With a yell of hate and triumph, the big Ute applied the torch to the fuel heaped up about Buffalo Bill, and the fire flamed upward with an angry roar.
Buffalo Bill at the Torture Stake; 
OR, 
A Close Call Among the Utes.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

OLD COLOROW.

Old Colorow, the renowned Ute chief, rode slowly out from the fringe of aspens that bordered the stream, guiding his cayuse toward the open valley before him.

As he did so, down from the slope at the opposite side of the valley another figure appeared—the figure of the great scout, Buffalo Bill, mounted on a splendid horse, with repeating-rifle at his back and revolvers in his belt.

The scout and the Indian chief rode toward each other, meeting finally in the middle of the valley, well beyond possible gunshot range of the aspen fringe or the sagebrush slope.

"How?" said the Ute chief, as he drew rein.

"Glad to see you, Colorow," responded the scout.

For a moment they sat eying each other, as if each would read the innermost thought of the other.

Colorow, somewhat past the prime of vigorous manhood, was a tall and well-proportioned brave, with a not unhandsome face for an Indian. It was strong and showed character; the broad, high brow told of more than the average Indian intelligence; the eye was like the eye of an eagle.

A few fine lines of paint on cheek and forehead gave to the countenance a more savage look than it would otherwise have possessed. Yet the face was not daubed with paint, as Indian faces often are; nor did it show broad stripes and bands, or intricate figures and designs. Colorow was not in his war-paint. This was a peaceful mission, and he had come as a peaceful man.

Yet, aside from the lack of paint, he showed how important he regarded this conference with the great scout, by the elaborate manner of his dress, the richness of whose fringe and ornaments of quill and beads and needlework baffles description. The beadwork glittered on his hunting-shirt like gems, and his moccasins, also, were profusely ornamented with them.

"The great scout sent word for the Ute chief to meet him," said Colorow, "and to come alone, and with no weapons in his hands. He has done so."

He spread out his open, empty hands.

"Yet behind the scout's back is a quick-shooting rifle, a knife in his belt, and the little quick-shooting guns that kill many men in a minute are at his hips and in the holsters of his saddle!"

Something like scorn flashed in the eagle eyes of the chief.
“Colorow has come unarmed; the great scout has not!”
Buffalo Bill smiled quietly.
“I asked for the great chief to meet me alone in the heart of this valley,” he answered, “that we might talk together of the anger of his young men, and of the horse-soldiers encamped beyond the mountains. I am willing to leave my arms behind me, even as he has done.”

He had spoken in the chief’s native tongue.
He turned his horse slowly about, and with his back to the chief rode slowly away for a hundred paces, and there, dismounting, he proceeded to divest himself of all his weapons.

Colorow sat on the ground, watching him, with face grave and impassive.
The scout left his horse picketed on the plain, and returned to the meeting-point on foot.
The Indian chief had his pipe out and was rubbing together between his brown palms some tobacco mixed with willow bark. A wonderful thing was that pipe—with its long stem, from which floating eagle-feathers depended, and its great bowl of carved stone.

Buffalo Bill dropped to a seat on the grass, facing the mute chieftain.
Colorow said not a word, but continued to pulverize the tobacco and bark in his hands; and then stuffed the mixture into the bowl of the pipe.

Having filled the pipe, he produced from the beaded-deerskin pouch at his side flint and steel, and struck sparks into the tobacco, drawing solemnly on the long stem until the tobacco had ignited.

Colorow had matches in that bag, but these he would not use in lighting the ceremonial pipe. That must be done with flint and steel, in the fashion of the olden time.

Having lighted the pipe, he blew a ring of smoke toward the north, the south, the east, and the west, thus in a manner making the sign of the cross.

Old Colorow did not know why he did this, except that it was the Indian custom; he did not know that the custom had come down to him, in a changed form, from that distant day, when the French missionaries, ascending the Mississippi and the Missouri to teach Christianity to the Indians, had taught them to make the sign of the cross.

The Indians had forgotten its original significance, even while in a modified form they retained the custom.

Having thus invoked the favor of the spirits of the air, the water, the mountains, and the prairies on the conference that was to take place, without a word, and in the most solemn and formal manner, the chief passed the ceremonial pipe to Buffalo Bill, who repeated the singular performance.

When this had been done old Colorow was ready to talk; and he opened by reminding the scout that he—Colorow—had been invited by the great scout to meet him there.

“The horse-soldiers are in the valley beyond the mountains,” he said, meaning at the foot of the mountains, on the edge of the plains. “They have many men and many long-shooting guns, and their coming frightens my people.”

“You know why they are there,” said the scout, speaking as slowly and calmly as the chief. “They have come because your young men threaten the lives of the white men and women in the mountain valleys. The Great Father, at Washington, has heard that the white people are in danger, and so he has sent the horse-soldiers, that they may protect the white people, if needed. But the Great Father has a warm heart toward his children, the Utes; he does not wish them harmed, or frightened by the horse-soldiers. Yet he must protect the white people, when they are threatened.”

“My young men are uneasy because the white men take the valley land and encroach on the hunting ranges of the mountains. They have quick heads and hot hearts.”

“The white men have taken no lands but those the Utes have sold to them—lands which they sold to the Great Father, and to which they have no longer any rights.”

Colorow’s face clouded and his thin lips curled.

“The chiefs who sold the lands had no right to sell them,” he declared. “The lands belonged to the Ute people, and not to those chiefs. The false chiefs have lied, and have gone to the Snakes and the Blackfeet. The Utes have cast them out.”

“Let my brother hearken to me,” said the scout earnestly. “If the young men of the Utes dig up the tomahawk and turn its edge against the white people who have made homes in these valleys, I shall not be able to restrain the wrath of the Great Father, which will then burn hot against the Utes. The horse-soldiers will climb over the hills, and they will come with their long-shooting guns, and there will be wailing in the Ute lodges for the young men slain.”

Colorow drew his robe stiffly and proudly about him.

“Does my brother use threats?”

“No, I but speak the truth.”

“Let the Great Father remove the white people who have come here, and let him send the horse-soldiers away, and then there will be no trouble; the hearts of my young men will not grow hot in their breasts, if the hunting-grounds are no more trodden by the feet of white men. But the white men do not even stay in the valleys; they roam over the mountains, hunting for the yellow earth which they call gold, and they scare the game away, and kill it with their rifles. The deer are frightened, the elk are going; even the bear hides in the hollows of the hills, afraid any more to come out into the open.”

Buffalo Bill was at a loss how to answer this. The charge was true; the white men were roaming everywhere, hunting for gold, and they were killing game and frightening it away.

“The Great Father gives money to the Utes,” he said.

“He gives them guns and knives and looking-glasses, and hatchets and nails, and many things which they would not have had. He gives these things in return for the valley lands which the white men occupy. The white men will not leave these lands.”

“But the men who hunt for the yellow earth?”

“If they harm any of the people of my friend, the great chief, they will be punished for it by the Great Father. He does not wish any of his red children harmed.”

“They scare away the game,” Colorow insisted, with some warmth.

“They but want the yellow earth, and they will not harm the Utes, if the Utes do not attack them.”

“The hearts of my young men are very hot against them. I can no longer restrain them.”
“My friend, the great chief, must speak to his young men; he must repeat to them the message from the Great Father; and he must warn them! The Great Father’s anger will burn, and it will melt away the Utes if it is aroused against them. Will not the great chief repeat this message to his young men; and say to them that they must not lift hand against any of the white people in these mountains?”

Colorow arose abruptly, almost angrily.
The scout flushed, as if he had been slapped in the face.
“I will deliver the message,” said Colorow curtly.
Then he turned abruptly, and walked slowly away, not once looking back.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTIVE WHITE GIRL.

Buffalo Bill felt some uneasiness, as he saw old Colorow walking away in that manner.
It foreboded evil. The old chief had not been pleased with the interview, and it had terminated suddenly and in a manner most unsatisfactory.
Yet there was sadness in the eyes of Buffalo Bill, instead of anger. He knew how true were many of the things of which the Utes complained.
But how were they to be prevented? It would have required regiments of men to hold back the gold-hunters, or force them to let the game alone; and as for the settlers on the valley lands, they could not be ordered to leave them simply because at this time the younger men of the Ute tribe had taken it into their heads to dishonor the sale and treaty made by their chiefs of these lands.
When Colorow had walked some distance the scout rose, returned to his horse, picked up his weapons, and then, mounting, rode slowly back toward the hills from which he had come.
Colorow gained the fringe of aspens, and there disappeared from sight, so that when Buffalo Bill turned round to look he was not to be seen.
Buffalo Bill knew that trouble was brewing. Already some outrages had been committed. A settler had been murdered in his cabin, and some gold-hunters had been shot on one of the lonely trails.
There were wild rumors flying. The younger braves—always the ones who make trouble—were reported to be holding war-dances and exciting the tribe to anger against the whites.
Some of the settlers had already fled from the mountains, and others were going; and the fear of an Indian outbreak had caused the government to send a company of cavalry toward the scene.
They were in camp now, over at the edge of the foothills; and Buffalo Bill, as the government scout, had been sent to find and meet Colorow and try to induce him to hold the young bucks in check.
The interview had been held, but Colorow had not been placated. He believed in his heart that the young men were right; and while he probably had enough knowledge of the power of the whites to make him wary of an encounter with the soldiers, it was clear that he would not try very hard to restrain his young men.
The scout was not sure that Colorow could do anything of the kind, if he desired; yet he had seen that Colorow’s desire in that line was not strong.
It was now the scout’s intention to return to the camp of the soldiers and there report to the officer commanding.
He climbed the high ridge from which he had surveyed the valley before descending into it, and from that point saw the mounted Ute chief riding toward the western hills.
Riding down from this ridge, he struck a trail in the ravine, and followed this for some time.
It was past midday when he came in sight of a group of houses, at the settlement known as Meekin.
Some valley farming had been attempted then by means of irrigation. Squares of green alfalfa showed, together with gardens and small farms.
The houses were clustered together in a little group.
The place was so strangely silent that when the scout came in sight of it he drew rein. Producing his field-glass, he leveled it on the little town.
What he saw convinced him that the houses had been abandoned.
“Frightened away by threats of an Indian uprising,” was his conclusion. “It would be well, perhaps, if all had been frightened away, for there’s going to be bloody trouble in these hills within a week, in my judgment.”
He had scarcely put the glass away, and was about to ride on, when he heard the scream of a woman, from a point off on his right.
The slope was steep there. Without trying to force the horse up it, he leaped from the saddle; and, leaving the horse standing in the trail, hastily climbed the intervening divide.
What he beheld when he reached the top sent the blood jumping through his veins.
Two stalwart Utes, both young, were jerking a white girl along the trail, one of them pulling her by the hair.
She was frightened, and the pain had caused her to scream.
The one who had her by the hair jerked her forward again, and when she fell prostrate he lifted a knife. Probably he meant to scare her, but she expected death, and screamed loudly.
A brutal kick from his mocassined foot followed this.
The angry blood mounted to the scout’s ears.
His rifle went to his shoulder with lightning quickness. Its report rang out, and the brutal savage who was jerking the prostrate girl threw up his hands with a wild yell of astonishment, and tumbled over on his face in the trail.
The scout pumped another cartridge into his rifle.
The second Indian stared wildly around.
But, instead of having been frightened enough to make him abandon the girl, he caught her in his arms, and with a quick jump interposed a large boulder between himself and the unknown rifleman.
The scout fired again, without execution; and then leaped angrily down the slope.

CHAPTER III.

THE MASSACRE.

The settlement at Meekin was one of the earliest and most prosperous in the Colorado mountains.
It grew up around Jim Meekin’s store and trading-post. The store had lately supplied few people besides the families of settlers. The miners and prospectors had moved further on, and the Indians seldom came there
of late. Hence the little town had become a quiet and almost prosaic place.

Jim Meekin was away much of the time now, and in his absence the store and post-office were tended by his daughter Lillie.

The growing uneasiness of the whites had caused some of the people to move away, and more were talking of going.

Lillie Meekin went on with her work in the store. She had heard talk of Ute uprisings many times, and took small stock in the rumors. She thought the people were foolish.

Even when word came that the young Utes were dancing, and that a company of soldiers had been sent to that vicinity from the nearest military-post, Lillie Meekin still disbelieved in the danger, of which every one now talked.

One day she was given a fright.

She had not seen an Indian in months, when a big Ute stalked solemnly into the store.

She had heard the clatter of hoofs in the streets, and, glancing through the window, she saw a number of Indians out there. Some of them had dismounted and seemed about to tie their horses, but others still sat on horseback.

Lillie Meekin was not well versed in Indian ways, yet she observed that these Indians wore an unusually large amount of paint and feathers.

The Ute who had come into the store had drawn a huge knife, which of itself would have been enough to frighten a timid girl. Without speaking a word to her, he came slowly along the counter.

She was behind the counter; and retreated before him until she came to the wall by the window, where she could go no farther, unless she hoisted the window and leaped out.

She fancied that his snaky eyes glittered, and she was aware that she had an intense desire to scream at the top of her voice.

Pallidating with fear she watched him, as he stepped slowly along.

Then she wanted to laugh; for he reached up to a shelf where there was a tobacco-box, and taking down a plug of tobacco cut a large slice from it.

He began to retreat when he had done that, and she fancied she saw a twinkle of humor in his eyes. She knew, then, that he had merely been trying to scare her, which was his Indian idea of fun.

He was hardly outside of the house, though, when some one fired a rifle. She knew, later, that this was an excited young man who, having ordered two Indians not to enter his house, where his wife lay sick, had in a rash moment fired the shot.

The young Ute fell across the door-sill, spattering it with his blood. The young white man sprang back into the house, closing the door.

That single shot was followed by a volley, which pattered on the doors and walls of that house.

It was the opening volley of the Ute war; for the enraged Utes, after losing more of their numbers, battered in the doors and windows, slew the man and his wife; and then running wildly amuck through the town, slew and scalped every white person they encountered.

A few of the men, barricading themselves in a cabin with their women and children, put up a stiff fight, killing some more of the young bucks; only to fail themselves, before the thing ended.

Lillie Meekin saw only the beginning of that dreadful massacre.

Frightened half out of her wits by seeing men and women shot down in the little streets as they ran for their homes, she hurried to the rear of the store.

There she found a small door, through which she crept through to a back room. In the darkness there she borrowed beneath some boxes, pulling gummy-bags and other things of that kind down on top of her. There she lay for hours, trembling and frightened beyond the power of words to describe, expecting all the time that the building would be burned over her head.

