself that I was introducing you to them for the first time. There you are! And you'll never wear a handsome pair of bracelets in your life!"
Black Ivan was handcuffed, and Wild Bill proceeded to relieve him of his weapons.
"By my haidom, Black Ivan, what a terror you are!" he continued, smiling. "Here's a whole arsenal. And a dagger or two in your boot-legs, and a revolver under your coat. How many men did you expect to slay with these gory weapons?"
Black Ivan writhed in his impotent rage.

He glanced constantly at the cabin door, hoping to see there some of his men. He had sent them away, yet he hoped some of them would return.

CHAPTER XIV.
CONCLUSION.
The thing that Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill had feared happened soon.
It was their intention to gag Black Ivan and bear him out of the cabin to some place where the outlaws would not find him, thus serving him as the sentinels had been served.
Having tied his ankles, Wild Bill pressed a revolver to the head of the bandit chief and ordered him to rise and go with him.
Buffalo Bill led the way, with Black Ivan behind him, and Wild Bill followed Black Ivan, with the revolver muzzles pressed now against the bandit's neck in a way to make cold chills shiver down his spine.
They had left the cabin but a few yards behind them, and were hurrying to find a spot where the bandit chief might be left safe, when several men came running wildly from the tunnel.
The cabin door was open, and the light was burning on the little table.
The men darted in, to report the fact that the two guards had been discovered bound and gagged.
This discovery was the thing the scouts had feared. They dropped to the ground now, and forced the bandit chief to lie down there in the darkness with them, using the revolver muzzle, pressed against his head, as an argument.
The men were surprised when Black Ivan was not found in the cabin.
But, naturally, they supposed he had gone toward the tunnel and that he had missed him; hence, they ran out, and hurried back along the way they had come.
Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill now made Black Ivan rise and go farther with them from the cabin; and, finding a dark hole in the wall of rock, they forced the chief into it, made sure that he was tied so that he could not release himself, that the gag in his mouth was well set, and left him there, in his impotent wrath and dismay.
But they had barely left him, when a number of men came running from the tunnel.
Black Ivan, it had been learned, was not at the tunnel, and could not be found.
The released guards had reported that two men had captured and tied them—they were not sure but there were more—and that these men had gone on into the valley.
Naturally, the disappearance of the captain was connected in some way with these men.
That the valley had been thus invaded was a startling and demoralizing thing. And even more demoralizing was the growing fear that the captain, on whom they relied for guidance, was gone in a mysterious manner.
"What's them dogs?" some one shouted.
The scouts sank to the ground and drew their revolvers, for the searchers, after visiting the cabin and finding it empty, were coming toward them.
The dogs they feared even more than the men, for their noses would be as keen in the darkness as in the light.
The searchers passed by a few yards distant, and called to the dogs.  
"We'd better get toward the entrance," Buffalo Bill whispered.  
The scouts arose and began to creep along in the direction of the tunnel.  
All of the outlaw force not engaged in the search for Black Ivan and the men who had invaded their stronghold was stationed now at the tunnel, ready to repel an attack.  
As the scouts drew near the tunnel they heard some of the men talking there in low, excited conversation.  
Behind them sounded the confusion and noise of the search.  
The dogs had been aroused, and were running anxiously at intervals.  
There were two dogs, of the hound variety, the scouts judged from the sounds.  
"I question if they can pick out our tracks from the others," said Buffalo Bill.  
"The ground here is pretty well trodden. Still, they may come on us. And probably they'll find Black Ivan, for he'll make as much noise as he can."  
"I don't know but we ought to have kept him with us," said Wild Bill.  
"We might have made a shield of him, if they go to throwing lead in this direction."  
He spoke half-humorously.  
The greater the peril the more Wild Bill seemed to be pleased. When facing apparent death there was usually a smile on his face and a jest on his lips.  
Excited cries and a roar of rage showed that Black Ivan had been found. The dogs barked loudly.  
"And now there'll be music in the air!" said Wild Bill.  
"Is it time for us to give the signals?"  
Buffalo Bill did not answer for a moment, harkened to the tumult created by the finding of the bandit chief.  
"Yes," he then replied.  
Each produced a signal-rocket, brought for the purpose.  
There was a double flash of fire, and two rockets soared high into the air, with a whirring and startling rush.  
