Buffalo Bill raised his revolver, and taking deliberate aim at the ferocious grizzly, fired a couple of shots into his head, killing the animal instantly.
BUFFALO BILL IN TIGHT QUARTERS

OR,

The Ruse of the Jumping Tarantula.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

A CALL FOR HELP.

"We need a man who can act as guide, scout, and protector."

"How will Taos Dan line up?"

"He drinks to excess and might fail us on a pinch."

"Trailing Panther?"

"That's better. Panther is a half-breed, though he's worth four ordinary plainsmen. But he's half Apache, and we are going into the Apache country. Blood is thicker than water, and though Panther might mean well at the start, there's the probability of a fall down once we get into trouble with the red devils."

"I reckon what you want, captain, is an American, strong as a bull, cunning as a fox, brave as a lion, honest as the day is long, and worth his weight in wildcats."

The captain nodded his head. Then he said, gloomily:

"I might as well want the earth, for such a man as you describe isn't to be found in this stretch of country."

"What's the matter with Buffalo Bill?"

"Buffalo Bill," replied the other, with a sorrowful shake of the head, "is the man for my money. There isn't his equal in the country. But Bill is in Nebraska."

"Then his ghost is walking the streets of Taos, for I saw him not half an hour ago and"—looking down the road—"there he is, now. He is coming this way."

Tall, graceful, muscular, handsome, arrayed in a new buckskin suit which set off his finely proportioned figure to the best advantage, the king of the border strode up to the veranda of the adobe store and accosted the proprietor, who had been conversing with the man he had addressed as "Captain."

"I'm wanting another box of those Puertos, Morrison. There are cigars and cigars, and the Puertos are pretty near the top of the heap."

"All right, colonel. No hurry, is there?"

"No. I am taking it easy now. Am going to leave this afternoon, though I don't have to."

Morrison shot a meaning glance at the captain and then said to Buffalo Bill:
THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

“Sit down and make yourself comfortable. But first let me present a friend of mine, Captain Stair, of Chicago.”

The border king and the army officer shook hands. Each took to the other at once. Captain Stair was a man of forty, tall, spare, and wiry, with a sharp face, a resolute chin, and keen gray eyes which expressed daring and honesty.

After cigars were lighted, the captain said: “I am delighted to meet you, Colonel Cody, for more reasons than one. Let me explain a bit, and then I will come down to business. I am under orders from the United States Geodetic Survey to take two men and place a heliostope signal on Red Mountain, which has an elevation of nine thousand eight hundred feet and is located in the Rockies, not far from the Colorado line.”

“What is the object, captain?”

“To show a signal from this station to Eagle Peak, in Colorado, distant in an air-line sixty miles. The chief of survey on Eagle Peak has been instructed to observe the horizontal and vertical angles upon Red Mountain’s signal in order to connect that system with the Rocky Mountain scheme of triangulation.”

Buffalo Bill nodded his head understandingly. “Over a hundred miles of travel through a rough country and right by a nest of the Apaches who have been acting ugly ever since a fool prospector, imagining himself in danger, peppered old Salt-Face, the locoed squaw outfit.”

“The Geodetic Survey does not fly from danger; it prepares to meet it,” replied Captain Stair quietly.

Buffalo Bill slapped his thigh approvingly. “Spoken like a thoroughbred,” he said. Then he added: “When do you start?”

“To-morrow morning.”

“How long do you expect to be gone?”

“Thirty days at the outside. If everything goes off well, the work ought to be covered in a fortnight.”

“Captain, I will go with you. I know what’s in your mind. You were about to make me an offer. I’ll accept it before it is made. I am on a vacation. Haven’t got to show up in Laramie for six weeks.”

Captain Stair’s face shone with delight. What he said made the modest border king blush like a schoolgirl.

John Morrison grinned his satisfaction at Buffalo Bill’s proposal.

“You’ll want one who can fight and who can dodge; who can meet trick with trick and who’s game to the core. You’ve got him in Buffalo Bill.”

“Morrison is my squire,” remarked the border king lightly. “He sits up nights studying new whoop-ups, because he’s honest and wants to give fair return for the money. By the way, John,” turning a jocose face on the storekeeper, “did I pay you for the last service?”

Morrison laughed. “Alkali Allen is at work on the books. When he’s through with them I’ll let you know.”

“Alkali Allen!” exclaimed Buffalo Bill, in marked surprise. “Is he in Taos?”

“Didn’t you know it? Why, he has been lying around here for a month.”

“Where is he?”

“In the back of the store. Want to see him?”

“You bet. Allen is my friend and a thoroughbred. Haven’t clapped eyes on him for a month of Sundays.”

Buffalo Bill, after a few words with Captain Stair, went inside the store.

In a little back office he found Alkali Allen sitting in a chair fast asleep.

The border king, with a smile in which affection and amusement were mingled, remained for some moments looking at the long-limbed figure with the bowed head and the open mouth, from out of which there came noises that at times threatened to raise the tiles of the roof.

Alkali Allen was not a picture of manly beauty. He had a nose like a hawk’s beak, a long face, sharp chin, and mouth which stretched from ear to ear. From a narrow upper lip depended a straw-colored mustache, whose thin ends could be joined below his immense Adam’s apple.

When Buffalo Bill gave Allen a resounding slap on the shoulder two keen, snappy eyes looked out of caverns under shaggy brows; and as they lighted on the visitor the thin lips were indrawn and four yellow tusks that served for teeth and which stood alone in a desert of gum, were joyously displayed.

“Buffler, by the great horn-spoon! Put it thar.” A large, horny hand was extended to grasp the one that had gone quickly forth to meet it.

The two friends had much to say to each other. They had been fellow scouts and Indian-hunters in days gone by, but they had been separated for several years.

Buffalo Bill told Allen of the geodetic contract, whereat the lanky plainsman sighed deeply.

“I’d like to go with you, Bill,” he said, “I shore would, I’m just stagnatin’ her. Nothin’ doin’, an’ I would be dead an’ planted ef it weren’t for one of Kit Carson’s boys who comes over once in awhile ter see me. An’ he’s moseyed now. Gone ter Santa Fé ter meet up with one of his half-breed shemal cousins he’s plottin’ ter hitch on to.”

“I would be tickled to death to have you go along with us, Alkali,” said Buffalo Bill earnestly. “I can fix it all right, if you’ll say the word.”

Allen sighed again, this time so heavily that it was little less than a groan.

“Kaint,” he replied. “I’m plumb in a hole. Borrowed money of John Morrison, an’ promised ter work it out playin’ with his books. Me, a bookkeeper, with three months’ schoolin’, way back in ter fifties. Ef my work when it’s plumb done don’t shoreley par’lyze him, then I’m a liar by ter watch.”
“I’ll settle your bill, Alkali, and then you can owe me.”  

But Allen shook his head. “I’m obleeged ter ye, Buffler, but a contract is a contract. I slambanged when I hit ther town, an’ I’ve got ter pay ther score.”

The border king said no more on this subject, for he knew he would not be able to change Allen’s mind.

The remainder of the day was spent in outfitting preparations.

Early next morning the expedition started for the North. There were four horsemen and two pack-mules. The two workmen engaged for the practical part of the scientific program were sturdy, good-natured fellows who could be counted on for courageous, determined work in case of emergency.

Two days travel found the party in a deep cañon in the heart of the Rockies.

Up to this time no Indians had been seen.

Captain Stair was in the best of spirits, and was beginning to believe that the trip would be made and the orders of the government carried out without a brush with the redskins.

But Buffalo Bill was not so confident. He had studied the Indian nature, and he was well acquainted with the practises of the subtle and bloodthirsty Apaches. His motto, formulated after years of thrilling experience, was: “In times of calm look out for squalls.”

The place selected for the night’s camp was at the head waters of Cougar Creek, a broad, deep basin with perpendicular walls arising two hundred feet on either side. Directly in front of the camp was a beautiful waterfall dropping in a narrow ribbon over the smooth face of the steep wall to strike the outcropping rocks and distribute itself in cataracts.

As he sat before the evening fire Captain Stair wondered how Buffalo Bill would be able to find a way to scale the wall and climb the peak beyond. The border king was not then in camp. After supper he had gone out for a scout.

Behind a huge boulder, at the base of the waterfall, he descried something that made his eyes glitter with excitement. It was a belt of wampum, and attached to it was a square piece of wild-goat skin.

He took up the find, and, with wrinkled brow, read these words which had been scratched upon the smooth skin: “I am a prisoner in the hands of the Apaches. Black Bear is the chief. If this falls into the hands of a white man I implore him to try to rescue me. I have been a prisoner for ten years. I am the only survivor of the Oldham massacre in Arizona. My name is Nancy Fulton, and my father is Lieutenant William Fulton, of the United States Army. This is written on the fifth day of May, 1874.”

“And this,” said the border king to himself, “is the seventh day of May.”

With serious countenance, he returned to camp. He showed the writing to Captain Stair, and said: “I don’t know how you feel about it, but I think that just at this time human interest ought to shove aside geodeitics or any other scientific affairs of our Uncle Samuel.”

“Perhaps the two may be combined,” replied the captain composedly.

“As how?”

“You want to make an immediate effort to rescue this girl. Good. To rescue her you must, for awhile at least, pursue the route to Red Mountain. We may, if luck is with us, and luck always ought to favor the deserving, rescue Miss Fulton before we reach our goal.”

“And the girl shall be first?”

“Certainly. The government work is not so pressing that it can’t stand a short delay.”