In the store was some whisky, in bottles and casks; and getting possession of this devil's broth the Utes wound up in a wild carnival.

It was this that probably saved her.

They believed they had killed every white person in the place. The contents of the store they piled in the street. Turning their attention to the whisky, in an hour's time they were blind drunk, and more than half of them lay scattered about the streets, snoring like so many stupid hogs, dead to all things earthly.

Night came down, and still the girl shivered with dread in her hiding-place. Now and then she heard wild Indian yells.

Still under the fear that the place where she was hiding would be given to the torch, she crept out of it under cover of the darkness.

As she fled she stumbled over dead men and intoxicated Indians. One of the latter rose half up as her feet struck him. He clutched at her, muttering something, and fell back.

She fled on wildly, forgetting caution.

A few Indians were still prowling about who had not been overcome by the whisky; or, if overcome, had partially recovered.

They saw her, as she scrambled in horror across lots and toward the hills. And they pursued her.

Then she lost all sense of direction and ran on and on, falling only to regain her feet and plunge blindly ahead.

When she felt she could go no farther she crouched down in the darkness.

But she managed to outdistance her pursuers. A great horror was still on her. By and by she began to consider what she was to do. She was sure she was the only person of the town left alive who had been in the place when the Utes came there.

A desire grew on her to give warning to those who happened to be away at the time, but who might soon return and fall into the hands of the murderers. Among these was her own father.

She feared, however, to try anything that night, and lay where she had fallen through the long, long hours. In all that time she heard nothing. Not a wolf howled on the hills. Only the night wind moaned.

The time was summer, yet the air was chill, and before morning came she was stiff with the cold, and with the stiffness and soreness that came as a natural result of her wild flight.

The town was not in sight from the point where she lay; but when, in the early morning, she had climbed to the top of the nearest hill, she was able to see it.

It looked so quiet and peaceful that she was almost
tempted to believe the things which had occurred were figments of a crazed imagination. She knew better. There had been a horrible massacre, and she believed herself the sole survivor.

Though she had lived so long at Meekin she was not familiar with the hills where she now was; but getting her bearings as well as she could by the sun, she began a long detour, in the hope of striking the trail on the other side of the town, whereby she might make her way down toward the lower settlements and warn them, and also warn any traveler who might be passing over that trail.

It was afternoon, and she was hardly able to drag one foot after the other, though she was keeping on pluckily, when she was confronted by two young Utes in all the glory of war-paint.

They had been of the number who had massacred and looted at Meekin. She screamed when she saw them before her, and tried to run. They overtook her with a few quick leaps, and then they began to drive her on before them, beating her, and jerking at her hair to make her walk faster.

They were still under the influence of the whisky they had swallowed, and all the brutality and deviltry of their nature was in full play. It delighted them to see her writhe with pain and scream with fear. They laughed, and repeated the performance for the sole purpose of making her writhe and scream again.

Then, suddenly, a rifle cracked on the high slope off at one side, and one of the young bucks who was thus amusing himself spun round suddenly, and fell forward on his face.

Buffalo Bill had sighted the two Indians with the captive, and had opened on them with his rifle.

The sight presented by this man was as terrible as he had ever looked on, for the man had been scalped.

"Where was this?" the scout asked.

"At Meekin."

"Tell me about it."

He was producing his water-bottle and pressing it against the poor fellow's fevered lips.

The man went on with his story as soon as he could.

"It happened yesterday afternoon. Utes came there, and a fight began. I was shot and fell in the street, close by my house, into which I tried to get. The bullet went through my shoulder. The Indian who shot me took my scalp as soon as I fell, and after that I didn't know anything for hours. They thought I was dead. When I came to myself it was dark, and the Indians were drunk or drinking and everybody in the place had been killed. I saw dead men and women lying in the street. Then I crawled away and—"

He choked with pain, excitement, and weariness, and the scout gave him more water.

"That is all?"

"Yes."

"Your name?"

"Jasper Seaver."

"You think everyone was killed?"

"I'm sure of it. The red devils thought I was dead, or I'd never got away."

The scout knew, however, that at least one other had escaped—the girl he had seen a captive of the two Indians. He asked other questions, speaking rapidly, and the wounded and suffering man replied as well as he could.

"Seaver," he said, "I don't know whether you can ride or not; but I have a horse on the other side of this ridge; and down at Crow Butte is camped a company of the Seventh Cavalry. I can let you have that horse and a revolver, and all the food you want, and water. I'd go with you, but there was another person who escaped from Meekin, and that was a girl, who passed this point not many minutes ago. You see that dead Indian?"

Seaver stared at the corpse of the Ute.

"He and one other Ute had this young woman a prisoner, and from the top of that ridge I shot this fellow. The other caught her up and ran with her, and I had just found the trail here when you appeared."

"Then that was the shot I heard?"

"It was."

"That shot is what brought me in this direction. I didn't know but it was fired by an Indian. When I saw that you were a white man I nearly fainted with joy."

He dropped to the grass, where he sat, reeling with weakness.

Buffalo Bill looked at him with sad eyes. He doubted the ability of this man to make the ride to Crow Butte. The fellow had bled a good deal, and that and the pain of his wounds had made him weak as water.

Yet the scout felt that he was losing precious time even now, and that it was his duty to hurry to the assistance of the girl.

He told Seaver what was in his mind, while Seaver looked at him with dull eyes.

"I'll see what I can do for the wound in your shoulder, if anything."
The scout stripped back the bloody shirt. Discovering that the wound had almost ceased to bleed, he concluded to let it alone, as the shirt was sticking to it; and to tear the shirt away would be to reopen the wound.

As for the scalp wound, it required the services of a surgeon.

The scout saw that the man had an iron constitution or he could not have stood the terrible strain. Yet he feared it was expecting more than human endurance was capable of for Seaver to ride now over the long trail to Crow Butte.

But what was he to do? He could not remain there with Seaver. The problem solved itself, as problems have a way of doing some time.

"More Indians!" cried Seaver suddenly.

He had been staring at the top of the hill in the direction from which the scout had come. Though his eyes were dull with pain and blood-stained, he had seen a figure moving there, and he believed it the figure of an Indian, with others behind it.

CHAPTER V.

OLD NICK NOMAD.

The man whom Seaver took to be an Indian rode a gnarled and shaggy horse, and carried across the saddle in front of him a long rifle of ancient manufacture. As for himself, he was as ancient and shaggy-looking as the horse; his beard and hair were long, and his clothing tattered by contact with tearing bushes and cacti. He was a small man; and, sitting crouched low in the big saddle, with his shoulders humped and his neck drawn in, he looked even smaller than he was.

Behind him he led the horse which Buffalo Bill had left on the other side of the divide.

"Old Nick Nomad!" cried the scout, with a tone of relief and delight.

"You know him?" said Seaver.

"Know him? There's no one I know better. Ah, this simplifies things! He must have been following my trail."

Nick Nomad came slowly down the slope, his wary little eyes glancing keenly round. When he drew nearer, it was seen that his wide mouth was stretched in a grin of pleasure.

"Glad ter see ye, Buffalo!" was his greeting.

"I never was more pleased to see any one in my life," was the scout's truthful answer.

Nomad jogged up at an easy canter, dragging at the rein of Buffalo Bill's horse.

"Found this creetur over thar, and knew 'twas yourn," he explained, glancing at Seaver, who through weakness had sunk to a seat on the ground. "Been fol-lerin' yer trail for a goodish spell, Buffalo. Struck it over on r'other side o' that long slope, after you'd had that confab with ther Injun in the valley."

Seaver was looking at this strange figure, and wondering how the old trapper knew so much.

"Who war that you war confab in with, Buffalo?"

"Old Colorow."

"Thet old skunk!"

"I met him, in hope that something could be done to prevent a Ute outbreak."

"She's already come, Buffalo!"

"Yes, I know it; here's evidence of it!"

He indicated Seaver.

"But we haven't any time to talk, Nick. I've got work for you to do at once. The Utes have massacred the people at Meekin. This man, Mr. Seaver, and a girl escaped. She is a prisoner, and a Ute, who was a companion of that fellow lying dead there, went on down this trail with her. He must be followed at once. Seaver must be taken to some place where he can get proper attention, and the Seventh Cavalry, at Crow Butte, must be notified that the Utes are on the war-path."

He spoke hurriedly.

"I knew good and well they had broke loose," said the trapper, not at all hurried in his manner. "I see some o' ther devils on the other trail, not more'n an hour ago. They'd a lot o' plunder with 'em. I reckon they took it from Meekin."

"Could you ride at once to Crow Butte?"

"And seein' 'em," the trapper went on, with exasperating slowness, "and then comin' on ther trail o' yer hoss, Buffalo, what you'd been confab wi' thet Injun, made me sorta uneasy about ye; and so I followed yer trail to here."

He looked again at Seaver; then answered the scout's question:

"Yes, Buffalo, I stands ready ter kerry out orders. But I'm s'prised at ye talkin' wi' that old murderer, Colorow. Ef you'd shot 'im, 'stid of talkin' ter him, it would 'a' been servin' him proper. But I'm ready, Buffalo. I war anxious about ye; but I sees that you're all right."

He looked at Seaver again.

"But we ain't got but two hosses," he added.

"I'm going to follow the girl," the scout announced.

"You're to take my horse and your own, with this man on one of them, and ride for Crow Butte. Seaver is in pretty bad shape, but maybe he can hold up for the trip. If he can't, and you have to leave him, make him comfortable somewhere, and then go on. You might stop on the way and take a look at Meekin. There may be other survivors in or about the place."

Old Nick swung to the ground, showing no sign of his age, which his general appearance indicated.

His horse had dropped its shaggy head as if it had not enough life and energy to hold it up.

"Nebby war plum anxious about ye—as anxious as I war myself," said the trapper, referring to the shaggy beast; "but now that he sees you're all right he's feelin' better."

He laughed in a cackling way.

The things that so disturbed Buffalo Bill seemed to make no impression on the gnarled old man, who had seen so much of life and death in the mountains.

Yet old Nick was far from being heartless, as the scout knew.

He dropped down by the side of Seaver.

"Ther air reds war hair-hungry when they comes your way," he said; "but I've seen more'n one man who had his hair lifted and lived ter tell of it to his grandchildren. So, I reckons, you're all right yit. This wound in yer shoulder looks bad."

Together he and Buffalo Bill helped the wounded man to the back of the scout's horse. Then old Nick swung up into his own saddle. Leading the scout's horse, he turned about.

Buffalo Bill was already moving away.
Old Nick had received all the instructions necessary. He knew the mountains and the trail, and could find his way to Crow Butte without trouble. He would care for Seaver as well as Buffalo Bill could do himself.

He turned and waved his hand as he rode away.

"Look out for ther pizen redes, Buffler! This Meckin business will make 'em wuss than rattlesnakes. I'll have ther troopers hyar in a hurry, an' you'll see me along of 'em."

Buffalo Bill gilded out of sight, down into a gully where the trail led, and was off in pursuit of the Indian who had dragged the girl away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNDERGROUND RIVER.

There were indications that the Indian had hurried straight on. At first he had carried the girl; but a little later he had set her down and forced her on at a rapid gait.

These points were easy to determine by a trail so skilled as Buffalo Bill.

At first there was but one track, which sank rather deep into the soft soil at the bottom of the gully. Then there were two, one being the girl's, and plainly distinguishable; for she wore shoes that were small and dainty, while the big mocassin tracks of the Ute could not be mistaken for anything else.

This was at the beginning of the Indian's flight, after his companion had been killed.

But the trail faded out after that, and would have been lost to any but the keenest trail; for the Ute had sought the flintiest slopes, and barren rocks, which left no tracks.

There was the constant danger of ambush to be guarded against by the scout. Hence his progress was slow—even slower than that of the burdened Indian, who had now a considerable start. Where the country was open this was easy; but where there were bushes and boulders behind which one might lie in wait, the task became difficult. The scout had no notion of running into a bullet or arrow.

In addition, the difficulty of spelling out the trail where it was dim consumed much time.

The trail led by and by into a wild ravine, which showed lava in sheets and in broken boulders, this lava being like flint. An elephant could have made no impression in passing over it.

But even here the scout was not baffled. The lay of the land guided him when he could see no trail at all. On either hand were frowning cliffs, where a few bushes grew.

It would have been almost impossible for the Ute to scale the cliffs with the girl without clinging to some of those shrubs to aid his ascent. Therefore, the scout gave close attention to the bushes.

Now and then he halted and trained his glasses on one of them, for the double purpose of determining the possibility of the Ute being behind it in ambush, and to see if any of the twigs or branches had been bent or broken.

Working thus slowly along, his eyes seeing everything before him and on each side of him, the scout came into a still lower part of the ravine.

At the bottom here was a dry water channel, with water at intervals standing in holes.

A little later, somewhat to his surprise, the channel dropped from sight in a hole which resembled a well.

A sheet of lava had been thrown across at some time in the remote past, covering in the channel; but the river had here bored a hole and disappeared in it.

For a time the scout hesitated, looking at that dark hole.

Not a trace of the passage of the Indian and his prisoner could be seen, and none had been detected for a quarter of a mile back.

Going on beyond the hole the scout scanned the lava crust there.

The wash and wear of water and frost had disintegrated some of the lava, and the disintegrated portions lay like black sand in the little hollows.

But in no place could the scout come upon a footprint.

Returning to the well-like opening, the scout put his hat on the end of his rifle and thrust it over the edge.

To one below it would have seemed that the owner of the hat was trying to look down into the opening without exposing himself.

The scout tried this from different sides of the hole, hoping it would draw a shot from the Indian, if he were hiding below.

It required unweariny patience to be a successful tracker of man or beast, and particularly of man, where the tracker must match his wits against wits that are perhaps as keen as his own.

There was every reason why the great scout should wish to hurry on, the peril and fright of the girl being chief.

Yet he moved slowly and cautiously, as if time were of little account.

When the projection of his hat over the opening drew no shot, he gathered some dead leaves and brushwood, and forming these into a sort of torch he lighted it and tossed it into the well-like space.

As he did so he listened intently, for he felt sure if the Indian were below, that sudden descent of the fiery mass would drive him back. Yet he heard nothing.

Venturing to look over at last, the light of the fire which had fallen to the bottom of the hole showed the ragged edges of the "well," and also showed a hole which opened horizontally, like a ragged tunnel, or a section of twisted and broken water-pipe.