The scouts backed hurriedly from the point where they had fired the rockets.  
With wild cries, the bandits, who had found their captain, came running.  
Those guarding the tunnel asked excited questions, and some of them came out of the tunnel.  
The scouts separated hurriedly.  
A wild yell came from somewhere outside.  
It was the announcement of the beginning of an attack by the bordermen, in answer to the signals of the rockets.  
Then revolvers began to roar, as Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, one on each side of the trail, began to shoot into the midst of the men in the tunnel.  
Black Ivan and the other bandits came rushing toward the tunnel, the dogs barking before them.  
The ringing cheers of the charging bordermen now sounded, as they dashed in at the outer end of the tunnel, rushing thus upon the bandits set there to defend it.  
The tunnel defenders were thrown into confusion by the combined attack from rear and front.  
Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill ceased firing into the tunnel, and turned their revolvers on the bandits coming on under Black Ivan.  
So rapidly did they handle their weapons, sending out such a stream of bullets, that the bandits were led to believe a number of men were stationed there, having invaded the valley.  
Black Ivan's men halted in confusion, when, with a roaring voice, he ordered them on.  
He came on himself, firing his revolvers.  
His huge bulk was soon seen in the darkness, and Wild Bill tumbled him to the earth.  
Out of the tunnel and into the valley came the tunnel defenders, unable in their bewilderment to withstand the fierce rush of the bordermen, who were led by Texas Jack and old Nick Wharton.  
Wharton's wolflike yell rose high over all, as, at the head of the charging force, he rushed through the tunnel out into the valley.  
A panic had overtaken the bandits.  
Black Ivan had fallen.  
A few of them tried to make a stand near the cabins; but they fled as the bordermen pressed on to that point.  
Men could be heard running in the darkness.  
The bordermen fired in the direction of the sounds, but more often than not without effect.  
Several of the bandits had been killed, including Black Ivan.  
Some of them escaped by climbing the precipitous walls. One or two escaped by way of the tunnel itself.  
The others not slain were captured, and this number included about half the band.  
One-eyed Jack was not among them.  
Nor could he be found in the morning.  
But when the return to the town of Colburn was made, that day, One-eyed Jack was found beside the trail.  
He had been shot through and through by a Cheyenne arrow, in the confusion of the fight with the Cheyennes; and, having escaped discovery by the Indians, he had remained in that condition, suffering greatly.  
He was in a dying condition, and already at the point of death.  
Moved by the knowledge that he was dying, he made a confession of the murder of Jim Thornton, the sheriff, and of the attempt he had made to fix the crime on Buffalo Bill.  
Jim Thornton, Black Ivan, and One-eyed Jack were dead.  
The band of Black Ivan was broken and hopelessly scattered.  
And Buffalo Bill's work at Colburn was finished.  
The Cheyennes understood later that the wanton attack made on their village had been made by white criminals, and their deep irritation by degrees passed away.  

THE END.

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<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Finish; or, The Great Stone Door</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Peril; or, The Cannibals of Tiburon Island</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Strange Quest; or, The White Princess of Sonora</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Horsethief; or, The Enigma of Lost Springs</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Chase; or, The Rescue of Yuen Ho</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Haunt; or, Stella’s Escape from Sacrifice</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West Underground; or, Stella to the Rescue.</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Brand; or, How Stella Held the Fort</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>108</td>
</tr>
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<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Key; or, Stella in the Hidden Vault</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s “Hassayamper”; or, Stella in the Death Cavern</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Gulch Diggings; or, Stella’s Star Rôle</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Motor-Car; or, Stella Fosdick’s Peril</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Duty; or, Stella Cast Away in the Wilderness</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the Wild West’s Wild-Goose Band; or, Stella’s Long Flight</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
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