“Captain,” returned Buffalo Bill, with emotion, “you are of right stuff. I am glad that you see things as I do, for”—with a tightening of the jaws—“if you had refused to deviate from the plan you had mapped out, I should have been compelled to cancel my contract. I am not one who regards his word lightly. I have always kept mine, but when the life of an innocent white woman is at stake, obligations of cold business must be set aside. The call of humanity is stronger than the call of mere business.”

Captain Stair smiled indulgently. “I understand you thoroughly, Bill. In your place I would feel the same. But there is something you have not yet told me. You say this girl’s life is in imminent danger. How do you know that?”

“I got my cue from something that Trailing Panther said down in Taos a few days ago. He was drunk and talkative. He is with the whites when it suits his interests, but he is not with us now. He is a brother of Black Bear, and in his cups he let fall the information that the Black one is preparing for a human sacrifice that will wake the country. I could not get him to say more, but when I read the writing on that goatskin I guessed what is contemplated. Nancy Fulton will be sacrificed. Black Bear is making ready for war. He will inaugurate it by the murder of his captive.”

“Great Heaven!” exclaimed the army officer, in righteous indignation. “We must stop it.”

“Must is not the word, captain,” replied Buffalo Bill firmly. “We will stop it.”

CHAPTER II.

BUFFALO BILL SHOWS HIS METTLE.

“I am deeply interested in this affair,” continued the border king, with a feeling and earnestness that quickened Captain Stair’s attention, “for I knew Lieutenant Fulton well. We became acquainted during the Kansas border troubles when I was a mere boy. He was not a
soldier then, but after the John Brown business he entered West Point and graduated in time to take part in the concluding battles of the Civil War. The war over, he married and was ordered West. I remember the Oldham massacre. A whole train of emigrants was supposed to have been wiped out by the Apaches. Not until to-day did I know that one member of that party had escaped alive. Nancy Fulton was about nine years old at the time. Therefore she is now nineteen.”

“She writes like a girl of some education.”

“Probably some squaw man took sufficient interest in her to give instruction which supplemented the knowledge she had gained while in attendance at the Topeka school, from which she was taken for the overland journey.”

“Was her father alive at the time of the massacre?”

“Yes, and he is alive now. When the massacre occurred he was in San Francisco. His wife and child were on their way to join him when the blow fell. The news of the awful tragedy almost killed Fulton. He resigned from the army and went abroad. For years he wandered in foreign countries with a sorrow-laden heart. He is now in St. Louis holding some important position in the land office. I saw him last about three years ago. He looks like a man of seventy, and he is not more than forty-five. He attends to business with skill and fidelity, but his face is sad and the conversation I had with him showed me that he has not yet recovered from the terrible shock of the massacre.”

“The child must—shall be, restored to him,” said Captain Stair emphatically.

“To look into Nancy’s face again will give him a new lease of life,” said Buffalo Bill, in a tone of intense conviction.

Although it was probable that there were no Indians within miles of the camp, an extra watch was set that night. Tom Masters, one of the captain’s men, and Captain Stair himself went on guard until midnight. They were then relieved by Buffalo Bill and Newt Ferguson, the other workman. The border king stationed himself at the base of the rocky wall and in the shadow of a huge boulder kept his eyes fixed on the heights above.

The night passed without incident, and in the morning the little party began the ascent of the seemingly impassable barrier. The border king took the lead, and with such an air of confidence that Captain Stair experienced no doubts as to the success of the undertaking.

Halting by the side of the waterfall, Buffalo Bill coiled a lariat, and, whirling it above his head, sent the loop upward with such force and precision that it struck the point aimed at—a large, knotty projection of the root of a dwarf cedar growing in a crevice of the rocky wall. The loop encircled the knot, and the rope was drawn tightly and the strength of the knot thoroughly tested.

“All right,” announced the famous scout and guide. “The rope will take us to that tree.”

“How about the animals?” asked Ferguson, as he gazed doubtfully up the wall.

Buffalo Bill looked at the man with commiserating eyes. Then he laughed. “What’s the matter with providing them with wings and letting them fly up there?”

“If they can’t get up there that way they won’t be likely to make the rifle in any other fashion,” retorted Ferguson.

“Think so?” said the border king easily. “Just hold your horses a bit and we’ll see about that.”

Without further words the speaker, with a quickness and skill which won the admiration of the lookers-on, went up the rope. A moment later he was lost to view behind the cedar.

Buffalo Bill had been over the route before, but he wished to assure himself that there had been no physical changes since his last visit to the place. What he saw was reassuring. Above the tree were large indentations in the wall, and at convenient intervals there were boulders.

Returning to the waiting men below, he issued his orders: “We will hoist the broncos and mules first, and then we will follow them. Once our outfit has reached the tree, the work of climbing to the top will not be difficult.”

It was easy to say “hoist,” but Captain Stair did not see how the work could be accomplished.

The border king speedily solved the problem.

From the Taos store he had procured a large coil of stout quarter-inch rope. Captain Stair had asked no questions when the rope was loaded upon one of the pack-mules, but now when he saw Buffalo Bill remove it from the back of the animal he began to have an idea of the purpose for which it would be used.

There were plenty of small trees about, and with the aid of an ax, hammer, and nails, a rude sled was quickly constructed. After one end of the long rope had been securely fastened in front, one of the mules, in a recumbent position, was firmly tied to the sled.

The border king then reascended the wall, and, with the other end of the rope in his hand, passed it around the cedar-tree and threw the long slack down to the ground.

“It’s now up to the three of you to pull,” he shouted.

“I’ll assist you up here.”

The pull was made, and in a short time the sled and the mule reached the tree. The process was repeated for the benefit of the other mule and the horses, and then Captain Stair and his two employees used the riata to join Buffalo Bill.

The summit was reached without accident, and the crowd followed until the trail dropped into a deep cañon.

The cañon was well wooded, and the little party had gone a few hundred yards when Buffalo Bill, several rods in advance, stopped suddenly, and, drawing out his field-
glasses, slung from a cord about his neck, leveled them at a small flat at the intersection of a cross cañon nearly a mile away.

The mules and the men were then in a spot sheltered from view.

“What is it?” asked Captain Stair, in a low voice.

“Indians,” answered the border king sententiously.

“How many?”

“A small party; probably not more than a dozen.”

“Apaches?”

“Yes.”

Buffalo Bill put up his glasses, and, dismounting, led his horse to a tree and secured it. Then he turned to Captain Stair.

“I am going to reconnoiter,” he announced quietly. “The presence of these redskins on the flat means something. They may be scouts, or they may be runners sent out to give warning either of an uprising or some council or ceremony. Ceremony,” he repeated, as a hideous thought came to him, “what if the ceremony is the immolation of Nancy Fulton?” There was a fierce glitter in his eyes as he spoke the last words.

Captain Stair drew a sharp breath. “Bill,” he said grimly, “if these Indians are members of Black Bear’s band they must never be allowed to reach their chief.”

“That is a matter we will consider after my return,” replied the border king quickly. “Remain here. I shall not be gone long.”

Moving with celerity and caution, he matched his knowledge of woodcraft against that of the redskin natives of the soil whose skill and cunning had been tested through the hundreds of years that had elapsed since the advent of the white-faced foe, and no Indian that ever lived could have surmounted him at the game. When he could keep under cover he glided from tree to tree, from bush to bush, with the agility of a rabbit. Open spaces were traversed by stretching his body on the ground and wriggling forward like a snake.

When within a few rods of the Indian camp Buffalo Bill rested and listened until assured that his approach was not suspected. Then crawling, without noise, toward his enemies, halting a moment or two behind every convenient bush and rock, he at last reached a point from which he could overlook the camp and see the faces of every Apache member of the party.

There were six Indians in all. They were sitting around a dying camp-fire and were engaged in earnest conversation. This was something unusual, for as a rule the Indian is taciturn and never indulges in long speeches outside of council meetings.

There was no guard, a circumstance which convinced the border king that they were confident that neither the rumor of the coming ceremony nor of the uprising had reached the ears of the white soldiers. For every year there had been peace, and white men had penetrated the Apache country without molestation.

Of the six Indians, one who appeared to be in command was a medicine-man. He was fantastically attired in a fiery red blanket with grotesque figures worked in colored grasses, a head-dress of white and black feathers, and a huge necklace made of snake skins, from the middle of which and resting on the breast depended the stuffed head of a rattler. The face of the medicine-man was painted in a hideous caricature. The body color was a grayish white, which lent a ghastly effect. A heavy black line running from the right eye to the lip, across it and curving in an oval at the side of the mouth, was ornamented with a double line of blood-red dots upon one side and sky-blue dots upon the other. The long, curved nose, with its body color of grayish white, was dotted with blue and the end was criss-crossed with red and black. On the forehead and about the eyes were other grotesque markings. The left cheek bore the representation of an enormous thick-legged hairy spider, the death-dealing tarantula.

Buffalo Bill knew the wearer of this fantastic make-up. He was Jumping Tarantula, Black Bear’s right-hand man and one of the most crafty and bloodthirsty Apaches in the Southwest.

When the king of scouts arrived within seeing and hearing distance Jumping Tarantula’s guttural voice was being exercised for the benefit of a tall, wiry, evil-faced Indian, who was leaning forward and listening intently to the words.

“Trailing Panther knows not that the date has been changed. He must be notified that the ceremony will take place to-morrow night, instead of four days hence.”