Water streaming down into the "well" was drawn off through that hole. But there was no water in the well now. Otherwise, the fire would not have burned.

When the torch went out and the smoke cleared out of the opening, Buffalo Bill swung himself over and descended carefully, letting himself down by clinging to the jagged edges of lava.

The bottom of the "well" was twenty feet below the surface. He reached it quickly. Stooping over the edge he peered into the horizontal tunnel.

It was as black as the fabled "stack of black cats."

No sound came from that hole, though the scout crouched for some time in the opening, listening.

It seemed so improbable that the Indian had gone in there that Buffalo Bill climbed out of the "well," for another look about.

He went to the farther side and found that the lava blocked in the old bed of the stream. Because of it, the only way out of the ravine—which here became a
"pocket"—was by a tiresome climb up over the mountains, which rose in rugged peaks and sheer walls. The scout went back.

He had lost much time, yet he was sure now that the Ute had gone into that "well."

He therefore descended into it again, and crawled into the tunnel, making his way along on his hands and knees, feeling his course before him, for he could not know that some awful chasm or fissure was not under his very nose, so great was the darkness.

When he had advanced in this way for some time he was stopped by the sound of trickling water. It was right before him; and, as he crept on, his hands touched the edge of the stream.

Venturing now to strike a match, he saw before him a small stream of water, which came from a hole at the right. This was the juncture-joint of two tunnels; and from this, straight on, the water filled the single channel.

But the tunnel was now much enlarged, partaking of the nature of a cavern. The ceiling, or roof, was black lava, honeycombed; and the walls and the floor were also of lava. The floor had been rubbed smooth as an asphalt pavement by the passage of water.

It was at this point that Buffalo Bill had the first proof that he was on the right track, and had made no mistake in thinking the Indian had taken that course for a wet moccasin footprint, that had not been given time to dry in that underground place, showed on the edge of the stream.

The heart of the scout leaped with exultation when he beheld it.

The match fell sputtering into the water, after he had given one keen look ahead into the darkness. Unless there were bends in the tunnel, the light of the match could have been seen a long distance.

Having noted the general direction, and that the stream ran on as far as he could see, the scout set out now, walking in the water.

The air was cool and damp and the water cold. The little stream gurgled musically, now and then making so much sound that Buffalo Bill stopped to listen, in order to ascertain if any other sounds were rising in that strange underground place.

So long as the water ran straight on he knew he could not tumble into any great chasm, though he might fall into a hole which contained deep water. The latter did not trouble him—he could swim; and it was a relief to walk straight on, with the assurance that the next step would not plunge him into some rift that might be hundreds of feet deep.

It was a singular experience, following this underground stream, of whose existence he had been ignorant. After a time he heard a roar, as of a waterfall, showing that at that point the stream tumbled over rocks.

When he drew near this, Buffalo Bill struck another match. Holding it over his head he tried to get a view of the falls.

The channel contracted at this point, making the water deeper. If he went up, he saw that when he reached the falls the water would probably rise over the tops of his high boots. There was no shore on either side.

He struck another match, and walked a little farther; and as he did this he was startled by seeing a wet moccasin track at the foot of the steep, black cliff on his right.

The next moment an arrow skittered by his head, striking in the water.

He dropped down, to avoid another, and drew a revolver. His hand striking the water put out the match. Following, and almost accompanying, that arrow-shot, there was a struggle somewhere on that steep, black cliff, and the scream of a woman rang out with a distinctness that was startling.

The scout knew that the scream came from the girl prisoner. He struck another match, that he might see what was going on, even though at the risk of calling forth another arrow.

As he scratched the match, a form shot with a sliding motion down the cliff toward him, striking in the water and throwing it in a shower in his face.

The match flared up and revealed the girl in the water, almost within reach of his hand. It revealed, too, the Ute, tumbling down the lava wall, as if he had thrown himself bodily in pursuit of her.

The splashing water put out the match even as it flared into flame; then the Ute struck the water with another splash that threw a shower into the face of the scout.

He heard the Ute yell wildly; heard a wild scrambling and floundering; trying to strike another match, that he might know what to do and see what was being done, the scout became aware that the struggle had ceased suddenly.

The roar of the falls alone sounded, with the swash and gurgle of the current against the ragged lava rocks.

The scout's face and clothing were showered and wet; but the match-case was dry, and he drew out another match.

With some difficulty he got it to flare up, and, holding it up, looked about.

No human form was to be seen. On the lava wall were wet marks, showing where the water had splashed. That was all.

He held up the match until it burned down to his fingers, and listened through the roar of the water.

"Gone over the falls!" was his conclusion.

He did not know how high the falls were. He stood in what may be called the cataracts, with the water washing up about his legs, as it raced for the plunge over into the darkness beyond.

Over those falls the girl and the Ute had gone, whether to life or death he did not know.

"He was holding her up there somewhere on a shelf," was the scout's conclusion, as he tried to frame a theory for what he had seen and heard. "Perhaps he had choked her into submission. He knew I was coming; and he climbed up there, no doubt, with the thought of shooting me with the arrow. The arrow missed. Perhaps it slipped on the bowstring. Then the girl tried to get away, and both came tumbling down here. And the falls carried them over."

The match flickered out and left him once more alone in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

Buffalo Bill was undeniably in a quandary. It seemed not courage, but mere foolhardiness, to leap into the falls and shoot over them into the unknown
darkness, in order to continue this singular underground pursuit, when he did not know whether the girl or the Ute were still alive.

The water washing against his legs told him that the current was not extremely rapid or heavy, as would have been the case if the falls had been high.

While he stood hesitating, he caught the gleam of another light from up-stream. It was but a momentary glimpse, but it was startling.

This light vanished; then swung into view again; and he saw that it was in a canoe occupied by Utes.

They were coming down-stream, and straight toward him. The light was fixed as a torch in the bow; and one of the Utes, sitting beside it, was paddling energetically to keep the frail craft off the rocks.

The scout's position was exceedingly ticklish.

With that light flashing on the water, he was certain he could not keep from being seen where he was.

A fight seemed the only solution, and he loosed his revolvers.

Then he remembered the shelf from which the girl and the Ute had tumbled. The Ute had climbed up to that point, and he could do the same. It ought to be easier for him than for the Ute, for the latter had been hampered by the girl.

Though the scout could see the boat plainly by this time, the occupants could not see him. The light of the torch did not reach far enough for that, and it also blinded them to objects any distance off.

There was no time for hesitation, and Buffalo Bill began scrambling up the face of the rock.

The water poured from his boots and clothing as he did so, wetting the lava cliff, the sides of which were so steep and slippery that he found the climb a difficult one.

Yet he clambered on, and reached the shelf where the Ute had crouched with the girl. He remained concealed on the rock as the boat came shooting on toward the falls.

He was aware now that this underground stream was thoroughly familiar to the Utes, which accounted for the fact that the Indian with the prisoner had taken it.

It seemed likely, as the true reason for the Ute's wait there on the shelf, that he had been waiting for the coming of this boat, fearing to trust himself to the falls without such aid.

The Utes in the boat were not watching the black walls that swept by them, but they could hardly help seeing those wet streaks made by the scout's climb up to the shelf.

One of them cried out his discovery, and there was a wild backing of paddles. The torch flared red in the darkness.

The scout lifted a revolver.

In the boat he saw a number of articles which he did not doubt had been taken from the houses at Meekin.

These Utes were some of the murderous young braves who had attacked that place.

The bow of the boat swung round under the furious backing of the paddles. The Utes were talking and questioning in exclamatory gutturals.

While the scout crouched on the shelf above the stream, with revolver lifted, something moved behind him, startling him, and gave him the unpleasant feeling that an enemy was in there.

Then a red hand reached out and snatched at the revolver, clutching Buffalo Bill by the arm.

There had been two Utes on that ledge over the stream!

One of them had come down the underground river with the girl.

The second must have been already on the shelf, waiting for the boat, being joined there by the one who held the girl. And this second one was still there when the scout climbed up to the shelf.

It was enough to unnerved almost any man not so ironhearted as the great scout.

He jerked his arm forward, to shake off that clutch; and the next instant he was fighting desperately with the savage on the ledge.

A cry rang out from the Ute, summoning help from those below.

Buffalo Bill tried to use his knife or revolver in the contracted area; but the savage had locked his long arms round the scout and held on mercilessly.

A clamor of excitement rose from the boat.

Then the scout and warrior fell off the shelf together, whirling and sliding down the lava wall, while the cries from the boat rose in a scrambling babel.

The struggling men struck the boat, burying it under water and throwing out the occupants.

Buffalo Bill felt himself caught by the current and swept on toward the falls, even while he still fought with the Ute who had clutched him.

The Ute's arms relaxed suddenly; and then the scout knew he was shooting over the falls, and had the sensation of being thrown through the air.

The current tossed him like a log. A din of hideous noises roared in his ears. He seemed deluged by tons and tons of water; and, whirling round and round, while he made a vain effort to swim, he felt his lungs choking for air and his brain reeling.

He knew that he was falling through the water, or being driven through whirlpools; and then he shot to the surface, popping up like a submerged log shooting to the surface; and the cool air filled his lungs again.

There were dark spots round him that appeared to be men scrambling in the water, though he could not be sure of that.

He supported himself on the surface as well as he could, and felt the racing current sweep him on. And soon he seemed to be alone. All round him was darkness, in which nothing was visible.

As he thus drove on, a distant point of light came slowly toward him.

He took courage when he beheld it, for it indicated daylight. The strength of the current was decreasing, too, as the falls were left behind.

He supported himself by swimming, keeping his head well out of the water.

As the light came nearer and began to make its influence felt, showing the black walls between which the stream ran, the scout became aware that a dark object floating near him was the overturned boat.

It floated bottom up, almost within reach of his hand. He looked round, thinking to see some of the Indians; but he saw nothing else.

"I'm afraid that girl never came over the waterfall alive," was his thought. "It seems to me that some of those Utes, or all of them, were drowned."

It was clear, though, that it was a habit of these In-
dians to run the waterfall with boats. Perhaps it offered a short cut to some interior valley, saving a long journey across the wild mountains.

The approaching point of light was the end of the tunnel in which the scout had been so long; here the stream flowed out again into daylight, after its submerged journey.

The scout swam to the boat and laid a hand on it, that he might have its aid in supporting himself in the water. As he clung thus to it, the current carried him along, and finally shot him out into the light through the opening.

Just before him was a naked sand-bar, in a bend of the stream.

Then his heart jumped with the discovery that followed; for beyond the ridge of stones and gravel were Ute teepees, with smoke rising from them, and Indians moving among them. Close down by the water were a number of ponies, with Ute boys playing near them, while men and women were near the stream.

To escape discovery seemed impossible.

Yet even then the scout's courage did not forsake him.

If the girl had escaped the peril of the waterfall, she was certainly in this village and in one of those lodges. If he could find concealment and remain hidden until night, he could hope to find her and release her.

He dived with the softness of an otter, sinking down out of sight and rising under the end of the canoe, leaving only his face visible. His hat he had removed, holding it under water with one hand, while with the other hand he clung to the end of the boat.

Thus he drifted on, wondering if in this manner he could run past the village.

The thing seemed impossible. The boat was certain to be seen, and as certain to be taken from the water. The Utes would never let it float on by.

Realizing this, the scout tried to guide it toward the sand-bar. If he could safely ground it there, before it was opposite the village, he might, by desperate and clever work, get into the screen of willows and cottonwoods that formed there a thin fringe, and so keep himself from discovery.

In a little while the boat grounded softly against the bar.

If it had escaped attention so far, of which the scout was not sure, it would not escape it long; so he began to move softly toward the land as soon as his feet touched bottom.

Rising half erect, as he reached the sandy shore, he turned round and was astounded to see an Indian swim out from behind the other end of the boat. The redman reached the sand-bar and rose to his feet.

For an instant the scout and the Ute stood staring at each other.

The scout's clothing was dripping wet, and streams of water ran down upon the sand from them. The Ute had on nothing but a breech-clout, with feathers in his long black hair. His face had been smeared with paint, which the water had run together in queer streaks, giving him a horrible appearance.

With a quick motion Buffalo Bill drew his knife, for he saw that the Ute meant to yell, and that would have aroused the village and brought a score of warriors.

He leaped at the Ute at the same time.

Quick as he was he was not quick enough to prevent the Indian from giving his death-yell. Then the scout was on the astonished brave, who apparently had not known that Buffalo Bill was at the other end of the boat until he saw him in the water.

There was a sickening thud as the scout drove home the long knife.

The warrior fell back into the water, and with a push of his foot the scout threw him out into the current.

But that yell had done its work.

The village was alarmed, other savages took up the cries, and a number of warriors came running toward the cottonwoods fringing the stream.

The opposite shore of the stream was composed of an impassable cliff, rising like the side of a house. Even if that side of the stream could have been gained that cliff could hardly be scaled, and while the effort was being made the Utes would have had plenty of time to pick off the fugitive with their rifles and arrows.

For the scout to jump back into the water and trust to the boat, or trust to hiding under and behind it again, seemed a wild and barren hope.

The only other alternative was to hide in the bushes, which were extremely thin at that point.

Yet there could be no delay.

The scout thrust his knife into its sheath and drew one of his revolvers. He was not given much time to determine the best course of action, for the warriors were now close to him.

With a great jump he tried to clear the open, sandy space and leave no telltale tracks; but the distance was so great that the heels of his boot scraped the sand at the point where he landed in the bushy shelter.

There he burrowed farther in; and, crouching low, waited with anxious feelings, holding the ready revolver.

A fight against the whole village seemed the thing most likely to follow now.

If he was discovered and succeeded in killing the Utes who were coming on first, or if he could drive them back, there would be a running fight toward the nearest good hiding-ground, which was a line of cliffs nearly a mile away.

Buffalo Bill was no more than well concealed when the Ute braves reached the sand-bar. They saw the boat, tracks of the single Indian, and the marks of the struggle when the Ute tumbled back with the knife gash in his heart.

Then, looking down-stream, they observed a black head bob on the surface of the water.
A wailing cry followed. Some of the braves ran along the bar, and leaping into the stream brought the dead Indian ashore.

They gathered round him, wailing loudly, and howling out their desire for revenge against his slayer.

Some of them began to search along the bar, stooping low and moving with much celerity, their snaky eyes roving here and there, and their heads moving as if they were the heads of serpents.

The scout saw them, and he knew that if discovery came, as it seemed it must, he would have to fight for his life.

Both revolvers came out, and he loosed the rifle that had all the while been strapped to his back.

With a revolver in each hand, he watched the searching braves as they moved along the sand-bar and came on toward his hiding-place.

"It's a fight, and to the finish!" was his thought, as he watched their slow advance.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRISONER OF THE UTES.

The foremost Ute reached the point where the scout had left the water, and there his roving eyes beheld the spot scraped in the sand by Buffalo Bill's boot heel.

He lifted his eyes to the fringe of willows.

Behind him were several other Utes, who were searching the sand.

A yell came from the lips of the brave who had discovered the imprint of the boot heel—a yell that rose wildly, reaching into the village.

As he thus yelled he drew his hatchet and strode toward the willows, the other braves jumping in behind him. They did not know who the foe was, yet they knew he was a white man and had killed the Ute found in the water. The furious passion of revenge blazed in their gleaming eyes.

As they thus moved upon the willow fringe Buffalo Bill rose into view with revolvers leveled.

But when he pulled the triggers the only sound was an ominous "click, click!"

He pulled the triggers again, and then again; but the cartridges had been spoiled by that long soaking in the river, and were useless.

Hurling the revolvers at the savages, who understood his predicament and came leaping on toward him, he lifted his rifle from his shoulder and leveled it at them.

Click!

The cartridges in the rifle were as useless as those in the revolvers.

With wild whoops the Utes darted upon him.

Buffalo Bill retreated slowly, swinging the rifle round his head as a club, and with it knocking down the Ute who came first.

One after another fell under his quick blows; but the rest came straight on, yelling wildly, and eager to lay hands on him.

Hurling the rifle at them, as they dove within the circle of its guard, he met them defiantly with his knife.

A half-dozen sprang on him, in defiance of the knife.

One he struck down, killing him instantly, another he gashed dangerously, and then he went down himself, under a struggling heap, overcome by the sheer weight of numbers.

Fortune favors the brave, it is said; but fortune had been against Buffalo Bill that day.

He had knocked down and put of business a half-dozen Ute braves in this desperate hand-to-hand fight, but that availed nothing; it only made his case worse; for, overpowered by them, he was forced to surrender; yielding, however, only when a blow between the eyes stretched him senseless.

When he came back to himself he was lying on the sand, with hands and feet tied, and a score or more of Utes wildly dancing and howling round him.

Others were running toward the sand-bar from the village—a motley lot, with many women and children running in their midst.

With the foremost ran old Colorow himself.

When the chief came up, the enraged and victorious braves were venting their hate and spite on Buffalo Bill by kicking him savagely.

A loud wailing rose from the women, who saw the dead brave who had been drawn from the water, and the two other Ute warriors who had fallen in that final rush on the great scout. Still others were stretched on the ground, badly wounded by his rifle and knife.

Buffalo Bill lay on the sand, looking defiantly at his captors, and seeming to take no more heed of their kicks than if he were a log of wood.

The coming of old Colorow doubtless saved his life.

Several of the angry braves had their knives out, and they would have cut the scout to pieces in revenge for what he had done, if the chief had not appeared and commanded them, under pain of death, not to touch Buffalo Bill.

Colorow stopped before the prisoner, and looked at him sternly.

Already the word had gone out that the prisoner was the great scout, Buffalo Bill, better known to them as Long Hair; and the knowledge that so redoubtable a scout and fighter had fallen into their hands filled them with fiendish joy.

Looking down at the helpless prisoner, Colorow spoke to him.

"Why is the Long Hair here?" he said, in Ute. "I left him far away from here. But he is here, in the borders of my village; and his knife and rifle have been busy with my warriors!"
There was anger, as well as grief, in the tones of the chief. Buffalo Bill tried to sit up, and succeeded in gaining a half-sitting position on the sand. His clothing was wet, and on his forehead there was a small wound, where the skin had been laid bare by the blow received. From that small wound the blood trickled down over his face. "I did not know that the village of the great chief was here," he said, answering indirectly. "The great scout, Long Hair, came through the drowned river?" questioned Colorow. "Yes." "How did he find it?" "By accident." "Was it an accident that made him drive a knife into the heart of the brave who lies dead over there?" The wails of the squaws wilder at this mention of the dead man who had been drawn from the stream. "He attacked me as I left the water, and I had to defend myself." These mild methods of the chief were not pleasing to the braves, nor to the women, and a wild clamor for the life of the scout arose. Colorow again looked at the scout sorrowfully. "The great scout has invaded my village, and has killed some of the bravest of my warriors. What has he to say?" "I did it because they were trying to kill me." The women continued to howl, and the angry braves crowded nearer, yelling for the life of the scout. "Take him to the village," was the command of the chief. It was a respite for which the scout was glad. He saw that Colorow was not willing to have him slain there. The chief's reasons were not so clear. Buffalo Bill could hardly think that pity or mercy had any share in them. There was some demur from the Utes when that order was heard. Old Colorow drew himself up proudly and swept the circle of angry faces with fierce eyes. Before that burning gaze the clamorous braves shrank back. "Have I not said he shall be taken to the village?" the chief demanded. "Place him in the prison-lodge, and then, later—" He waved his hand comprehensively. The braves understood his meaning. Later, the great scout, after having been made to suffer torture, was to be given into their hands and they should have his life. They yelled wildly, as they crowded now round Buffalo Bill. His weapons had been taken away, and he was bound and helpless. They lifted him to his feet. Releasing the cords about his ankles, so that he could walk with short steps, they drove him on ahead of them, lashing him with thongs. About him and behind gathered the women and children, and the constantly increasing conourse of angry warriors. All were yelling and crying out for his life. The scout knew that unless he could in some way contrive to escape there was no hope for him. Yet—it is an old adage, and he fully believed in it—while there is life there is hope! Having been driven to the village by the howling mob of dancing savages, Buffalo Bill was thrust into one of the larger lodges. There the cords that were on his ankles were tightened, and the knots of the cords that held his wrists were looked to. Then for a time he was let alone with his own thoughts. A guard was stationed at the lodge entrance, and he could still hear the Indians yelling. The lodge being near the center of the village, Indians were all round him. By and by Colorow came in. The scout had been expecting him. "How?" said the chief gravely. He stood just within the entrance, with blanket drawn round him and looked keenly at the scout, who was lying on the ground. "How!" Buffalo Bill answered. He lifted himself on his elbow, and then with difficulty to a sitting position. His hands were tied together behind his back. Colorow squatted just within the entrance. "The Long Hair has brought trouble to himself by coming here," said the chief gravely. "Why did he come?" The scout returned the chief's keen look. "I came because a young maiden of the white race was taken prisoner by a Ute brave and brought here."
Colorow started; and his manner told the scout, what he wished to know, that the girl was even then in the village. "I followed the brave who held her a prisoner to the hole that opens into the sunken river, and then I came on through that hole." "Long Hair killed the brave who was with her?" "No." "Where is that brave?" "They went together over the falls that are in the sunken river. I did not see them after that. I do not know how the maiden came on through to this place." "I have not said the maiden is here!" "I know that she is." Colorow stood in silent thought for a moment. "The scout did not kill the brave who held her?"
“No.”
“Was not the brave who held her the one with the knife wound, who was found in the water?”
“I think not.”
“Why did he slay that brave with the knife?”
“I followed the sunken river, and I saw the brave and the maiden go through the falls, or over them. I hid on a shelf by the falls. A boat came down the stream, with Utes in it. A Ute who was hiding on the shelf waiting for that boat attacked me. We fell into the water together. I was swept over the falls. Then I floated and swam on till I came here. I found the boat floating, and clung to it. The Ute brave whom I killed was clinging to the other end of it. I did not know that. When he came out of the water I was forced to fight him, and slew him. That is all I know.”
Colorow looked at him steadily.
“Long Hair has caused the death of many braves today. The warriors and the women and children cry aloud for his blood. I could not save him if I would.”
“But the white maiden is here?”
“She is here.”
“She came alone?”
Again the chief was silent.
“Yes, alone; she came floating down the sunken river on a log. We found her on the sand-bar, where she was wandering round like one who dreams bad dreams. She is in one of the lodges.”
“You will release her?”
“No.”
“The white soldiers will come, and slay many Ute warriors, if she is harmed,” warned the scout sternly.
“She cannot go! We do not fear the soldiers.”
He looked at the scout in silence.
“Did you know, Colorow, that the town of Meekin had been attacked and the people wiped out while we were holding that conference, or before it? Your warriors did that. The canoe that came down the sunken river was loaded with plunder.”
“The braves who were in the canoe have not appeared to tell of it,” said the chief significantly. “It may be that the Long Hair slew them there in the sunken river.”
“No.”
“They have not come. Perhaps the river swallowed them.”
He backed toward the entrance. In another moment he had slipped through and was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GIRL CAPTIVE.

Colorow was a wary old dog. Accustomed to doing a lot of lying himself whenever it served his purpose, he was ready to expect lying on the part of the scout. The presence of the scout there and the fact that he had descended through the sunken river were ominous matters to him.

The Utes had believed that the sunken-river route to the village was known only to themselves. The only other way the place could be reached was by rough climbing over some high mountains, difficult on horseback.

But now it seemed that the horse-soldiers probably knew of the sunken river. The scout had come through it; and he was looked on as the leader of the dreaded horse-soldiers, otherwise the United States cavalry. A company of these troopers, as Colorow knew, was stationed at, or near, Crow Butte. They might even then be on their way to the village, following the scout through the sunken river.

Therefore, one of the first things Colorow did when he left the lodge was to send some of his braves into the sunken river, with instructions to pass up it to and beyond the falls, and as much farther as might be necessary to determine if the soldiers were approaching by that route.

They were also instructed to look for the crew of the boat of whom Buffalo Bill had told.

To the clamorous braves and women who demanded the death of the scout, and who had already begun to dance and howl in anticipation of that event, Colorow made crafty promises, telling that as soon as it was surely known the horse-soldiers were not coming they might have the scout to do with as it pleased them.

This was so gratifying that they yelled their delight.

The detail of braves to search the river departed, using boats, which they drew from points of concealment in the willows and cottonwoods.

The women who were mourning the loss of their sons or husbands, slain by the scout, continued their loud wailing, a most unpleasant sound.

The warriors who remained made themselves brave in paint and feathers, and danced and howled in the largest of the lodges, boasting of the great things they would do when the hated horse-soldiers arrived.

They struck their hatchets into the lodge-pole, as they made their boasts, recounting the scalps they had taken, and bragging of their prowess. Some new scalps floated in that lodge—scalps taken from the heads of those murdered at Meekin.

Lying alone, with the guard in front of his prison, Buffalo Bill heard much of this. At times he twisted at the cords that held him. They had been set cleverly, and his efforts seemed only to tighten the knots of rawhide.

The outlook was not bright; but the scout was not thinking of his own peril half so much as he was of the peril of the girl, and of the settlers in the lonely valleys, on whom would now descend all the horrors of Indian warfare.

He thought, too, of old Nick Nomad, who had gone on to Crow Butte by the way of Meekin, with Seaver, the
badly wounded man of that place; and he wondered what
the success of the old trapper had been.
He did not doubt the prowess and ability of old Nick,
but he was aware that the dangers which would encom-
pass him now were many, since the Utes had doubtless
everywhere risen. Not only from this village, where old
Colorow had his headquarters, but from other Ute vil-
lages, warriors would swarm forth now; and, falling on
the helpless people, would massacre and slay, with tor-
tures and burnings.
The outlook was sad and sickening. And the scout
was helpless to avert any part of it, or render assistance
to those threatened.
His hopes lay in what Nick Nomad might accomplish,
and in the quick movements of that little company of regu-
lar stationed at Crow Butte. Whatever was done to
put down this sudden Ute rising would have to be done
by that company, for the other troopers were too far
away.
Little wonder that the scout anathematized the hard
luck that had caused him to fall a prisoner at this time.
As for old Colorow, having given that order for the
searching of the river, he turned his steps toward the
lodge in which the girl was held.
Lillie Meekin's thoughts were even more somber than
those of the scout, as she listened to that confusion of
yells, of drum-beats, of loud wailing, and all the babble
and noise that had followed the capture of Buffalo Bill.
She did not understand what had caused this sudden
outburst, for her lodge was not where she could see down
to the river even when she dared to lift the flap of the
lodge-skins and look out.
An Indian guard stood by this lodge, too, and he ut-
ered guttural exclamations, that drove her back in fear
and trembling whenever she took one of those cautious
surveys from under the edge of the lodge-skins.
Miss Meekin had never, until this dreadful experience,
faced Indians; simply because she did not know them.
She was like those good people of the East who believe
that the Indians are a much-abused people, and so symp-
thize with them unduly.
That the Indian needs sympathy there can be no doubt.
But at the same time it is equally true that whenever he
goes on the war-path, or falls a victim to overindulgence
in whisky—a thing that happens whenever he can get
any whisky—he is about as responsible as a mad dog or a
rattlesnake.
He does not strike at the man or the men who in-
jured him, but at any white man he meets; and he wars
alike on men, women, and children, having no more
hesitation in braining a helpless baby than in thrusting
a knife to the heart of the man who is fighting him.
And he burns houses and towns, and massacres whoever
he can, without discrimination.
In short, an Indian is a savage. He knows nothing
of a white man's standards, and cannot be judged by
them.
White men encroach on his hunting-lands. Many,
many times they are in the wrong. They scare away and
kill the game he has been used to hunting for food. He
rises in wrath, a massacre follows, and the border is then
plunged into the horrors of an Indian war.
A border war was now on. The Utes had risen.
This was the knowledge that had come to Lillie
Meekin. She was now seeing the savage and the implac-
able side of the Indian; and she shivered with fear in
her prison-lodge as she listened to those wild yells, for
she expected the Indians to rush in and slay her.
Hence, when the flap of the lodge shook, she shrank
back with a cry of fear.
Colorow had drawn the flap aside and came on in
"How!" he said, using his usual salutation.
He dropped down in a squatting posture before her,
while she shrank from him against the wall of the lodge.
"The White Rose need have no fear," he said, trying
to smile upon her.
"I do not understand Ute very well," she answered.
He continued, however, to address her in that tongue,
which she understood somewhat.
"The White Rose need have no fear, for she will not
be harmed. She is to become the squaw of the great
chief, Colorow."
He grinned with an attempt at amiable familiarity.
"Why are they making so much noise?" she asked,
trembling.
"They dance with joy."
"But that wailing?"
"That," he said, with what she thought was a sniff of
contempt, "is the wailing of the squaws. Many brave
have gone the long trail to the happy hunting-grounds.
The women wail and cry for vengeance."
"But was there not a fight while ago? I thought there
was a fight!"
"The great scout, Long Hair, crept into the edge of
the village to spy it out, that he might lead the horse-
soldiers here, and was captured. They held him now in
the prison-lodge, and by and by they will burn him at the
torture-stake."
She felt her flesh creep.
"Buffalo Bill, you mean? I have heard him called the
Long Hair."
"We call him the Long Hair," he said. "But, he, too,
goes soon, on the long trail to the happy hunting-grounds.
He will lead the horse-soldiers no more."
The knowledge that the great scout, Buffalo Bill, was
also a prisoner in the village stirred her strangely. She
did not see how his presence there could help her; yet,
somehow, it made her feel different, and more hopeful,
just to know that another white person was there, even
though he was a prisoner. At the same time, she was
horrified by this cool statement, that Buffalo Bill was soon to be burned at the stake.