The words were spoken in the Indian tongue, and the translation into English is a free and not a literal one. Buffalo Bill understood every word, and his interest was aroused to the highest pitch as Jumping Tarantula proceeded:

“The brother of Black Bear is now in Taos, but he will be in Grizzly Gulch to-night. You, Bounding Elk, will start instantly in order that you may meet him when he reaches the gulch. Your message is this: ‘To-morrow night at Lolite Basin.’ The cry of the white owl must announce his coming. Go!”

The tall, supple Indian arose, busied himself a moment with his accouterments, and then glided swiftly away, taking the direction of the cañon down which Buffalo Bill had come and passing by the spot which had been the border king’s place of concealment.

But Buffalo Bill was no longer there. Before Jumping Tarantula had finished speaking he not only awoke to a realization of his danger, but of the danger which menaced Captain Stair and his men. Trailing Panther, if he had already started from Taos, must have come upon the trail of the geodetic party, and knowing that the trail
must take Captain Stair into the heart of the Apache country, would hurry forward either for the purpose of communicating with his brother, Black Bear, or of attempting single-handed the slaughter of the party before Buffalo Bill, the party’s scout, could get an inkling of the bloody event the Apaches had in contemplation.

Moving with the swiftness and caution of a serpent, Buffalo Bill was many rods away and concealed behind a boulder when Bounding Elk set forth upon his mission.

The young Indian—he was not more than twenty—started out in high spirits. His head was in the air, for he had been intrusted with a most important service. Had his eyes been directed toward the ground he might have noticed from those infallible signs—the flattening of the grasses, the displacement of branches, the ground marks—that some person had recently passed over the trail. But war had not yet been declared, and according to his belief and the belief of Black Bear, no hint of the threatened uprising had yet reached the whites.

But the instinct of the hunted race soon caused him to exercise those gifts with which nature had furnished him just at the moment that saw him within a few feet of the rock that sheltered Buffalo Bill. He stopped, and his eyes swept the cañon. A low exclamation escaped his lips. He had seen something which excited his suspicions. He stopped to make a closer examination of the ground.

At that instant Buffalo Bill acted. With a leap like that of a panther he sprang over the boulder, and, flinging himself upon the Indian, bore him to the ground. One hand grasped the Apache’s throat with a grip of iron to prevent a cry which should bring the other Indians to the spot, while the other held in a vice the right wrist until the fingers below relaxed and a knife dropped to the ground.

The struggles of the Apache were ineffectual. He was as a child in the grip of the powerful king of the border, and it was not many minutes before his body, limp and motionless, lay on the trail at the feet of his adversary.

There had been no sound calculated to reach the ears of the Apaches below, and the place of the encounter was screened from view by the trees.

Buffalo Bill dragged the dead body into the bushes and then carefully made his way to the waiting men above.

His story, told quickly and concisely, surprised but did not alarm Captain Stair.

“What about the redskins down below?” he asked.

“They are our meat, I should say.”

“Yes,” returned Buffalo Bill. “We must capture every one of them if we can. If necessary——”

He did not finish the sentence.

Captain Stair understood.
level ground, when his quick ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

Some one was coming up the cañon.

Crouched behind a low-growing bush the border king waited in grim silence.

His own movements had been noiseless, and the slight wind stirring had been blowing toward him, thus giving him an important advantage in the event of the approach of an enemy.

The oncomer, whoever he was, seemed to be using the utmost caution. But for the breeze Buffalo Bill might not have become aware of his approach until the Indian was close at hand.

Peering through the branches of the bush, the hero of more than a hundred desperate encounters at last saw two piercing eyes looking out of a crevice between two rocks on one side of the trail, and not more than twenty-five feet distant.

Below the eyes appeared the long, curved nose, with its dots and criss-crosses, of the Jumping Tarantula.

What has brought him up the cañon? Did he suspect the presence of white men? Or had he something more than mere suspicion to guide him, a discovery of footprints on the ground and other marks which the border king had, in spite of his precautions, left behind?

But Buffalo Bill did not waste time in speculation. It was enough to know that the wily medicine-man was on the trail as a spy, and that an encounter which meant death to one of the combatants was inevitable.

Soon the king of the scouts saw that the keen eyes of the Indian were fixed upon the bush behind which he was hiding. Now eye looked into eye. The situation to an ordinary man would have been disconcerting. But Buffalo Bill only smiled. True, it was not a pleasant smile.

And as he smiled he made a discovery. Jumping Tarantula had no desire to shoot. For that matter, neither had the white man. The border king could easily have sent a bullet crashing through the Indian’s brain before Jumping Tarantula had made the discovery of his enemy’s presence, but there were excellent reasons why he should not have taken such a course. The report of the pistol would likely bring to the place the four Apaches on the flat below, and with the enemy fully aware of the conditions surrounding them, the capture or death of all of them would be a matter of uncertainty. And should one of them escape to carry the news to Black Bear, all Buffalo Bill’s plans for the rescue of Nancy Fulton would be disarranged and he might not be able to prevent the horrible ceremony of which she was to be the victim.

As for Jumping Tarantula, the reasons for withholding bloody action at this time were, so Buffalo Bill concluded, nearly on a line with those of his enemy. The medicine-man had no desire to warn the other white men of his presence on the war-path. What he craved was the scalp of the man who was crouched behind the bush. With Buffalo Bill out of the way, the extermination of the scout’s companions ought not to be a difficult undertaking.

Therefore, the two wily and determined foes watched each other, neither caring to make the first move.

There was absolute silence above and below them.

Suddenly Jumping Tarantula’s eyes and nose disappeared. Then it was that Buffalo Bill took the game into his own hands. Quickly removing his coonskin cap, he affixed it to a branch of the bush, giving it the exact position it had held when it was upon his head. He had no sooner made this move than the eyes of Jumping Tarantula were again seen looking from the crevice between the rocks.

On one side of the bush was a depression, a sort of gully, running a few rods, the result of a washout.

Along this the king of the scouts crawled until he was within ten feet of the farthest boulder of the pair which had been made use of by the medicine-man.

Buffalo Bill did not believe that his ruse would deceive the cunning enemy more than a moment. The moment was all he wanted. He was on his feet and close by the boulder when the Indian’s head protruded from the outer side. There was a quick rush, and white man and Apache became locked in a deadly embrace. Not a word, not an exclamation fell from the lips of either, but in deadly silence each strained every nerve to get the advantage of the other.

The border king was a marvel in muscular power, science, and bulldog determination. But he realized when he came to close quarters with Jumping Tarantula that he had met a foe man worthy of his steel. The Indian was as strong as a grizzly bear and as supple as a panther. As they strained and tugged, first one was on top and then the other.

Neither had obtained an under hold, and every effort made either by the Indian or the white man to gain this advantage had been promptly prevented.

At last Buffalo Bill, freeing one of his arms, sought to grasp Jumping Tarantula by the throat, but as quick as a flash the Apache raised his head, and, sending it forward, struck his adversary at the point of the chin, causing a succession of stars to flit by the scout’s eyes and all the muscles of his body to temporarily relax. In an instant Jumping Tarantula had his enemy by the throat.

The Indian thought his hour of triumph had come, but at the moment when his fingers were fastening in a death grip about the windpipe of his adversary, Buffalo Bill’s elbow crooked, and, exerted with all the strength of which he was capable, encountered the pit of the Indian’s stomach. A deep groan and a sudden collapse of strength was followed by an alteration of the position of affairs. The border king not only recovered his lost ground, but made a material addition to it. Now he was on top, with his fingers at the throat of the disgruntled opponent.
He was squeezing with all his force, and the Indian was
-growing black in the face and his tongue was protruding,
when a stone struck him on the head, and he fell over
and lay still.

Help had come to Jumping Tarantula, and in the nick
of time.

Running up the trail, panting with exertion and with
a countenance expressive of hellish delight, was a lithe
Apache, one of the four whom Buffalo Bill had seen on
the flat.

If the newcomer had been nearer he would have used
his tomahawk, but the apparent imminent peril of the
medicine-man had caused him to try the stone.

A few bounds and he was at the side of Jumping Tarantula, who, raising himself on elbow and gasping for
breath, looked the thanks he was unable to orally express.

For the moment the newcomer's attention was di-
rected away from the body of the white man. That mo-
ment was fatal to his hope of life. The head of the
king of scouts suddenly raised up, his hands shot for-
ward, and, catching the Indian by the ankles, sent him
backward upon the stony ground.

Had the stone thrown with murderous intent struck
Buffalo Bill squarely in the head, it must have broken
his skull, but as it was, it only grazed his temple. For
a few brief moments his faculties were paralyzed, but he
was ready for action when the stone-thrower came up.

As the Apache fell, the border king sprang to his feet,
and, after giving Jumping Tarantula a kick in the head,
which induced a quick return to the former recumbent
position, threw himself upon the other Indian, who was
striving to arise.

Work here was short, sharp, and decisive, and as Buf-
falo Bill stood up, panting from his victory, he saw facing
him the indomitable medicine-man. In his hand was a
knife, and his grotesquely marked face was convulsed
with murderous rage.

Before the brave scout could draw his own knife the
medicine-man sprang forward.

Quick as lightning Buffalo Bill ducked, side-stepped,
and then as quickly shot out his right, and the Indian
went down as if a pile-driver had struck him. As he
fell his head encountered a sharp projection of rock, and
the point was driven into his brain.

When the border king bent over him he saw that the
medicine-man was dead.

The battle was over and victory had come to the
white man.

CHAPTER IV.

ALKALI ALLEN TAKES A HAND.

The battle was over, yes. But the war was still on,
and there were other battles to fight. Down on the flat
were three Apaches. Until they were disposed of, Buffalo
Bill could not regard his expedition as having been suc-
cessfully concluded.

Leaving the spot of the double encounter, he hurried
down the remaining distance, reaching the flat without
having been observed.

To his great satisfaction the three Indians were seated
on the ground about the camp-fire in about the same
position in which he had found them less than an hour
before.

Occupying the hiding-place which had enabled him to
overhear the parting words spoken by Jumping Taran-
tula to Bounding Elk, he tried to form a plan for en-
gaging with the Indians single-handed.

He had about made up his mind to a course of action,
when one of the Apaches arose, and, pointing up the
cannon, spoke excitedly to his companions.

Buffalo Bill, from his position, could not see what the
Indian saw, and he could form no idea of the cause of the
redskin's excitement.

All at once there came sounds which announced the on-
coming of some heavy body, careless of surroundings.

Limbs crashed, stones came flying down the trail, and
suddenly the person of Tom Masters, one of the men in
the survey party, hove into view.

He was running like the wind, and close behind him fol-
lowed an immense grizzly bear.

Buffalo Bill raised his revolver, and, taking deliberate
aim at the ferocious grizzly, fired a couple of shots into
its head, killing it instantly.

The Apaches, surprised both at the appearance of the
bear and the man and the shots which came from the
boulder on the edge of the flat, stood still until they
saw bruin fall. Then they drew their tomahawks and
dashed across the flat to give battle to the white men.
A bullet from Buffalo Bill's pistol laid one of them low
before he left the flat. Then with a quick signal to
Masters, the scott dropped behind the huge carcass of the
bear. Masters followed suit.

As the two remaining Apaches parted the bushes and
looked down at the dead animal, two more shots rang
out and two Indians sank to the ground, each mortally
wounded. Their sufferings were soon ended.

The two white men arose to their feet, Tom Masters,
pale and trembling, Buffalo Bill cool and collected.

"When I saw you loping down the trail, Tom," said
the border king, with a light laugh, "I was primed to
give you a good raking down, for it seemed as if my
game was about to be spoiled. But as matters have
turned out, your lightning skip was the best thing that
could have happened. So you are forgiven. But don't
disobey orders again."

Masters, who had now recovered his equipose, humbly
replied: "I heard some kind of a noise down this way,
and I feared that you had run into a trap. So I went
down the trail a few rods to see if I could spot what was
up. I was standing by a big rock when out comes this brute of a grizzly. He sees me and makes a forward lunge. About that time it was up to me to make tracks. I couldn’t go back up the cañon, for the bear was in the way, so I had to come a-running in this direction.”

They were still talking when above them, in the brush, was heard a sibilant rattle.

Buffalo Bill, enjoining silence, knelt down behind the carcass of the bear. The rattling sound was repeated.

Tom Masters, on his stomach beside the king of scouts, waited in wonder and misgiving.

He glanced at his companion and saw that the scout was smiling.

There was a stir close by them, and then again they heard the hissing rattle.

Buffalo Bill answered, and the imitation was so good as to cause Masters to start in terror from his position.

The next instant there appeared before the two men’s eyes the ungainly form of Alkali Allen, of Taos.

There was a satisfied grin on his hawklike face as Buffalo Bill sprang up to meet him.

As they shook hands Allen said: “Chaw me fer a jack-rabbit ef I didn’t call ter turn on this yer romance. Cap’n Stair allowed ez how you wuz takin’ a bite at some’n thet wuz too big fer yer stummick, an’ thet I better sashay down an’ sheer yer breakfast. ‘I’ll mosey,’ sez I, but I’ll bet a hoss agin’ a last-year’s bird’s nest thet Buffalo kin attend to this yer business of his’n ‘bout any assistance. Ah”—looking about him—“I shore reckon ye hev.”

“Yes,” replied the border king, in a matter-of-fact tone. “I have made a pretty fair clean-up, thanks to our good friend here, Tom Masters.”

The story told, Alkali Allen stroked his chin thoughtfully. “Yer plottin’ ter git ther gal, Bill,” he said, “an’ ther bust play hev been made. Do ye reckon on allayin’ Black Bear’s suspicions by killin’ off his scouts? Seems ter me thet yer think-works need lookin’ arter.”

Buffalo Bill was not offended by these words. He sat down upon the dead bear, and Allen and Masters followed his example. “Before I start to open up,” he said, “I want to know how matters are up on the summit.”

“They air hunky dory.”

“Did Captain Stair overhaul Trailing Panther?”

“Nary an overhaul.”

“Still looking for the drunken scoundrel?”

Alkali Allen winked as he made answer: “Ther cap’n hev lost all interest in Trailin’ Panther.”

Buffalo Bill laughed and then slapped Allen on the shoulder. “Of course, Alkali, of course. I might have known what your presence in this neck o’ woods meant. You have attended to the traitorous half-breed.”

“We hev shore met an’ exchanged cards, Bill. Owin’ ter succumstances over which ther pizen serpent hev no control, Trailin’ Panther will not be able to j’ine his

sweet-scented brother. He is now chasin’ June-bugs in ther happy huntin’-grounds.”

Tom Masters regarded the ungainly plainsman curiously.

“You salted his bacon, did you?” he asked.

“Well, we had a mix-up, son, an’ I saved my skelp,” returned Alkali Allen imperturbably. “’Twar his death or mine, an’ I nacherly played ter win.”

“Give us the story, Alkali,” said the king of the scouts.

Thus adjured, the long-limbed plainsman went on: “It wuz this way: I met a half-breed friend of mine not long arter Cap’n Stair’s party pulled out, an’ he told me thet Trailin’ Panther hed skinned fer ther North half-an-hour before, an’ thet ther rascal wuz aimin’ ter come up with you-alls an’ do some skelp-raisin’. This yer pointer settled it fer me. I seen John Morrison, got shot of my job fer a month, an’ on ther fastest pony I could round up I takes ther trail ter spoil Trailin’s little game.

“This forenoon I kem upon ther pestiferous vermint on ther basin at ther head waters of Cougar Creek. I reckon you-alls camped ther last night. He wuz fixin’ things ter go up ther wall when I hove inter sight. When he clapped his peepers onto me I shore had him kivered. ‘Scheid yer gun,’ I yells, ‘or I’ll let daylight plumb through ye.’ Ther durn fule didn’t shed. I reckon he known he was shore up agin’ it. Quick as lightnin’ he cut loose with his Winchester. But”—with a chuckle—“ef he wuz quick, yer Uncle Alkali war quickar. His bullet made ther ha’r riz above my year. My chunk o’ lead cut a hole in his forsed, an’ he went down ter stay.

“So it wuz yours truly thet meandered up ther wall. As I got close ter ther top I looked ahead an’ saw sudden death in one vellum a-waitin’ fer me. Behind ther rifle wuz Cap’n Stair. I reckon he’d just come up an’ hedn’t got onter what hed been takin’ place down below. ‘Hold hard,’ I yells, ‘I’m no coyote. I’m white.’

“And the captain lent you a hand instead of shooting you, eh?” said Buffalo Bill.

“For sure, an’ arter he’d marked off ther lay of ther land, I waltzed down this yer way ter see how you wuz a-makin’ it. An’ now I’ll hear what you hev ter say, Bill.”

“I’ll say this, for a starter. The ceremony which means the death of Nancy Fulton has been set for tomorrow night. I am going to be present, and you are going to be in a position to aid me.”

“Sure pop, Bill,” replied Alkali Allen, nodding his head violently. “But how in blazes air ye goin’ ter work yer snap?”

“I am going to attend as Jumping Tarantula. You saw his dead body up the cañon a little way, didn’t you?”

“That’s what, Bill. An’ when I seen it I knowed thet you wuz attendin’ strictly ter business.”

“We are about the same height,” the king of the scouts
calmly proceeded, “and I can make up so that the deception will be complete. These medicine-men always carry their make-up fixings on their persons, and I am sure to find what I want when I shall search the Tarantula’s body. I shall, of course, wear his togs.”

“It’s yer boss scheme, Bill,” said Allen approvingly, “an’ you’ll kerri it out to ther queen’s taste. But how do I come in?”

“I’ll explain later. Time enough ahead to make our plans carefully. And, now, let’s mosey?”

Arrived at the spot of the encounter with Jumping Tarantula and the young Apache, Buffalo Bill stopped, and, examining the body of the medicine-man, found, as he expected, a small package next to the skin on the left side over the heart. Opening it, smaller packages were found. These contained the colors, in powders, that had been used on the dead Indian’s face.

The body was carried to the spot where Captain Stair and Newt Ferguson were in waiting with the animals and stores.

“Get there in time to be of service, Allen?” questioned the captain.

“No, ther circus wuz plumb over when I showed up.”

“Bill managed it alone,” explained Masters. “He has wiped out the whole outfit.”

Captain Stair regarded the border king with eyes of admiration. “You are surely the limit,” said he. “I might have taken it for granted that you would come out all right. And now let’s get something to eat. I am, myself, as hungry as a bear.”

After a wholesome repast, the five men sat down for a smoke.

“Talkin’ about b’ars,” said Alkali Allen, apropos of something that Masters had said. “I kin say that I hev hed many a tussle with ther varmints. I bin in ther West since ’54, I’ve tramped the kentry from Leavenworth ter Walla Walla, an’ I hev bin through a heap. Do yer see this yer?”—brushing back the hair on one side of his head and revealing the fact that he possessed but one ear.