"So, that's what all that noise means?"

He did not answer.

"It can do no one any good to hold me here," she urged, her voice trembling.

"Does not the White Rose understand that she is to become the squaw of Colorow?"

He struck his breast proudly. In his opinion, it was an honor to be the squaw of the great Colorow.

He had been called originally Colorado, which the Indians had shortened to Colorow. One of the best known of the old Ute chiefs, he was at times wonderfully vindictive in his attitude toward the whites. Lately he had seemed more friendly inclined. Yet this outbreak did not show kindness. Perhaps he was not in a position to prevent it; for sometimes the hold of the chiefs on the brave under them is of the slightest character.

"But I do not wish to become the squaw of any one," said the girl, understanding what he meant, even though some of his words were unfamiliar to her. "I wish to go back to my people."

"The Utes are to be the people of the White Rose. Her own people are dead, at Meekin."

"But my father was not there!" she declared, though fear showed in her tones.

She could not be sure he had not been killed in one of the trails leading to the town, or slain somewhere else.

"The Utes are now the people of the White Rose. Tonight the Long Hair will be kissed by the flames of the torture-fire. If the horse-soldiers come they will meet their death in the mountains. The great Ute nation has risen, and it will slay all who come against it."

His tone was boastful, after the Indian manner.

The girl crouched back against the skin behind her. She saw that no hope could come from this source.

Still, she was resolved that she would never become the wife of this big brute of an Indian. She would kill herself first.

For a long time old Colorow sat there, talking to her in gutturals, ogling her, and trying to make himself attractive in her eyes.

He dilated on the number of ponies he owned; on the number of his squaws, telling her that she should be at the head of all of them, and the favorite; on the number of scalps he had taken in battle; and of the game he had slain in the hunting-chase.

The things he thought would seem attractive to her were all so horrible that she sickened under his words.

Finally, to her great relief, he rose to go, smiling coarsely upon her, and assuring her for the hundredth time that she was to become his squaw, which he seemed to think would be for her a great honor.

She felt as if she would fall in a faint, as he withdrew himself from her presence.

CHAPTER X.

BUFFALO BILL AT THE TORTURE-STAKE.

Just before night the braves sent into the sunken river returned.

Their coming was greeted by a renewal of the howling which at intervals had been going on ever since the capture of Buffalo Bill.

With them they had two of the Indians who had been in the boat when it went over the falls. Thrown out of the boat, they had clambered upon ledges, where they had chung until the searchers came and released them.

The others had, no doubt, been drowned.

Some of the searchers had gone to the farther end of the sunken river, but had discovered there no trace of the presence of white men.

Colorow, who was of those who met the returning warriors at the river’s edge, told them sharply that they should have gone farther into the mountains, to make sure that the horse-soldiers were not near.

But, in truth, they had been too anxious to witness the torture and death of Buffalo Bill to remain away from the village long; and, for that same reason, the old chief feared they had not made their search very thorough.

The wailing of the women was renewed, when it seemed clear that more warriors had met their death; and again the loud demands for the torture of the scout rose on the air from the lips of the clamoring warriors.

Colorow put them off with renewed promises and evasions.

He intended that they should have their fill of the pleasure of torturing the great scout to death, but he feared to hurry that delightful performance, knowing that if the horse-soldiers came upon the village later and discovered what had been done they would show no mercy.

Colorow knew enough of the whites to fear them, and he was cool enough not to let his wild hate carry him away. At the same time, he realized how flimsy was his control of the angry braves, and that soon he would have to yield to their demands.

Again he went into the prison-lodge where the scout was held and had another talk with him, trying this time to learn what the intentions of the horse-soldiers were.

He received little satisfaction.

When he came out he sent more warriors out through the hills, to guard against a surprise that night, and placed strong guards about the village.

Within the village itself, in the big council-lodge that rose near the center, a great council gathered, at which the situation was discussed.

When the council ended, more dancing followed, with more boastings, and some conjuring on the part of the medicine-men, whose wonderful tricks of magic and their supposed power to harm the soldiers and protect the Utes wrought the braves up to a pitch of wild enthusiasm.
Colorow still delayed the promised torture-dance, while the Indian scouts were out in the hills.

Twice there were alarms during the night, and the guards came rushing in.

One of these alarms was occasioned by a wolf.

The other, it was said, came about through the visit of a specter, that came down from the edge of the water, floating along the ground like a white mist, but in the shape of a white man, who rode a strange, shaggy horse that left no hoofprints in the sand.

The place where this spectral white man had been seen by one of the guards was scanned by the light of torches, and nothing was discovered; and as this was in accord with the statement of the guard that the specter had left no hoofprints, the absence of the hoofprints was taken as proof of the story.

Buffalo Bill heard much of the wild boastings in the council-lodge, for the prison-lodge was not far distant from it; and he heard some snatches of this singular tale.

A smile curled his lips.

"I wonder if that could have been old Nick Nomad?" was his query.

The thought gave him some hope and comfort.

But the night passed away and no Nick Nomad appeared.

It had seemed too good to be true; and it had seemed, also, that it could not be true, because of the fact that old Nick was supposed to be at the time far away, at or near Crow Butte.

Yet the suggestion had helped the scout to bear the tedium of that night of confinement, where he lay with those cords cutting into his flesh, and with hunger and thirst tormenting him, for he had been given nothing to eat or drink.

With the coming of day the clamor of the warriors for the life of the scout was renewed.

The Indian women vowed more loudly than before. The slain warriors were to be buried that day, and it was felt that the life of the scout must be demanded as a propitiation.

The scout heard this clamor, and knew that the outlook was very bad. It could hardly have been worse. In fact, he had begun to think that, in spite of the splendid luck that had always attended him, he had now reached the end of his earthly trail.

Yet even then he would not permit himself to despair.

Shortly after sunrise Buffalo Bill was brought forth from the prison-lodge to die.

His hands were still tied behind his back, and the cords that bound his ankles would permit him to take only short steps.

A great crowd of warriors surrounded him, and on the outskirts of this throng were the women and children, clamorous, and shrieking their hate at him.

Now, and then an old hag pushed violently through the crowd. Hurling filth at him, and squalling out her rage, she seemed a fiend rather than a woman.

The squaws were worse than the warriors. If they could have got at the scout they would have torn him in pieces, or gouged his eyes out.

Buffalo Bill came forth from that prison-lodge smiling. The sun was in his face, and it lighted his handsome countenance. It was like a benediction.

He was almost sure that he was to die now—in fact, he did not see how he could escape. Nevertheless, he did not flinch. The stout heart that had so long sustained him was as stout as ever.

His bearing was not that of a cringing coward going forth to meet death; but that of a victor walking toward some triumph. Even the furious Utes were impressed by it. They respected a brave man, whether he were white or red. To go to death without flinching or a show of fear was their idea of supreme courage.

Still, they did not intend to make his death the less terrible.

Out in an open space a stake had been erected, and around it fagots had been heaped.

To this stake the scout was led.

Walking serenely to it, he surveyed the surrounding mountains and all he could see of the river bank and the sand-bar.

He had not forgotten what had been said of the spectral horseman seen by the river. He had hoped that this supposed specter was old Nick Nomad.

But Nomad did not make his appearance; and there seemed small chance that if he had he could have accomplished anything but his own death.

The Indian yells rose in a mad tumult, as the scout thus walked calmly to the fagot-stake; and they rose again, screaming like the howls of maddened wolves, as the ropes were put in place to hold him to the stake.

And still Nick Nomad did not appear.

The scout would have made a fight for his life if he had not seen how useless that would be.

But he did not intend to be burned to death—roasted alive, as these yelling Indians planned. At the last he would try to make such a fight, or say such bitter things, that they would kill him suddenly, and save him the torture. He could not fight, with hands and feet tied, and those scores of Indians surrounding him, any more than he could run. But he could talk—he could say taunting things, and so anger them that they would kill him.

He continued to smile in that calm way as he was bound to the stake, and even while the fuel was being piled higher about his legs. He looked off at the sky, and the watching Utes thought they saw his lips move as if in prayer to the Great Spirit.
"Old Colorow came out of his lodge, and with arms folded watched what was going on, without attempting to interfere.

The scout did not appeal to him, knowing its uselessness. Colorow did not wish the life of this man prolonged; but if he had wished it he could not then have prolonged it. That would have exceeded even his authority and influence.

A big Ute danced forward and smote the scout on the cheek.

"The dog of a white man dies!" he yelled.

"Long Hair dies!" others howled, dancing with delight.

Screeching squaws rushed in with knives, and tried to hack his flesh, but were thrown back by the braves. Other squaws, with burning splinters, tried to drive them into his skin. Still others spat at him, and shouted opprobrious names.

The big Ute produced a torch and lighted it, waving it round his head.

A pandemonium of yells broke forth.

Suddenly the yells were broken into by a scream.

Miss Meekin had, in some manner, wriggled out of her bonds and evaded her guard, and was running into the crowd, with hands stretched out. She was as mad with excitement as any squaw there; and mad with a desire to save the scout, whose life they sought.

The diversion in his favor was but temporary.

She was caught by the hair and thrown to the ground; and then the enraged squaws sprang on her, beating her until she was almost insensible.

Again rang out the howls of the braves, demanding the sacrifice of the scout at the torture-stake.

Thus summoned, with a yell of hate and triumph the big Ute applied the torch to the fuel leaped up about Buffalo Bill, and the fire flamed up with an angry roar.

But at the same instant there was a strange, quavering cry from the high, distant cliffs.

As that cry rose an arrow came hurtling down from the sky, dropping point downward into the midst of the fire. It had been shot from that cliff.

Old Colorow, who had suddenly become as frantic in his hate against the scout as any of the others, kicked the fire apart, when he saw that arrow, and drew the arrow out of the midst of the fagots.

It was wrapped about with snakeskin, which the fire had begun to scorch.

The scattered fagots lay about on the ground, smoking, with the fire still flickering over them.

As Colorow lifted the snakeskin arrow another cry came—this time from one of the Indians by the fire; and he was seen pointing his finger at the cliff from which that first cry had seemed to come.

There, outlined against the cliff, was a skeleton horse and rider. The sightless eyes of the rider seemed staring down into the village, and the hands of the rider were raised, as if he held a weapon.

A puff of smoke was seen, and a report sounded; but before the report reached the ears of the astounded Indians the big Ute who had applied the torch to the fagots leaped into the air with a surprised yell, and fell over on his back on the ground.

The puff of smoke swelled out like an enveloping cloud, and when it slowly lifted the skeleton rider and the skeleton horse were gone.

A panic prevailed among the Utes.

The big Ute who apparently had been slain by the bullet from that rifle leaped to his feet; and now he was jumping about, screeching, swinging his arms, yelling, gyrating like a jumping-jack.

He ended by tumbling back again, where he lay as if lifeless.

The Indians were scattering with cries of fear.

Buffalo Bill made a violent struggle to break the cords that held him. His feet came free, for the fire had touched the cords there and weakened them; but he could not release his hands.

Miss Meekin took a hand at this juncture.

She had been neglected and forgotten by the Utes, and had in a measure recovered her strength. Her great desire to aid the scout helped her.

Seizing a knife now from the belt of a Ute, she sprang at the stake where the scout stood bound, and with a thrust of the knife cut through the rope that held him to the stake. As she struck again with the knife an Indian leaped at her, caught her by the hair, and threw her back to the ground.

The yell of this Indian warned the others that the scout was in danger of escaping, and some of them rushed at him.

That interrupted knife-stroke delivered by Miss Meekin had cut through the rawhide that held his wrists together. He tore them apart, and jumped for the knife which she had dropped.

As he arose with it, the foremost Indian sprang at him; but was struck down with the knife.

The scout now tried to fight his way to the girl who had come so heroically to his aid at the risk of her life; but this he could not do. She was being carried back, unconscious; and the Indians, pressing him now, drove him back.

He held them at bay with the swinging knife, striking down one who dashed at him; and so he continued to retreat in the direction of the river.

The village had apparently gone insane with mad excitement.

Some of the Utes were running away wildly, in fear of the skeleton rider and horse that had been seen on the high cliff.
Others surrounded the girl, dragging her away.

A mob of them pursued the scout, who fought them as he retreated, he being hampered by the swollen condition of his legs and by the fact that his muscles were stiff from the long constriction to which they had been subjected.

Still others of the Utes were about the big Ute who had acted so strangely after being stricken down by the ball from the rifle of the skeleton horseman.

The squaws and children were screaming like fiends, and the Indian dogs were adding their wild wolf-like barks and howls to the universal pandemonium.

Though the skeleton horse and rider had disappeared from the high cliff, a puff of smoke billowed there again, and one of the foremost of the Indians who were crowding Buffalo Bill and threatening to strike him down, leaped up, with a spasmodic jerk, and fell forward on his face.

The scout and his pursuers were close by the river now, and the stricken Ute, falling into the water, was swept away.

The scout backed into the water, still holding his furious pursuers at bay; but that shot, coming again so strangely, and laying an Indian low, favored him more than all his own efforts.

The pursuing Indians fell back, with startled cries.

They pointed up to the high cliff.

A little smoke cloud rested there, billowing lightly, and seeming to be but a section of misty fog. No human being was in sight; but it was at, or near, the spot where the spectral horseman had shown himself.

With a sudden leap now, like a fish springing up, the scout flung himself backward.

He struck the water, and went under like an otter.

The astonished Indians yelled again.

They rushed into the water up to their waists, and stood waiting.

A half an hour later they were still waiting, for the scout had not reappeared on the surface of the stream.