“Chawed off by a grizzly eight years ago. B’ars air curious critters, boys,” he added reflectively. “An’ ther ‘ments me that I hed a queer bit of an adventure up on the Gunnison about seven year back. Maybe you’d like ter hear me norate about it.”

“Sure! Go ahead,” said Ferguson.

After placing a couple of inches of coarse-cut tobacco under his jaw, Alkali Allen began his story.

“It wuz in ther fall, an’ I wuz out lookin’ fer cattle that hed strayed from Cunnel Beard’s outfit. Soon I found that wuz powerful good huntin’ in ther keiyons, an’ so I concluded ter hang around an’ hev some fun while my ammerniton held out. I knew what ther wuz an old prospector’s cabin, an’ I lowed I’d make that place my rendyvoo, as ther frog-eaters say.

“No sooner hed I made up my mind, then I struck a bee-line fer ther cabin, which I reached in a few hours. On enterin’, I found that some cuss hed been ther lately, fer in one corner I disskivered half a sack of flour, an’—would yer believe it—a keg of prime old whisky. No mistake ther, fer I sampled it. No tanglefoot extract, no sheep-herder’s delight, no forty-rod business, no blasted tarantula juice about that ther fluid. It wuz ther real stuff, you-alls kin jest bet yer gizzard. Nacherly I felt middlin’ good about that time. The owner might be back at any minute, but I made up my mind ter stick by ther ranch as long as I could.

“Waal, I hed tolerable luck ther fast three days. Killed four deer an’ two cougars, an’ hed ‘em piled up in ther cabin. I wuz tired ther night, arter a hard day’s work, an’ crawled into my blankets mighty early. The night bein’ hotter’n blazes, I left ther door open ter git all ther air I could.

“Waal, I lay ther a long time tryin’ ter sleep, an’ couldn’t, an’ wuz nigh on ter ‘ven o’clock, I reckon, when I heered a monstros phenominin’ an’ puffin’ outside ther shanty. I grabbed my shootin’-iron and lay still, fer I wuz dead onto ther cause of that growlin’. Nothin’ but a grizzly could make a noise like that one. Pooye sooner ther sound got nearer, an’ finally who should walk inter ther cabin but a big b’ar.

“I knew that a stir would bring ther varment onter me, so I shorely keep’ mighty quiet. But he didn’t appear ter notice ther bunks. Meat wuz what he wuz arter. He spotted ther deer, an’ he’d got his jaw onter one of ‘em when he raised his snoot an’ commenced snuffin’. ‘What’s up now?’ thinks I. Waal, ’twasn’t long afore I found out, fer without bitin’ any more inter ther meat, ther yer b’ar commenced sashayin’ round ther keg o’ whisky, an’ in less than a jiffy he had his mouth to ther open bung-hole an’ wuz suckin’ away like he’d made a bet an’ wuz alin’in’ ter win it.

“Ther night wuz not dark, an’ I could see things plain as could be. Well, I am a liar by ther watch ef that pesky critter didn’t set up on his hind feet an’ suck an’ suck until ther wasn’t a blame drop in ther keg. Maybe I wuzn’t riled. It wuz all I could do ter keep myself from jumpin’ up an’ stoppin’ ther yer robbery. You-alls jest think of it! A hull week’s sugar-coated joy gone in a holy minute!”

Alkali Allen sighed at the recollection, and Buffalo Bill winked at Captain Stair.

“But self-preservation air ther fist law of nacher, an’ so I could do nothin’ but look on an’ weep. Artier finishin’ ther liquor, ther measly son of a thief smacked his lips an’ then made fer ther door, but ther yer whisky wuz too much fer him, fer he just managed ter stagger out of the room. Then he went kerwhopple oter the ground. He tried to rise, but couldn’t. Thinks I to myself, it’s time ter be stirrin’; so up I git, an’ takin’ my lariat—a good strong one it wuz—I made fer ther b’ar. He wuz
fast asleep, dead drunk. ‘Now,’ says I, ‘you’re my prisoner. But fast I'll put yer under bonds,’ which I did by passin’ ther rope over his head an’ feet so he couldn’t get away. Then I hit ther bunk again an’ stayed ther until daylight. Fust thing when I got up wuz ter look fer ther b’ar. He wuz whar I’d left him, all right, but my fun wuz sp’illed. He wuz dead. I reckon he’d had an attack of delirium triangles durin’ ther night, an’ hed kicked ther bucket.”

“That all?” asked Newt Ferguson.

“All there main story,” replied Alkali Allen, as he made a grab at a mosquito that was sailin’ past his nose. “That’s a sequel as is interestin’ because it shore shows that every loss hev a compensation. When ther owner of the shack arriv’, which he did thot mornin’, him an’ me dressed ther b’ar, an’ fer a week we hed b’ar steak with a whisky flavor.”

CHAPTER V.

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

Buffalo Bill took advantage of the silence that followed Alkali Allen’s remarkable yarn. He left his companions, and, walking up the trail with head bent, indulged in grave reflections.

Presently he returned, and, addressing Captain Stair, said: “I believe that Black Bear intends to follow the ceremony on the program for to-morrow night by a campaign of murder and pillage. The nearest settlement is Sandy Hollow, which is about forty miles from this spot and about fifteen miles from the Indian rendezvous. In my opinion the settlement will be attacked. Therefore it must be warned and word of what is in the air must be sent to the troop of the Seventh Cavalry now quartered at Fort Doubleday.”

“I shore kin kiver both details,” spoke up Alkali Allen.

“Yes, but a one-man act, even though performed by one of the shrewdest, bravest, and most reliable men in the territory—that’s you, Alkali—would not suit my plans. There is Nancy Fulton to be considered.”

“What are your plans, Buffalo Bill?” It was Captain Stair who spoke.

“They contemplate a surprise for Black Bear. First, the settlement must be warned and some one must be left there to take charge of things. At dark to-morrow night a band of settlers must march toward Lolite Basin, the place selected for the ceremony. At Dry Creek Junction the band should meet the troop of cavalry, and the combined force galloping rapidly for the basin should reach the place in time to give me the assistance which I shall probably require.”

“What is the hour for the ceremony?” inquired Tom Masters.

“Midnight.”

“In case the cavalrymen should not arrive on time, what then?” asked Captain Stair.

“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” replied the border king, with a look that meant volumes. “I shall be in evidence if there is any slip, and I can promise a circus, if nothing more.”

The details were then arranged. Alkali Allen was selected as courier to the troop and Captain Stair, accompanied by Tom Masters, was to hasten to the settlement. For a part of the way to Sandy Hollow the three men would travel in company in order that Allen might set the captain and Masters in the right direction. Newt Ferguson was to remain behind with the mules and stores. In Buffalo Bill’s opinion, the present position near the summit was as safe a one as could be found.

Early in the afternoon Alkali Allen, Captain Stair, and Tom Masters set out on their journey. Allen’s last words were: “Bufler, ef ther troop fails ter connect, yer humble servant’ll shorely be on hand. Ye’ve taken a big contrack an’ ye’ll need help sure’s butter am grass.”

The hours sped away, day following night.

In the Lolite Basin next day all was bustle. A pocket valley high up in the hills, it was an ideal spot for a retreat. Wooded slopes surrounded it, and there was only one entrance, and this a narrow defile guarded by massive rocks which rose up hundreds of feet on either side of it. About the basin through which flowed a small stream were the teepes of the band of Apaches commanded by Black Bear.

These habitations were set in an oval with a courtlike space, some forty feet in diameter, on the inside.

In the center of this space was a demurred cedar and about the trunk were piled high branches of fagots and bundles of dry moss.

The sun had been down an hour when there rode up the defile leading to the basin a grotesque figure mounted on a mouse-colored cayuse. A sentinel leaning against a rock observed the figure, but evidenced no surprise.

When he heard the call of the white owl he answered it, and then stepped forward and prostrated himself upon the ground in front of the oncomer.

“Rise,” spoke the deep voice of the horseman. “The Jumping Tarantula brings the blessing of the Great Thunderer upon Roaming Bear and all his cubs.”

Then, without another word, the horseman rode on, passing into the basin and stopping only when he came in front of the largest tepee.

There were numbers of Indians moving about with torches in their hands, and one of them, an old, withered hag, came and planted herself in front of him just as he was in the act of entering the tepee.

Her voice, cracked and shrill, smote his ear unpleasantly. “I am up against it now,” thought the disguised king of scouts, “and if I crawl out, I’ll be lucky. I’ve heard of this witch grandmother of Black Bear, and she’s sharper than a steel trap. Cunning is the word now.”
Buffalo Bill in his rôle of the Jumping Tarantula, spoke first:

“The Great Spirit has watched over and protected the trail of the Jumping Tarantula. All is well, and he would seek the valiant chief, Black Bear, and speak the words that will make him rejoice.”

“The Black Bear is with the pale-faced maiden. He is now in her teepee chanting the song of his fathers. It will fill her soul with terror.” The hag gave utterance to a blood-curdling laugh.

“The hour of doom approacheth. The gods have decreed the sacrifice. In Black Bear’s teepee will the prophet, in the serenity of virtue, await his coming.”

The border king, in speaking, had given an almost perfect imitation of the voice of the dead medicine-man.

Turning his back on the hag, he entered the teepee.

She followed him.

It was dark inside, but Buffalo Bill, kicking his way about, soon found the couch of skins upon which Black Bear had recently rested.

“Jumping Tarantula would talk with Silver Smile. He would like to float in the wisdom of her speech.”

Silver Smile—the name might have been appropriate in the days of her youth, but it was now a frightful libel—glided forward and crouched at the feet of the disguised scout. Now accustomed to the darkness, Buffalo Bill could discern her figure, though he could not see the expression of her hideous face.

“Where are the braves who went forth with the Jumping Tarantula?” she asked, in the purring tone of a tiger-cat.

“They have gone to meet Trailing Panther.”

“And where is the brother of the great chief, the mighty son of Golden Sunshine, the daughter of Silver Smile?”

“There is a band of the Lasco-Apaches in camp near Grizzly Gulch. He has gone to carry the good news and obtain reinforcements.”

Silver Smile arose slowly and one hand went to her breast. She leaned forward so that her face almost touched that of the king of the scouts, and said, in a hissing whisper: “The Jumping Tarantula lies. The Lasco-Apaches have been here in Lolite Basin for four days. They were here when the Jumping Tarantula set out on his mission.”

As the words were spoken the hag’s hand came out in a flash and a knife would have been buried deep in Buffalo Bill’s breast if he had not caught the wrist in the nick of time. He had been looking for just such a demonstration, and was prepared for it.

Before her lips could open to give the alarm, the border king’s left hand was over her mouth.

There ensued a short, sharp struggle, in which no sounds but the deep breathing of the participants was heard.

At the expiration of five minutes Silver Smile lay on the floor of the teepee, bound and gagged.

What disposition to make of her was the problem that now confronted Buffalo Bill.

Black Bear might return at any moment, and the discovery of the presence of an enemy might operate to prevent the rescue of Nancy Fulton.

He might hide the hag in a corner and cover the body with robe or blanket, but such a proceeding would not be safe, for although Silver Smile had been scientifically gagged, she was yet able to make a low, muffling noise in her throat.

He could kill her, but the king of the scouts had no stomach for an act that, though justifiable, was cold-blooded murder.

He went to the door of the teepee and looked out. Lights flashed in the great center court, the place fixed for the ceremony of sacrifice.

He watched until he saw two Indians, bearing the form of a woman, move toward the tree with the fagots.

The woman was undoubtedly Nancy Fulton, and she was to be lashed to the tree, there to remain until the moment should come for the fighting of the fires.

A third Indian followed the pair with the victim. He was a tall and powerfully built fellow, and he moved and held himself in the manner of one accustomed to command. Once as the light of a torch showed his features Buffalo Bill, looking at the fierce and cruel mouth, the snaky eyes, and the retreating forehead, knew that Black Bear was before him.

The work of securing the victim to the tree took but a few minutes. When it was over the two Indians moved toward a teepee located at a point in the oval nearly opposite the teepee of Black Bear.

The Apache chief stood motionless until the two Indians had passed from sight. Then he returned to the wickiup which had served as the captive’s prison.

He might remain there some time or he might be returning to secure something he had left therein, in which latter event his stay would be short. But be his absence from his own teepee long or short, Buffalo Bill determined to take advantage of it.

While he had stood watching the two Indians lashing Nancy Fulton to the tree, a daring plan had come to him.

Its carrying out would be attended with grave danger, and yet there was a chance that it could be successfully accomplished.

The open oval space enclosed by the teepees and wickiup was upon one side in black darkness, a fact that indicated the absence of the Indians occupying the habitations in that quarter. Familiar with Indian customs, he knew that no one would again enter the court until the hour arrived for the assembling of the council, which
should, after appropriate ceremonies, issue the order for the lighting of the fires.

There was no time for delay if he expected to carry out his plan. When Black Bear’s form could no longer be seen, the king of the scouts hurriedly reentered the teepee, and, lifting the body of Silver Smile in his strong arms, bore her rapidly to the tree of sacrifice, halting on the spot of the black shadow.

The form of the Apaches’ victim was half in this shadow, a circumstance that favored the bold and courageous scout’s scheme.

Depositing the hag on the ground against a pile of fagots, Buffalo Bill next proceeded to cut loose the victim, accompanying the work with these words of encouragement and warning: “I am your friend come to rescue you. When I remove the gag you may whisper, but you must not speak aloud. Rely on me, and obey me in everything.”

The gag was removed and a sweet tremulous whisper issued from the lips of Nancy Fulton: “God bless you, whoever you are. I cannot believe you are Jumping Tarantula.”

“The medicine-man is dead. My name is Cody.”

“Buffalo Bill!” There was awe in the response which was almost an ejaculation. A moment later her face shone with ecstatic hope. “I have heard of you, and I know if any man can help me you are he. I will do as you command.”

She was free of her bonds, and in the shade stood watching her rescuer while he bound Silver Smile to the tree, choosing the exact position which the white girl had a few moments before occupied.

A chaplet made of willow branches and ferns, some of the latter curving so as to nearly cover the face, was on Nancy Fulton’s head. The border king removed this and adjusted it to the head of Silver Smile, so arranging the drooping ferns that hardly any portion of the face could be seen. Next, the bearskin which covered the girl from neck to feet was taken and made to do service on the person of the hag. The work over, Nancy Fulton, clad in a sort of Mother Hubbard, made out of blankets woven by squaws, waited confidently for the next move of her shrewd and plucky defender.

Up to this moment there had been no appearance of Black Bear.

Buffalo Bill was about to steal away with the girl in his arms, make a break for the chief’s teepee, when the tall Apache’s form was discerned.

He was coming from the wickup.

Crouching in the shadow, the border king and the girl watched him until they saw him enter his own teepee.

Buffalo Bill took a deep breath and rose to his feet.

“You must stay here until I return,” he whispered.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I am going to interview Black Bear.”

Nancy Fulton saw him steal across the court, and her heart beat furiously when he passed out of sight.

The moments passed, and he did not reappear. Suddenly came ear-piercing yells and whoops from the direction of the defile.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A PLACE OF PERIL.

Buffalo Bill boldly entered the teepee and saw that Black Bear had lighted a torch and was stretched on the couch intently regarding a small object which he held in his hand. It was a gold locket, and had been worn around the neck of Nancy Fulton.

He looked up as the false Jumping Tarantula came in, but made no effort to arise.

“The Great Prophet comes with good news, is it not so?” he asked.

“All is well,” was the guttural answer, “but”—he took a step forward—“all will not be well if the great chief dallies with the charm of the paleface prisoner.”

“It is no longer hers,” returned Black Bear surlily.

“No, but the charm remains. Give it to me in order that I may upon it breathe the breath that shall dissolve the charm.”

The chief handed the locket to Buffalo Bill. The disguised border king took it, breathed upon it, and then placed it in a small pouch attached to a belt about his waist.

“In five minutes the charm will be gone. Then Black Bear shall have it again.”

“Jumping Tarantula is a bad friend to Black Bear,” said the Apache, with an ugly frown. “He takes from me that which was the Forest Lily’s, as he has taken from me the Lily herself. The god of the Prophet is not the god of Black Bear.”

Buffalo Bill was mystified at these words. But presently he grasped the truth.

“Perhaps it was an evil spirit which counseled the sacrifice. I can soon tell, for now the spirit which moves the waters and directs the clouds is near at hand. Lie you down and cover your face that I may call unto him and learn the truth.”

Black Bear obeyed.

It was at this moment that the yells and whoops from the defile were heard.

The Apache chief sprang to his feet in surprise and alarm.

Buffalo Bill barred the way to the door. He could not guess what had happened, but it was far from his purpose to allow Black Bear to leave the teepee.

“The Great Thunderer has sent reinforcements,” he said solemnly. “The chief must stay here to receive them.”

Black Bear was about to protest, when Nancy Fulton
appeared in the doorway. The yelling had alarmed her, and she had fled across the court to seek the protection of the king of the scouts.

Her coming precipitated matters.

Hurling himself upon Black Bear, Buffalo Bill bore the Indian chief to the floor.

The attack was so sudden and so unexpected that the Apache was not able to make determined resistance.

In the Indian's subjugation, Nancy Fulton lent efficient aid.

She threw over the chief's face a buffalo robe, and held it while Buffalo Bill pinioned his victim's arms and legs. When a gag had been inserted in Black Bear's mouth, the border king arose and hastened to the door.

The yelling was still going on and the noise was now near at hand.

It was a perilous moment for the intrepid Indian fighter.

He dared not remain in the teepee, while to venture forth might place him in the power of the enemy.

An inspiration came to him. Bidding the girl remain out of sight in the teepee, he walked boldly out of doors and caused to come to a halt a large party of Apaches.

After elevating his arms and making mysterious gestures, he said: 'Whence come the braves of the chief and what have they done that they should smite the air with their cries?'

"Let Little Thunder speak," cried a voice, and forth stepped a slender Apache, who, after making an obeisance, spoke as follows: 'Sent out to scout the defile, we came upon a pale-faced spy, and though he fought stubbornly and caused three of our braves to bite the dust, we yet encompassed his defeat. He is here and we are come to offer him as a sacrifice to the gods. If the Great Prophet shall say that the spy may be offered up along with the Forest Lily, the hearts of his minions will rejoice.'

Buffalo Bill, with misgiving in his heart, but with a fierce smile upon his lips, made reply: 'Bring forth the spy, that Jumping Tarantula may look upon his face.'