As for the big Ute who had set fire to the fagots, then had fallen back when that rifle sounded, and after that had jumped about and cut such high jinks as no sane and sensible warrior could be expected to do, he was now going about, with his hand pressed to his head, staring vacantly and muttering strange things.

His friends, in spite of their superstitious fears, caught him, and throwing him down examined him, to discover the wound which the supposed bullet had made.

They found only a faint line, of a whitish, ghostly color, on his head.

They were satisfied that it had been a spirit bullet, as they had already suspected.

The superstitious savages believed that a spirit bullet, fired by a spirit, from a spirit rifle, would not conduct itself like an ordinary one. And this had not. It had struck the big Ute to the earth without breaking the skin, and then had set him crazy—he was still as crazy as any March hare.

It occurred to them that in thus shooting down the big Ute the spectral horseman, who was probably some dead-and-gone Ute chief, was showing his displeasure at the thing which they had contemplated. For some singular and inexplicable reason the spirit had not favored the torture-stake for the noted Long Hair. And the spirit had shown it in that extremely startling manner.

The girl had been dragged back to the lodge, from which she had escaped through the inattention of her guard.

Long Hair, the great scout, after being closely pursued to the river, and striking down the Utes who crowded him too closely, had leaped into the river and been drowned.

Small wonder, when all these beliefs are taken into consideration, adding them to the things which had actually happened, that the Utes were now in a state bordering on panic; and but for the heroic efforts of old Colo-row and others of the leading men they would have abandoned the village and fled bodily with their squaws and children out into the hills.

Such is the effect of superstition on ignorant and superstitious men. If a thing cannot be explained they are sure it is the work of spirits; and if it goes against them, these spirits are offended and angry.

Yet this singular and foolish belief of the Utes was just then a good thing for Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD NICK NOMAD.

In a little hollow on the high cliff whence the shots had come a little man crouched, peering out, yet keeping himself well concealed.

His gnarled right hand grasped a long, ancient rifle.

By his side lay a bow.

Below him, behind the cliff wall and well beyond the rocky space, an ancient-looking horse stood with head down in an attitude of deep dejection.

The man and the horse were the old trapper, Nick Nomad, and Nebuchadnezzar.

Close by the side of the trapper lay the skeleton of a horse and man, half fallen against the side of the cliff.

Old Nick affectionately patted the long rifle.

"Them shots war good 'uns!" he said, as if speaking to a human being. "Thar ain't ary newfangled gun kin slang lead wi' you, arter all; er, if thar is, I ain't never seen it yit."

He spread his homely mouth in a wide grin.

"But durn ef I knows what's become o' Buffler!" he
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went on, anxiously, talking to the rifle and to himself. “He threw a back-summerset in er water, and he ain’t riz yit, so fur’s I kin see. Hope one o’ them red niggers didn’t git ter slip a knife inter him before he made thet jump.”

Then his eyes caught sight of the big Ute who was still dancing and gyrating crazily. “I reckon yer bullet must er jes’ creased him a little—jes’ ernough ter set him crazy!” he said to the rifle. "Waal, mebbe that’s better than ef it’d bored him plum center through. T’other Injuns seemed sorter worked up by it. Yes, I allow it jes’ creased ‘im a little, an’ thot’s why he acts so durn crazy.”

He craned his neck again. “But what is Buffler?”

For more than an hour he crouched in that place, with his keen old eyes fixed on the village. He saw the place quiet down somewhat; and saw the Utes hurrying about as if they thought of moving the village, or were getting ready for a foray.

The big Ute had vanished from sight. “Ole Crazy Head’s gone! We slung that lead jes’ in time, anyhow,” he remarked, speaking to the rifle. “Buffler’s knees must ‘a’ been scorchin’ in that fire. Ef we hadn’t stumbl’d on the skeleton o’ thot hoss and rider layin’ hyar, all bleached out and dryer’n kindlin’-wood, an’ with that ole bow an’ arre, I dunno ef even our shootin’ down inter thar would ‘a’ done any good. Luck was with us! But what’s Buffler?”

Many times he asked himself where Buffalo Bill was, and received no answer.

But at length, while he still watched the village and the stream, he saw a cluster of green leaves floating down on the surface of the water.

At these he stared keenly and long. “Buffler, or I’m an idjit!” he said, his mouth opening again in a wide grin.

From the height where he was perched he could see the round black dot that he believed to be a human head. That the head was not an Indian’s was only guess-work, so far as his actual knowledge was concerned. But reason told him that an Indian would have no cause to screen his head in that cluster of floating leaves and swim with his body wholly under the water.

When satisfied he could not be mistaken in thinking that the black dot was a human head, the old trapper slipped back from his hiding-place, dragging his long rifle with him.

A little later he had the shaggy-headed horse by the bridle and was leading it down a narrow rift between two rocky walls, the rift being just wide enough for horse and man to pass through, and with enough débris at the bottom to make a walk.

The descent was very steep, but this seemed not to trouble the horse. It braced its feet, and when the way was too steep it slid down like a toboggan, guided by the trapper.

In a remarkably short time horse and man were at the bottom of the rocky walls, and threading their way still lower to the margin of the stream, which made a turn here and swung in toward the left, the side that the trapper was on.

Rocks and bushes, and this bend of the stream, made it impossible for Nick Nomad and his horse to be seen now from the Ute village.

For this reason Nick abandoned the caution that had been so marked, and hurried down to the stream, where he stood watching for the coming of the drifting leaves. Soon they appeared in sight, bobbing along in the most innocent fashion. They came on until almost opposite the point where the old trapper stood, rifle in hand, and holding the bridle of his horse.

Then a sudden and remarkable transformation took place.

Out of the midst of the leaves a head popped, showing the well-known face of Buffalo Bill; and, with long, strong strokes, he began to swim toward the shore.

The sight was so cheerful that old Nick doubled over in his usual fashion, in silent laughter.

But he was down close to the edge of the water, ready to stretch out a helping hand, when the scout gained the bank.

“Buffler!” Nick caught the scout’s extended hand, and drew him out of the water.

“Buffler!” he cried again, when the scout stood up, with water running in streams from his person and clothing. “I’m gladder ter see ye than ef I’d stepped on a rattler! Shake! Shake ag’in. I seen thot brush a-comin’, and I seen thot top o’ yer head, and I knowed you war under thar. Which ain’t sayin’, howsomedever, thot I warn’t a good deal anxious about you a spell ago. Then pizen Utes war shore a-usin’ ye mighty onhand-some.”

“Nick!” cried the scout in return, squeezing the horny palm of his old mountain pard until it ached. “I was sure that your rifle did that work, and that you were down here somewhere.”

His only weapon was the knife with which he had defended himself in his retreat to the river, and he had stuck that in his belt. In his left hand he held his big hat, while his right hand was being pumped energetically by the delighted trapper.

The latter drew him back from the shore.

“That dreenin’ down frum yer clo’es, Buffler, is makin’ a puddle thar which won’t dry in an hour, an’ ef any pesky Utes should come snoopin’ round they might see it,” he warned.

“Very true," Buffalo Bill assented; “we’ll move back. You’ve a hiding-place near?”
“Up on that clift, it war thar I sent them bullets frum, an’ thet arrer.”

“Yes, I want to hear about that.”

“An’ I’m jes’ dyin’ ter hear how ye got under them leaves so cunnin’. You made me think of a mus’rat, when I seen the top of yer head a shinin’ through ’em.”

“It’s a long story.”

“And mine’s a long story.”

They were moving away from the river, looking for a place of concealment.

“I cut out wi’ that feller, Seaver, you recommender, on my way with him ter Crow Butte, goin’ past Meekin. Waal, I didn’t go no furder’n Meekin; didn’t have ter. Fer thar I found a man that had got out o’ one of the houses endurin’ of the massacre, and he war hidin’ thar when I come along. Everybody else had been killed, I reckon. Ther little streets and ther houses war full o’ dead people. Butter, it war a sicken’ sight, and it made me hate Injuns wuss’n ever.”

“It must have been horrible!”

“It war. Well, this feller wasn’t hurted none, and I seen he war all right, and so I sent him on ter Crow Butte with Seaver, instid o’ me goin’; fer I war thar anxious about ye thet I couldn’t rest.

“They war’n’t out o’ sight before I war on ther back track. I struck yer trail, and lost it ag’in, in that lava country, but I’d seen which way you, and the Injun you war folleerin’, war headin’, so I hunted fer as short a cut as I could. Had to have some way ter git ole Nebby through, ye know, an’ I war already informed of whar ther Ute village war sitivated. And, likewise, I knew these hills purty well.

“We got over ther hills by some o’ ther hardest work me and Nebby ever done, and struck ther river jes’ a little ’fore daylight. We rid along it, passin’ the village, though t’war risky; but Nebby he kep’ in ther ridge of ther water, so’s his tracks couldn’t be seen.”

“The Ute guard saw you, and reported that a spirit horse and rider, shaped of mist, or looking like mist, had passed along by the river; and they searched there for the tracks of the horse.”

Old Nick laughed silently.

“An Injun is a cur’es creeter, Butter! Git im ter think thet spirits is ramblin’ round and he’s ready ter run, er believe anything. I war takin’ big resks, in comin’ so nigh ther village.”

He laughed again over the idea that he and Nebby had been mistaken for a spirit rider and horse.

“I didn’t know you war in thar, o’ course. Never dreemt thet you war. Fer it ain’t often, Butter, thet you let’s ther dumb reds git hold o’ ye. But I allowed you war snoopin’ round somewher, ef you hadn’t already got away wi’ the gal. So I war jes’ prospectin’.

“But it warn’t long ’fore I knowned, through ther hullybalooh ther red niggers begun ter kick up. They don’t never go on so, onless they’ve got what they consider an important pris’ner; and so I war shore they had nabbed ye.

“Well, what ter do, me and Nebby didn’t know. Fer ye see, ’twar then about daylight; and I couldn’t go ter amblin’ round ther village, er crawlin’ inter it, in daylight. Wouldn’t be no use fer me ter git kitched; fer then I couldn’t help you, ye see.

“So me an’ Nebby climbed up ter ther top o’ that clift over thar, fer the purpose of spyn’ out the lay o’ the land; and we war up thar when the sun riz; and we war thar still, when they brought ye out to tie ye to ther stake, and have fun wi’ ye, preparin’ ter roast ye like an ox at a barbecue.

“Thet sight riz my dander straight up. I wanted ter jump acrost thel ole river and kill about a million Injuns to wunst. I war plum crazy!

“But, before thet, I’d found ther carkiss of a hoss an’ man up thar, and an ole bow an’ arrers. Ther hoss had been a little Injun pony, and ther rider had been an Injun. They’d been killed up thar, I think, and had laid thar so long that ther bones war as white as ashes. An’ they were considdlable light, too, which war a good thing fer me; fer I hefted ’em up inter position, hopin’ ter skeer ther Injuns with ’em, fer I war calc’latin’ they didn’t know about ’em bein’ thar.

“Well, I’d already done that, and ther skeleton hoss and skeleton rider war settin’ up thar in plain sight when ther sun riz; and ther said rider had a stick in his hands, which I’d propped thar in immynation of a gun, and was p’intin’ it at the village.

“Waal, as I war sayin’, they brung ye out ter tie ye to ther torture-stake, and ther sight of it made me madder’n any pizen rattler. My lust idee war ter retreat down to ther river, and cross it, and make a dash, with Nebby, ter save ye; and then I see I couldn’t do thet.

“Finally, I concluded ter try ther trick of ther skeleton hoss and rider, and you seen how it worked. Findin’ a snakeskin, I wrapped round an’ arrer an’ shot it down thar. Then I let this hyar old gun go at them red devils, aimin’ fer ther big Ute that war usin’ ther torch on ye. I reckon I creased him on the head, jedgin’ by ther crazy way he acted afterward.

“Having done thet, and while the smoke of the old rifle war rollin’ up like a cloud, I tipped ther skeleton hoss and rider backward inter ther ravine thar, and laid down on ther clift, with ther ole rifle, ready fer another shot.

“I war a long ways off, Butter, but I war bound ter help ye; and I suttinly tried hard enogh.”

“And successfully!” Buffalo Bill cried, in warm admiration. “No repeating rifle could have done better.”

“Ner as good!” said old Nick, grieved that, for a moment, the scout could think that any modern gun was the equal of that ancient muzzle-loader.
"That's right; none could have done so well! But I'm thinking that, after all, it was the man behind the gun. It usually is."

"Waal, then you turned that flip-flop inter ther water; and when I didn't see ye come up no more, I begun fer ter fear that mebbe some red nigger had jabbed his sticker under yer ribs and you war done fer; but bimbye I seen them leaves floatin', and the top o' yer head shinin' up through 'em. Waal, then I wanted ter holler!"

He laughed again in his peculiar manner.

"How'd you do it, Buffler?"

"I swam under water down-stream as long as I could hold my breath, and rose under the edge of a cottonwood, where the leaves came close down to the water. There I stayed a long time, with only my nose and eyes sticking out.

"By and by, by cautious work, I contrived to break off some of the leaves and smaller branches, and form them into that bunch you saw; and I floated down the river under them, keeping as low in the water as I could. Luck helped me, together with the fact that the Utes had given up the search, under the belief that I had been drowned."

"It war a great trick!" was the trapper's enthusiastic declaration. "But I'm allowin', Buffler, that ef the female ther hadn't come to yer help jes' when she did, an' if Injuns warnt, by natur, so durn supersticious, you'd never got out o' that alive. They war shore meanin' ter roast you! Who war ther female? Ther gal you follarred? She looked white, frum what I war." "Yes, the girl captive; the one from Meekin. That was a brave deed, and I'm afraid it has gone hard with her since, because of it. She escaped somewhow, and came down there wildly determined to help me, even at the risk of her life. It was as brave a thing as I ever saw."

"Cur'rus what a difference there air in women, Buffler! Think o' them Ute she-devils howlin' round and tryin' ter jab they're knives inter ye; they war wuss'n ther bucks—ten times wuss!"

"They were—far worse."

"But you're all right, Buffler!"

He looked at the scout as if the thing was almost impossible.

"I reckons, too, that you've got some considable of an interesting' story ter tell. We're safe hyar, in this hole in ther rocks; ther sun shines down good and hot, and ye kin dry yerself; and while you're doin' of it, you may tell me all that you know, er have been doin' sense we sep'rated. I'm calc'latin' that it's goin' ter be inter'estin'!"

It was very interesting, to judge by the many exclamations of delight and admiration that came from old Nick's hairy lips.

While he told it, Buffalo Bill removed his water-filled boots, and a portion of his clothing, emptying the boots of the water, and spreading the clothing out on the rocks, in the hot sunshine, to dry.

Then they talked of the prisoner; of the Meekin massacre; and of the probable coming of the troopers from Crow Butte.

"You're goin' ter try fer ther gal, ag'in, Buffler?"

"Yes, to-night."

"I knowed yer would. Anybody as sassy brave as she war, deserves better than ter be left in that village, ter become ther squaw o' some cussed Ute buck."

"We'll get her out of their clutches, Nick, or lay down our lives in the effort."

"Amen, ter thet, Buffler! I'm with ye to the end!"

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CHAPTER XII.

NICK NOMAD'S MASQUERADE.

That afternoon the Ute guards, watching by the river, were astonished to see a shaggy, tattered horseman approaching on a shaggy, tattered horse. The rider bent over as if in pain; but when he lifted his eyes, he stared round wildly, and they heard him muttering strange words.

Apparently he did not see them, and would have ridden on by, or straight over them, if they had not halted him.

Now they observed that, in addition to his singular, staring manner, which indicated an affected mind, his right arm was held stiffly against his side, and it was wrapped in bloody buckskin.

The horse stared about as stupidly as the man, when stopped by the Utes, while the latter expressed their surprise in many exclamations; for one of their number claimed that this old man and this shaggy horse were identical in appearance with the ghost horseman and steed seen down by the river in the white mists just before daybreak. That horse and rider had vanished like the mist itself, and not even a track had been found.

The man who had ridden thus boldly along the stream to the village, was, of course, old Nick himself, and his horse was that knowing beast, Nebuchadnessar. The blood on the buckskin was from a rabbit. His daring descent into the village had been decided on after a long discussion of the best methods by himself and his friend and pard, Buffalo Bill.

Nomad had no gun, and, apparently, no weapon of any kind; and he seemed but a wounded and wandering man, rendered imbecile, probably, by the wound which was indicated by the bandaged arm. His eyes lacked luster and seemed little brighter than the eyes of an idiot; and, when thus stopped, and spoken to, he muttered in a strange, wild way.

Straightening himself in his saddle, he shook his head like an angry deer; then emitted a sharp, shrill deer-whistle.
Then he began to talk, crazily, in the Ute tongue. He was a wild deer, he claimed, shot in the fore leg by a hunter.

He held up his bandaged arm in proof. Then he whistled again, giving an exact imitation of the sound made by a startled deer.

The old horse stood with drooping head, "I must go on," said old Nick, waving his bandaged arm. "The mountains call me! Many days have I wandered. Before me I see a place where the tree-buds are fresh and sweet, and the grass tender and green. Do not stop me here, in the desert, where the sand crawls round me like serpents, but let me go on to that good green land."

His eyes rolled, and his tone was pitiful.

There was no dialect of imperfect English, of course, when the Ute tongue was used; and he dropped, like an Indian, into the sonorous and poetical words, which an Indian so loves.

"The Indians touched their own foreheads significantly, to indicate their belief that he was not right in his mind. Instead of permitting him to go on, they led his horse now in the direction of the lodge of old Colorow.

The entrance of Nick Nomad into the village was creating a great stir of excitement; and old Colorow had come out of his lodge before the white man and his Indian escort reached it.

When brought face to face with the chief, old Nick gazed at him dully and mournfully. Then he looked about, and his old eyes seemed to brighten.

"Ah, I have found it!" he cried. "Found the land where the tree-buds are tender and the grass is cool and green."

He bent forward from the back of Nebby, and, with his bandaged hand, tried to pick an imaginary tree-bud from the feathered head of old Colorow.

The chief drew back, putting out a hand to keep off the touch of the trapper's fingers.

Nick pawed at the air; and, then, drawing in his hand, pretended to thrust the bud into his mouth, chewing contentedly.

"Who is this?" said Colorow suspiciously.

The guard who had beheld the spectral horseman by the river answered, saying that he resembled that strange figure.

"Then what you saw was not a spirit, but this man!" said Colorow.

He again looked keenly at old Nick.

"I know him. He is an old white man who has spent many winters in the mountains. He is called the Weasel. The Great Spirit has touched his mind, and it has gone from him."

The Utes, though grouped round in a dense throng, yet stood well back. One whom the Great Spirit had touched held for them something of awe.

They feared to crowd too close to this singular white man, who believed he was a wounded deer, and whistled so like one. The Ute children clung to their mothers, in a sort of terror, and the mothers were as frightened as the children.

"Has he no weapons?" said Colorow, still suspiciously. When the Ute braves feared to search the white man, Colorow stepped out from the lodge and made the search himself. But the trapper was, to all appearances, without weapons of any kind.

Colorow touched the bandaged right arm; and the trapper fairly leaped in the saddle, as if with overpowering pain, and shriiled that strange, deerlike whistle, causing the Utes to start back with many cries.

"He has been shot, or has fallen over a cliff and broken his arm, and has tied it up with a stick, beneath the bandage, to keep the bones straight," said Colorow, thus endeavoring to display his superior wisdom.

Then he spoke to Nomad, addressing him as the Weasel.

Nomad looked at him dully, without apparent comprehension.

"The tree-buds are good and green now," said Nomad.

He reached forth again, plucking at the tip of one of the chief's eagle feathers.

Colorow ducked and avoided the outstretched fingers, but Nick, seeming to think he had secured the bud, thrust the imaginary bud into his mouth and chewed it, working his jaws as much as he could like those of a deer.

"The Weasel was shot in the fore leg," he said, looking down at his stiff arm, which hung useless at his side. "But the Weasel is a deer now! A hunter shot him in the leg. For days I wandered in the desert, over the hot sands, and now here are good tree-buds, and good green grass."

He reached out a hand toward the nearest eagle feathers, causing the brave who wore them to jump back.

"Let him alone, but watch him," whispered Colorow, to one of the least superstitious of the Indians near him. "It is a time in which to watch all white men. But if the Great Spirit has really touched him, he is harmless."

The strange awe with which Indians always regard any one whom they think crazy, or touched by the Great Spirit, was the thing on which old Nick was relying for safety now.

It had seemed necessary, or desirable, to locate the lodge in which the girl prisoner was held; and Nick had volunteered for the task, which now would have been quite beyond the power of Buffalo Bill. The scout had been a prisoner, and had escaped, and his reappearance in the village would have been but a signal for his recapture.
Old Nick might have a better chance to succeed; they believed. And the romance of it appealed to his whimsical heart. He was inwardly laughing all the while he sat there before Colorow.

Now he slipped to the ground, the Utes retreated before him, and gave him all the room he wanted.

He came down heavily, for that stiff arm seemed to impede him.

As it fell at his side he writhed as if with sudden pain, and again uttered that deer whistle, screwing his face into comical shape.

Then he dropped to the ground on hands and feet, as if he were truly a deer, seeming to forget his horse wholly. He dragged the stiff "fore leg" along painfully, and nibbled at the grass, reaching up with his lips now and then, as if searching for tree-buds.

As he moved thus along, the Utes retreated before him; yet they came up behind, keeping him closely ringed in.

When tired of this, old Nick sat down on the ground, taking a very un-deerlike attitude, and, with his dull eyes, looked at the Utes who stared at him.

A long time passed before the curiosity of the Utes was far enough satisfied to cause them to leave off their unwearying watching of the "man-deer."

They did not wholly leave it off at any time, for always there were a number to stare at the old man, and whisper concerning him, and nudge each other with excitement whenever he moved.

And children followed him all the time, much as white children would follow a wild deer that had wandered from the woods into some village.

All feared him, or felt awe of him. He was supposed to be under the protection of the Great Spirit, as all insane persons are supposed to be by Indians. Therefore, he was not to be harmed, or disturbed in any way.

Still pretending to pull buds from imaginary trees, and to crop daintily at imaginary grass, old Nick began to move in seemingly aimless fashion about the Ute village.

He was looking for the girl, or for indications of the lodge in which she was held.

He seemed, however, not to be looking at anything in particular, beyond the ground and the sky.

He proceeded slowly, for he wanted to make the search thorough; yet this slow movement was, apparently, caused by that stiff "fore leg," which he put down haltingly, and which made him grimace when he struck it against something, as though it "pained" him.

Left to his own devices, Nebuchadnezzar attacked some bunch-grass, which he found near the spot where he had been deserted by his master.

The Utes did not trouble him; for he, as the horse of the man touched by the Great Spirit, partook somewhat of the characteristics of that stricken man. So they let the beast alone, being rather afraid to do otherwise.

Not at all disturbed by the movements of the Indians here and there about him, old Nebuchadnezzar set his teeth heartily to the bunch-grass, and proceeded to make up for the trying fast he had endured while on the grassless rocks across the river.

Moving thus through the village, old Nick Nomad observed, by and by, that one of the lodges had a guard stationed in front of it.

This indicated a prisoner held there, and, as he was sure Miss Meekin was the only captive, he knew she was there.

He was strongly tempted to "nibble" his way up to that lodge, and even look into it.

He could have done that, for the guard, in all probability, would not have laid hands on him, unless Nick showed a desire to aid in the escape of the prisoner; but Nick's second thought told him this would be unwise.

It might draw suspicion, and, just then, that was a thing to be avoided, and unnecessary.

Having located the lodge in which he was sure the girl was held, Nick Nomad moved slowly on, finding himself at length well down toward the river, and not far from Nebuchadnezzar.

Here he lay back on his left, or "well" arm, and went no farther for a time.

He was tired. That ceaseless, slow hopping, like a deer, had been wearisome.

"Glad I ain't a deer," was his thought; "leastways, not a wounded one, ef it's as hard fer it ter git about as 'tis fer me. I'm as tuckerd out as a fat bair that ther dogs has been chasin'."

A group of children, and a few warriors, had followed him, and these now surrounded him, standing off respectfully.

With that "guard of honor" around him all the time, it was not clear how old Nick hoped to aid Miss Meekin.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ATTEMPT AT RESCUE.

The excitement of renewed hope which the discovery of the presence of this white man in the village brought to Miss Meekin may be imagined rather than described.

Old Nick had been there a good while before she knew it.

He was a stranger to her, she saw; for she was bold enough to look out from beneath the lodge-skin, even though the guard threatened her when she did so.

Like the Utes, she was impressed with the belief that Nick Nomad was insane. He had every mark of insanity, of a mild, harmless type.

The belief that this "insane" man was there to help her would have been preposterous, and she did not
harbor it; yet it was something to have even a crazy white man there.

After he had passed on down toward the river and away from her prison, she did not again see him, though, later, she was sure he was still in the village, for a cautious look revealed the crowd that still grouped about him.

Miss Meekin had every reason to be in the depths of despair.

Her effort to help Buffalo Bill, when he was tied to the stake and threatened with that horrible death by fire, had failed.

Yet she hardly counted it failure, even though she was told that the scout, in trying to escape, had been drowned in the river. Better a death by drowning than at the torture-stake.

Her own condition had not been improved. In truth, it seemed hopeless. Only the fact that old Colorow had selected her for his squaw, saved her from insult at the hands of other Indians; and of Colorow she had a deathly fear.

He seemed to have a good deal to do that afternoon. Details of Indians were coming and going, under his directions. They were scouting parties being sent out and returning, whose purpose was to learn if white men were near, or if the horse-soldiers had begun their expected march from Crow Butte.

Colorow was getting the village in shape for a sharp fight, and was preparing to send all the women and children into the hills at a moment’s notice.

In spite of these activities, which engrossed his time, the old chief came now and then to the lodge which the girl occupied, and there tried to win her favor, in his Indian way, with ogling glances, and by telling her of his wealth in ponies and wives, and of his greatness as a warrior and hunter.

She affected not to understand many of the things he said, which was well. And she asked him some sharp-pointed questions concerning the expected movements of the troopers, which did not please him, and which he did not answer.

But her questions concerning Buffalo Bill he replied to in a way to make her sure of his belief that the scout had been drowned in the river in trying to escape.

That escape of Buffalo Bill from the torture-stake had left a sore memory with the old chief. He and his braves had lost the joy of seeing a white man writhe in the fire; and, besides, many of the warriors were secretly charging that if he had not delayed the matter, there would have been no escape.

The girl was glad when night came again.

She had resolved to get away that night, or die in the attempt. She would risk her life in the wilds of the mountains, if she got out of the village.

There was more wild howling and dancing in the council-lodge that night, of which she was glad; for the noise gave her hope that she could work out the plans she had tried to mature.

She did not know that the infernal din was being taken advantage of by other people, who were risking their lives to help her.

The “man-deer” had been almost forgotten, but not entirely. He would have held a ring of the curious round him for many more hours, probably, if he had not at last pretended to fall asleep.

This he did not do until he had worked back, by slow degrees, toward the lodge where the girl was held.

When the crazy “man-deer” slept, and the braves began to howl and dance in the council-lodge, where the medicine-men were working their charms, and the drummers were booming the drums, the fringe of spectators around the sleeping “man-deer” melted away, leaving the old man at last alone.

He lay where the light of a lodge fire fell full on him; but, pretending to dream and thresh about, he rolled, finally, out of the firelight.

He was nearer the prison-lodge than ever, and was now shielded by darkness.

After lying for a moment in a listening attitude, the old trapper quickly stripped the bandage from his good right arm, revealing, as he did so, his hunting-knife, which he had concealed there, and for which, alone, he had worn the bandage.

It was the only weapon he had. His rifle he had left with Buffalo Bill.

With the knife in his hand he began to creep toward the lodge which held Miss Meekin.

The girl was at the moment wondering if she dared to try to escape from the lodge.

In the firelight, at the front, she could see the outline of the guard who had been set to watch her.

While she hesitated, she heard a low scratching at the back of the lodge, close by her.

The sound startled her, but she was not foolish enough to cry out and bring the guard.

And then she beheld an amazing thing.

The point of a sharp knife slipped through the lodge-skin; and, moving with a swift, downward motion, it ripped the skin apart.

The next moment she dimly beheld a head in the opening thus made.

She could not make out the features, and the whole thing was so startling that she was filled with fear and was ready to scream.

Then a voice spoke, and a hand waved to her in a friendly manner.

The words were in the merest whisper: “I’m ole Crazy Head; but yer friend, jes’ ther same. Savvy? Don’t make any hellybaloo, an’ mebbe I kin git ye out of here.”
The guard at the entrance apparently heard something, for he turned about; but as he thrust his head in at the flap, Miss Meekin was seized with a fit of violent coughing, which satisfied him as to the character of the noise he had heard.