A white man, with arms bound, was shoved forward. The torches carried by the Indians showed his face plainly.

It was covered with blood and dirt, but there was no mistaking it. It was the face of Alkali Allen.

"White man," said the false medicine-man in Spanish, "you are in the presence of the executioner. Within half-an-hour you will know your fate."

"'Ef some one o' these redskin varmints will reach a paw down in my sack, find a chaw o' terbacker, an' insinuate it inter my fly-trap, I'll shore be able ter listen to yer spil with an easier mind. Say, old goblin face, who gin ye ther right ter speak to yer betters?"

Buffalo Bill smiled. The Indians noted the smile, and so did Alkali Allen. The constructions of white and copper faces were not the same.

"Come forward."

At this command Allen stepped in front of the disguised king of the scouts. Buffalo Bill looked severely at the prisoner for a moment, and then continued: "Enter there." He pointed toward the door of the teepee.

When Alkali Allen had passed from sight the false prophet addressed the assembled Apaches.

"The great chief, Black Bear," he announced, "is engaged in devotions of a solemn character. I have this night, on account of a late desire of his to spare the life of the Forest Lily, imposed them upon him. When he is through he will be eager to slay not only the Forest Lily but this pale-faced spy. Return ye, therefore, to your wigwams and there remain until ye hear the call for the death council."

With no suspicion of trickery, the Indians dispersed. When the last one was out of sight Buffalo Bill reentered the teepee.

"William, my son," whispered Alkali Allen, "you air a wonder. Dog my skin! ef you don't take ther hull bakery. Put it thar."

He tried to extend his right hand, but found that the cords interfered with such action. When the cords had been cut he grasped his old comrade's hand and shook it heartily.

Buffalo Bill's pressure was not in kind. He was rather provoked at the old plainsman's bad break.

"How in thunder," he said, "did you happen to make such a crazy butt-in?"

"I might ha' exercised more caution, my son, ef I hadn't thought you needed some 'un to come a-runnin'. Hyer you wuz, all by yer lonesome, in a camp of three hundred Indians, relayin' on yer nerve to pack ye through. Now, nerve, Bill, is a mighty handy article to have a-lyin' around ther house, but that's a chans ter it ter git wabbily in a layout o' this kind."

The border king's expression softened. He had on other occasions witnessed exhibitions of Allen's courage and self-sacrifice, and he could but feel grateful at the gallant act of the night.

"You are all right, Allen," he said heartily. "The world would be a deal better off if all butters-in were like you."

The torch was still burning, and the king of the scouts, turning a moment from the old plainsman to the girl, had now opportunity to observe her closely. Her costume, to which reference has been made, did not appeal to him. But her face did. It was a lovely face, browned by the sun though it was. The features were regular, the eyes large, dark, and expressive of every emotion that agitated her. Her form was slightly but admirably proportioned, and grace marked her every movement.
In order to have his curiosity satisfied he asked: "You speak like an educated woman. Where did you acquire your learning?"

"From a renegade named Perkins."

"Crowfoot Perkins. I knew him when he was an honest miner. He's dead, isn't he?"

"Yes. He died last year. He lived with the Apaches six years. He was a man of good education and he took a liking to me. I could read when I was captured, but he lent me books and instructed me in many of the courses of the higher grades."

She was silent a moment, and then asked, with a slight tremor in her voice: "Is my father alive?"

"He is, and is living in St. Louis."

A look of happiness came into her face. "I am so glad," she said softly and tenderly.

"Bill," put in Alkali Allen, as he scratched his head, "we air here in a hole. How air we goin' ter crawl out of it?"

"Do you think you could play Black Bear?"

"I reckon I could play him in ther dark, but bust my suspenders ef I think I could get away with ther game in plumb daylight or any other kind o' light. What's eatin' ye?"

"An idea. We want to get away from here, and we can't do it without concocting a mighty cunning subterfuge. If you were Black Bear, there would be no Alkali Allen, a prisoner, to worry about. Then we might ride out, boldly pass the sentinels in the defile, and make our way to safety."

"With ther gal?"

"Yes, with Miss Fulton. She could ride behind me and cover herself up with a robe, the ends of which I would knot in front of me. Everything is in our favor, for no one is likely to stir from the teepees and wickups for more than an hour."

"All right, Bill, I'm agreeable. Fetch on your Bear outfit."

"You'll find it on Black Bear's person."

In a short time Alkali Allen, attired in the Apache chief's habiliments, with his head ornamented with the huge dress of feathers and with his face painted to resemble that of the prisoner, who viewed the proceeding in murderous rage, announced himself as ready to set forth.

Buffalo Bill's cayuse was tethered in front of the teepee.

The animal was brought close to the door so that the danger of discovery would be minimized when Nancy Fulton should mount behind the saddle.

When all was ready the little party set forth on the journey to liberty. Alkali Allen had selected a bronco from a band tethered close by. From the saddle, the finest in the lot, and from the looks of the animal, both he and Buffalo Bill had come to the conclusion that the property was that of Black Bear.

Not an Indian was seen as they started toward the defile.

The daring king of the scouts was congratulating himself over the success of his maneuver when a series of blood-curdling yells in his rear told him that the ruse to escape had been discovered and that he was in the throes of a most perilous situation.

Looking behind, he saw lights flashing about the Indian encampment and dark figures rushing for the places in which the ponies were tethered.

There was but one explanation of the situation. An Apache, more intelligent than his fellows, had not been satisfied with the action of the medicine-man, and had stolen out to spy upon the teepee of Black Bear, reaching the place just after the exodus of the white trio. He had heard the muffled moans of Black Bear and the hag, Silver Smile, and, entering the teepee, had learned the truth. The release of the Apache chief had been followed by the call for pursuit, and now the three fugitives had close behind them three hundred bloodthirsty Indians and before them a narrow defile guarded by sentinels entrenched in impregnable positions and adepts in all the cunning and treacherous forms of Indian warfare.

There was certain death in the rear. There was a slight chance of escape at the defile.

A few sharp words to Alkali Allen, and then gritting his teeth Buffalo Bill put spurs to his cayuse and a lightning dash for the defile was made.

The entrance to the narrow, tortuous exit was reached, with the nearest pursuers less than three hundred yards behind.

A dark form rose up as Buffalo Bill turned his animal to take the downward rocky trail. "The soldiers!" the false medicine-man gasped in the Indian tongue. "Mount your pony and fly. The stand is to be made at the pocket half-a-mile below."

The sentinel did not move. He was listening to the
yells from the basin. They had a language of their own, and they did not carry out the idea advanced by this excited medicine-man.

The impatient border king tried to ride past the Indian.

Up came the red man's rifle, when, crack! and he fell writhing to the ground, a bullet in his brain.

Alkali Allen had fired just as Buffalo Bill had a finger on the trigger of his own revolver.

On they went, riding recklessly. A shot rang out from the rocks above them, and Buffalo Bill's cayuse stumbled and fell, to rise no more.

Another shot, followed by two in quick succession, brought a scream of agony from the rocks. The king of the scouts had fallen on his feet, and when the Indian from above had fired the second shot, the flash had revealed his hiding-place. Buffalo Bill felt the hair rise on his temple, and upon the instant his trusty revolver spoke twice, carrying from the champion shot of the West the stern message of death. Now, cutting the knots which held the robe enfolding Nancy Fulton, the brave scout spoke rapidly to Alkali Allen: "Take Miss Fulton, ride on, and meet the troop. Urge the captain to hasten. I'll manage somehow to hold my own until help comes. It's the only chance."

"No," said the girl firmly, "I shall remain with Mr. Cody. What he proposes will not be safe. I know that pony. He will not carry double. I should not be able to remain on his back a minute and we should neither of us succeed in getting out of the defile."

"Then," returned the king of the scouts to Allen, "you must ride on alone."

"But—"

"No buts, old partner. Do as I say."

The lanky plainsman, with a sigh, rode on.

The yells from the basin had ceased. This was suspicious. It meant that a subtler game was in progress.

"Two can play at that," muttered Buffalo Bill, and then, taking Nancy Fulton by the arm, he started to mount to the spot from which the shots had been fired by the Indian sentinel.

It was a difficult and a perilous climb, and for a tenderfoot would have been impossible. But the border king and his fair companion were no novices in mountain-climbing; and in a short time they were ensconced behind a huge boulder, with the dead body of the Indian sentinel lying at their feet.

"We will be safe for a time at least," whispered the scout to the girl. "About this time the Apaches are entering the defile. They will move silently and cautiously, but we may look for a demonstration when they discover the dead cayuse."

"I hear something above us," came the return whisper from Nancy Fulton, as she clutched her protector's arm.

Buffalo Bill turned his head and listened intently. The noise was slight, but it was evident to the scout's trained ears that an Indian was skirting the ridge. There were probably others behind him, and more on the other side of the defile.

The listener was obviating the darkness which prevented him from seeing the maker of the noise, when the moon, which had been rising from the mouth of the defile, suddenly sent a reflected ray from a flat wall of the cut to a large rock some twenty feet above the fugitives. The line of light luckily passed a few feet from the shelter. But it brought into bold relief for one short minute the figure of an Indian, who in a crouching position was making his way down the incline and in the direction of the king of the scouts and his companion.

Buffalo Bill did not fire. Such a proceeding would have been suicidal. Silently he waited for an opportunity that should not be attended with the risk of discovery.