Old Nick smiled at the girl’s cleverness and held open the slit place which his knife had made in the lodge-skin, and beckoned to her.

She saw now that this man who wished to help her was the “man-deer,” whom the Indians had been watching throughout the afternoon.

It was equally clear that he was not crazy at all, and that he had been playing a part to deceive them.

The thing was bewildering, but it suggested a lively hope.

The girl crawled softly toward the opening, having, for the moment, dissipated the guard’s suspicion by her coughing.

Old Nick caught her by the shoulders, and gently assisted her through.

“Well may have ter run fer it,” he whispered, with his mouth close to her ear. “I war afeared mebbe I couldn’t make ye understand, and that the Injuns would find out what I war tryin’. But we’re all right now. Jes’ folle me. Buffler is out hyar.”

The girl trembled so violently as she crept after him that she shook all over, even her teeth chattering.

Suddenly a deerlike whistle rose from the lips of the old man.

It was so close to her that it made her leap with surprise.

He put out his hand, touching her on the arm.

“Stiddy!” he warned.

She expected to hear Indians rushing in her direction. Instead, she heard a wolf howl somewhere out in front, in the direction of the river.

“Buffler!” whispered Nick.

And then, right in the midst of this, she heard a wild commotion, with squealing and kicking, as of horses.

“Nebby!” said the old trapper, whispering the name with much pride. “Thet wolf howl o’ Buffler’s set him ter goin’.”

He caught her by the wrist.

“We’ve got ter be movin’.”

The deer whistle and the wolf howl, followed by that commotion among the Indian ponies, had brought the dancing in the council-lodge to a halt.

Then the girl heard a clattering of many hoofs, as if a whole drove of wild horses were racing away.

Across the village they came, kicking, squealing, and fighting; one that was doing the most fighting and squealing being a shaggy-headed brute that had on its back a big saddle.

“Nebby!” said the trapper, in a pleased whisper.

“Thet creetur has got more human sense than half ther humans!”

He whistled again.

Then the horse raced straight toward him.

He lifted the excited girl from the ground, at the same time jumping up in the darkness.

Off toward the river a rifle flamed and roared.

“Buffler drawin’ their attention,” said Nick.

Nebuchadnezzar came to a sudden halt by the trapper’s side, and he fairly threw the girl into the saddle.

“The Utes is plin’ this way,” he said. “Git out o’ this. Jes’ let Nebby kerry you. He’ll take ye ter safety, ef any hoss on this yearth kin.”

“But you?” she asked in wild excitement.

“I’ll folle ye! Git! The Utes is comin’ b’lin’!”

The whole village had aroused; and from the prison-lodge came cries which showed that the guard had discovered the escape of the prisoner.

Old Nick spoke in a low tone to the horse, and slapped the animal heavily on the flank, and Nebuchadnezzar sprang away so suddenly that the girl was almost thrown from the saddle.

She clutched the saddle-horn and clung with all her might, and let the animal carry her on into the darkness.

She did not know where she was going.

Behind her a whirlwind of sound had risen and was rising.

There were wild Indian yells, and cries of rage, and alarm, with a sudden popping of guns, and the whistling of arrows. She heard bullets and arrows sing over her head.

Camp-fires that had been smoldering, flamed into light, to show the warriors what they were doing.

And straight ahead tore old Nebuchadnezzar, bearing the girl out of the village and away into the gloom of the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE.

The desperate plan, put into operation by Buffalo Bill and old Nick Nomad, had worked out well.

That rifle-shot told Nick where the scout was, and the little old trapper writhed on in the darkness, toward the river, after he had sent Nebuchadnezzar flying with the girl.

In spite of the peril of it, he whistled in deer fashion again, and was answered by the scout, who was not far off and coming toward him.

Soon they met, to clasp hands, on the margin of the river.

“Break trail!” ordered the scout.

He stepped into the water, followed by Nick Nomad.

Water leaves no trail.
Then they turned down-stream, walking slowly in the water.

Off at the right the din of the aroused village sounded. And renewed camp-fires began to flash.

"The girl?" said the scout.

"She war hangin' ter Nebby, and that ole hoss war jes' flyin', last time I seen 'em."

He bent forward in silent laughter.

"Buff, I've had a more upright, downright, every sort o' fun ter-day that I ever had in any eka portion of my existence. If you never tried playin' ole Crazy Head ter a lot o' fool and superstitious Injuns, some day you try it; it'll pay ye."

They walked more rapidly as they began to leave the village behind.

Twice they came to a halt and stood out in the water, with the thick darkness round them and the black wall of the opposite cliff shore behind them, as a number of Ute braves came down to the stream.

"Buff, now we has ter slide!" whispered Nick, when at last a torch flashed in the darkness on the shore, and it was seen that the warriors were looking for human footprints there.

The braves found the place where the scout and the trapper had entered the stream. Wild and jubilant howls announced the discovery, and brought other braves running to the shore.

"More muskrat bizness now," said Nomad, in a tone of disgust. "I kin do it, but I never war cut out fer a muskrat."

Nevertheless, he sank to his neck in the water; and the scout did the same.

Then, with only their heads showing, they began to float down-stream in the darkness.

Old Nick knew it would be a difficult thing for the Utes to pick up the trail of Nebuchadnezzar, out of all the pony tracks which had been made through the village in that stampede of the ponies which Nebby's kicking and fighting had started.

Therefore, if he and the scout could break their own trail by using the water, the difficulty of the Utes in following them would be much increased.

While Buffalo Bill and old Nick Nomad were thus escaping, the girl was being borne straight on by Nebuchadnezzar.

Finally, to her surprise, the shaggy-headed horse stopped.

The girl was trembling with excitement. It had been a wild ride, made in the wildest manner.

Clinging to the saddle-horn, she peered ahead into the darkness, wondering why the horse had stopped.

Seeing nothing, and hearing nothing, she urged the beast on again, kicking its side with her heel.

Nebuchadnezzar humped his back a little, but did not move out of his tracks.

She kicked him again; and then, bending forward, stroked his shaggy neck in a coaxing way.

Nebuchadnezzar was insensible even to this blandishment.

While she was wondering about this, the shaggy head was turned, in a listening attitude, with the ears thrust forward.

She heard nothing herself, but Nebuchadnezzar began to move in the direction toward which he had thrust his ears.

Then she heard what he had heard before, and the thing that had made him stop—a whistle, of peculiar quality, low and deceptive.

Nebuchadnezzar walked straight on now, as if he knew what was expected of him.

The whistle sounded again and again, seeming to come from various points of the compass, confusing her; but it did not confuse old Nebuchadnezzar.

Soon a voice reached her, through the darkness.

"That you, Miss Meekin? Friends here!"

It was the voice of Buffalo Bill!

The girl wanted to shout with joy.

"I think you are safe now," said the scout, to encourage her. "There will be a pursuit, or an attempt at it; but we think we have broken the trail."

She wanted to ask a multitude of questions, yet restrained the desire.

They pushed on now, Buffalo Bill and old Nick walking swiftly in the lead, with the girl following on the horse.

After a time all entered the water, fording the stream.

On the other side they found Buffalo Bill's horse, which old Nick had brought back with him on his return from Meekin.

Day was breaking across the hills.

But the scout had scarcely mounted, when a wild, quavering yell behind them announced that the trail had been found at the ford, and that the Utes were in close pursuit.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GALLANT SEVENTH.

Captain Crosby had ridden to the top of a low hill, to get a view of the surrounding country.

At the foot of the hill half a hundred troopers sat waiting on their horses.

The captain was alone, with the exception of a scout, a youthful fellow in buckskin, who had warned him that they were now well within the Ute country and that an ambush might be looked for at any time.

The troopers belonged to the "Gallant Seventh," that crack regiment of United States regulars that had had so many battles with the wily redman of the Western border.
They had heard of the massacre at Meekin, and of the murders which the Utes had committed. They had wrongs of their own to avenge, too, and they were burning for a meeting with the warriors of old Colorow.

To the ears of Captain Crosby and the scout came now the report of a distant rifle. They started, involuntarily.

"Where did that come from, Mendon?" said the captain.

The scout's head was bent forward.

Following that report there sounded a fusillade.

"Off in that direction, captain," said Mendon, pointing toward the west.

"And I see somethin' movin' down there!" he added.

The troopers had also heard those distant reports, and they looked toward the summit where their captain and the scout had gone.

Crosby leveled his glass on the object pointed out by Mendon.

"A man on horseback," he said excitedly, "and he's riding like the wind!"

"The cursed Utes are after him, I reckon!"

"We must go to his assistance at once!"

Another rattling fire of rifles came, sounding like the popping of firecrackers.

Captain Crosby turned about and raced his horse down the incline, Mendon leaping along and keeping pace with the horse.

In another minute Captain Crosby and the scout, at the head of the troopers, were galloping round the hill, and heading in the direction of the fleeing horseman.

That horseman was old Nick Nomad, and the horse was Nebuchadnezzar.

If ever any one had been inclined to think that Nebuchadnezzar was a stupid and slow beast, a sight of him at that time, as he bore his master on with flying leaps, would have removed that false opinion. No Kentucky thoroughbred could have shown greater speed, on that wild and rocky trail.

Buffalo Bill and the little old trapper, fleeing with the girl for safety, had been so hard pressed by the Utes, who had picked up the trail at the ford, that they were compelled at length to stand and give battle.

Then it was discovered that Utes on their side of the river, who had doubtless been in signal communication with the band that found the trail at the ford, were in ahead of them, ambushed in the path they would be forced to take.

They tried now to run the gauntlet of these Utes in the pass.

The scout was handicapped by the fact that he had not his reliable revolvers and repeating rifle, which he had lost when captured, and had not been able to regain.

His only weapon was a half-worthless old rifle he had stolen from a Ute lodge.

The trapper's weapons were his long-barreled, slow-loading gun, and a revolver and knife.

Buffalo Bill also had a knife.

As the Utes outnumbered them more than twenty to one, and had the advantage of location, the odds were overwhelmingly against our friends.

In this dash through the pass, Buffalo Bill's horse was shot from under him.

After that, having passed through the worst of the hornets' nest, the scout and the trapper retreated, fighting, on foot, with the girl ahead, on Nebuchadnezzar.

But as more Utes were seen swarming down into the pass, and it was seen that soon Nebby would be shot down, and that the fight would, in the end, surely go against them without help, it was decided that old Nick should try to break through, and ride for help, while the scout, seeking shelter in the rocks, held the Utes at bay.

For this purpose Buffalo Bill took both the rifles, the revolver, and all the ammunition; and Nick Nomad, bouncing to the back of the shaggy horse, raised his wild war-cry, and rode at the fringe of braves who barred his way.

He broke through in safety, and then raced in mad speed along the trail, riding as he had seldom ridden in all his wilderness experience.

Both he and Buffalo Bill believed that the troopers of the Seventh Cavalry were not far away.

They had been instructed, in the word sent to them by old Nick, to come by this trail; and a computation of the time which would be required, showed the scout and the trapper that they ought to be near.

It seemed a desperate thing, to leave Buffalo Bill and the girl, ringed in by those howling red devils, and ride thus away from them, but Nick knew it was the only thing that offered hope.

"Ole Buffer kin hold ther devils off as long as any livin' man kin," the trapper whispered to Nebby, as he urged the horse on. "It's our duty now ter git help ter 'em, fore Buffer's wiped out."

It did not take Nomad long to acquaint Captain Crosby and his troopers with the situation.

Then, with revolvers drawn, the troopers broke into a swift gallop over the trail the trapper had come, led now by the trapper himself.

The rattle of the Indian rifle-fire rose louder and louder as they pressed ahead.

Now and then, in the midst of it, were heard wild yells from savage lips, and then the heavy crack of one of the rifles which Buffalo Bill was using.

"Buffer's still able ter stand up ter 'em!" said the trapper. "But we ain't knowin' how long he's goin' ter be."

The seasoned horses ridden by the troopers had as much as they cared to do to keep at the heels of that deceitful beast, Nebuchadnezzar.
When the troopers came in sight of the fight that was raging round the rocks where Buffalo Bill had taken shelter, they beheld out in front, more than a hundred howling and painted Indians.

The latter were taking advantage of the bushes and rocks, and from behind them were pouring a hot fire into the rocky stronghold held by the scout and the girl.

The girl was proving herself a heroine.

She loaded the rifles and the revolvers as fast as they were discharged, and passed back to her by the scout.

Both she and the scout were keeping well out of sight, for the bullets were striking all around them.

Buffalo Bill was throwing away no ammunition.

Whenever one of the heavy rifles cracked, or the revolver spoke, an Indian met his death.

It was the deadliness of his aim which was holding back the Utes.

However brave one may be, or however desirous of slaying his foe, few men, and fewer still if the men are Indians, are willing to leap out into the open, for a charging rush, when to do so is certain to bring death to the first one up.

With Indian determination, the Utes were hemming the scout in, and waiting until the time should come when his ammunition would be exhausted.

Into this body of yelling warriors drove the troopers of the Seventh Cavalry, led by old Nick Nomad.

There was a cracking fire of revolvers, and a swinging of swords that flashed brightly in the sun, and then redly as they began to drip with Ute blood.

The Indians broke in pell-mell confusion, with the troopers riding them down and shooting all who stood up before them.

This was followed by a wild flight, toward the river, of Utes who took advantage of the cover of the broken hills.

That breaking of the Ute force was signalized by old Nick in a wild yell, that rose like a wolf howl from his hairy lips.

After that he did not join in the bloody pursuit, but rode for rocks where Buffalo Bill had made his desperate stand.

He feared that, in spite of that gallant fight, the scout might be badly wounded.

When the great scout stood before him, unharmed, a smile of pleasure and gratification on his flushed face, the old trapper yelled again in his wolfish fashion.

Off his horse he slid.

"Buffler!" he screeched, rushing forward and stretching out both hands, one for the scout and the other for the brave girl who had aided him so heroically. "Ther same old Buffler—unwhipped and unconquered forever!"

Then he yelled again in his triumphant joy, with a screeching lustiness that defies description.

The Utes were overwhelmed, their village destroyed, and many of them slain.

They had taken up the bloody hatchet, in the old bloody Indian way, thus sowing the wind; and they reaped the whirlwind.

But within less than a month they were glad to sue for peace.

Then old Colorow and Buffalo Bill had another conference.

And that conference ended the Ute war.

THE END.

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