The Indian, out of the light, moved carefully down the rocks. When within a rod of the boulder behind which Buffalo Bill, revolver in hand, waited, he emitted a low hiss. It was quickly answered. The Indian then came forward with more confidence. Close by the boulder he stopped and again came the hiss.

Buffalo Bill again answered.

Softly the Apache approached the boulder, and as softly raised himself so that he could look over it.

His head was near the top when he met with the surprise of his life. Something tall, dark, and forbidding rose up suddenly from the other side of the boulder, and two hands of steel gripped him by the throat and held him until the breath of life had left his body.

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE MOVE.

The king of the scouts had scarcely settled accounts with the Indian at the boulder when low guttural exclamations from below announced that the dead cayuse had been found.
The moon, rising steadily, presently showed the forms of a large body of Apaches.

At their head was Black Bear, and Buffalo Bill, to his dismay, saw the chief point upward toward the hiding-place.

Worse than all, the moon threatened shortly to light up the boulder and all its surroundings.

Taking advantage of the short spell of darkness that remained, he dragged the bodies of the dead Indians into a crevice, and covered them with loose earth and stones, and then, with Nancy Fulton, sought the point that would be least exposed.

He knew that discovery of his retreat was imminent, for the Indians would not fail to find the evidences of the upward climb.

Where were the soldiers, and would they reach him in time? These thoughts were in his mind as he saw one Indian and then another begin the ascent of the steep incline.

Nancy Fulton pressed his hand and whispered: "They shall never take me back to the basin."

The tone was charged with deadly meaning.

Buffalo Bill said nothing in reply. He could not urge her to again submit to captivity, knowing well, as he did, that it meant death in a horrible form. He pressed her hand in return, and, strange as it may seem, the pressure gave her hope.

Upward came the Indians, until they stood erect and close to the base of the boulder. In another moment they would discover the two fugitives.

With the whispered counsel, "Do not act until you are obliged to do so," he leaped suddenly into view, with a revolver in each hand. There were two sharp reports, and an instant later there were two dead Indians.

Hastily gaining cover, the border king fired at an Indian who was on the way to rejoin his companions. His body struck the rocky ground at the feet of the assembled band.

Instantly arose a savage yell, followed by a fusillade of shots, not one of which reached the scout or the girl.

The moonlight now flooded the defile, and made plain every object on the side which held the fugitives.

Buffalo Bill, rubbing his back against the boulder, in the impatience of rage and disgust, suddenly felt the huge bulk move.

His quick brain at once evolved a daring plan.

Down in the defile, considering ways and means to kill or capture the white girl and her protector, were more than a hundred Apaches. The descent from the boulder was almost vertical. The boulder, immense and heavy, rested lightly on the inclined surface of the wall. A strong push could send it downward, and death by wholesale would follow swiftly in its wake.

To think was to act. In a whisper, the border king announced his purpose. The girl nodded her head in fierce understanding.

With his shoulder against the massive rock, and with no mean assistance from the muscular captive of the Apaches, the boulder first swayed and then with tremendous impetus went crashing down the wall.

The doomed Indians saw their terrible danger, but were powerless to escape it.

Buffalo Bill and Nancy Fulton placed their hands over their ears to shut out the horrible groans and cries that arose from the defile.

All below were not killed, but not more than twenty escaped with their lives.

The survivors for the moment lost their senses and had fled from the spot when the king of the scouts, using his eyes, looked down to note the result.

"We must descend," said he quickly to the girl. "The survivors have gone away some distance, and we will have at least five minutes at our disposal."

Quickly they went down the wall, arriving at the trail to find no living thing there.

With but one glance at the horrible sight about the boulder, they took their way down the defile.

The border king did not expect to find the lower part of the defile clear of Indians. In all probability, many of the band had gone below in pursuit of Alkali Allen. But the numbers in his front were inconsiderable as compared with those in his rear, and therefore he had no hesitation in taking the downward journey.

Five minutes went by without incident. Then they heard yells from behind. The frightened Indians had returned and had discovered that their prey had again escaped them. They hastened their steps.

Soon in turning a bend they caught sight of half-a-dozen Indians coming toward them.

They were out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Nancy Fulton sighed. Buffalo Bill patted her on the shoulder and strove to smile, though his heart was heavy.

"Our luck may hold out," he said encouragingly, as he drew her down behind a rock. "The Indians below
have not seen us yet, and if they pass us without discovery of our presence, we may strike a hiding-place that will be worth something."

The Apaches down the defile were a quarter of a mile away.

On one side of the trail a small stream gushed and tumbled over the rocks. There were deep pools here and there, and a short distance from the fugitive was a large one and in the middle of it a monster rock.

Buffalo Bill, with his eyes moving hither and thither, noted the rock, and saw in it a means of salvation.

Explaining matters to Nancy Fulton, he cautiously made his way through the water to the rock and got behind it. The girl with perfect confidence followed him. The water was above their waists and was as cold as ice. But they had no thought of the discomfort of their position.

Sinking their bodies until the water reached their chins, and entirely screened from view, they waited for the approach of their enemies.

Before entering the water Buffalo Bill had wrapped his revolvers in a piece of oilskin and had placed them in his breast.

The moments went by, and the Indians below passed the pool with the rock to meet a short distance above a detachment from the basin on the way to seek the fugitives.

There was a halt and a consultation.

It was now near midnight, the time appointed for the coming of the soldiers.

Presently the combined detachments came down the defile. Buffalo Bill and Nancy Fulton, behind the rock and in the shadow, thought themselves in as safe a place as could be found anywhere in the defile, and when the Indians stopped opposite them and again consulted, the brave scout's mind was oppressed by no misgiving.

He was chilled to the bone, but that was a small matter. Suddenly his companion began to shiver with the cold. Her teeth chattered and she felt a violent inclination to sneeze. Three times she successfully repressed the desire. Then it became overpowering, and just as the Apaches were about to move on, a sneeze, not loud, but sharp, and impossible of mistaking, brought them quickly to a standstill.

For a few moments all was as silent as the grave. The Apaches, with every sense alert, listened for a repetition of the noise, so that it might be located.

Buffalo Bill, pity and disgust written on his face, slowly raised his head and carefully drew out his revolvers.

The silence lasted until the king of the scouts began to cherish the hope that the Indians would conclude to remain on the spot until daylight, when the discovery of the hiding-place would be an easy matter. If they would only adopt this plan, they must fall into the hands of the soldiers, who must certainly make their appearance before long.

But a slight noise, peculiar and suggestive, drove this hope from his mind. Some one was wading in the water. The movement was slow and cautious, but it was impossible to thus proceed without making a sound.

The sorely puzzled scout looked around the rock and saw that an Indian was within a few feet of him. He must now fight for his life. Out shot his right arm, and a death-dealing bullet clove the brain of the Apache. Then in quick succession Buffalo Bill's revolvers spat fire, the shots being directed toward the bunch of Indians on the trail.

Yells and groans told how deadly had been his aim. A fusillade of shots answered the attack, but the lead was wasted. It either cut the water or struck the rock.

"How many are left?" asked Nancy Fulton, in a whisper.

"Enough to make it warm for us unless we can get out of here," replied the scout soberly. "They have left the trail and are evidently aiming to come upon us from the sides and back."

"Can't we dive and swim out of the pool?"

"Bright idea. We must try it, for there is no other way of escape."

Some ten feet from the rock a narrow cut sent the water shooting down to another pool. To attempt to escape through the cut a person would have to take his life in his hands, for the water rushed through it with such velocity that unless the opening into the lower pool proved to be free from rocky obstructions death might await the taker of the hazard.

An Indian leaped across the rocks at a high point above them, and then turning, would have seen them if Buffalo Bill, after the command "Down, and make for the cut," had not, with his companion, instantly disappeared from view. A minute later a fiendish yell from the pool below, followed by another and another, announced that the ruse of the gallant king of the scouts had failed.

But quickly succeeding the yells of savage triumph, the
clear notes of a bugle were wafted up the defile, and then came the clattering of horses' hoofs and the encouraging shouts of American soldiers.

At the lower pool Alkali Allen, who rode in advance, drew up his pony in front of a wet and motionless form lying on the bank of the stream. "Ther pestiferous varmintshev killed Bufler," he cried. "Wehev struck thedefile too late."

Quickly dismounting, he lifted the still body and gazed sorrowfully into the blood-stained face.

There was a slight movement of the arms. Captain Stair, who had come up, said quickly: "He is not dead. Give him some whisky."

Alkali Allen, with a cry of joy, brought out a flask and forced some of the contents down the wounded scout's throat.

The effect was immediate. Buffalo Bill heaved a deep sigh and opened his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.
ON THE TRAIL OF THE CAPTIVE.

Five minutes sufficed to give the king of the scouts strength to sit up and talk.

His injuries were slight, and he would soon be in condition for active service.

He had shot through the cut and struck his head on a rock, becoming temporarily unconscious.

Death would have been his portion if the savages on the bank of the pool had not seized the body as it was whirling around in the water and dragged it to the shore.

They looked upon their terrible foe as dead, and would have taken his scalp if the sound of the bugle had not turned their thoughts into a new channel.

They escaped up the defile, leaving upon the bank the motionless form of their deadly enemy.

Buffalo Bill's wound was superficial. The skull was intact, though the scalp was cut and bruised. He had suffered from the shock of the blow, and the weakness that it had induced would soon pass away.

His first words were: "Where is Nancy Fulton?"

Captain Stair and Alkali Allen looked at him bewildered. He tried to arise to his feet. "Why don't you answer," he continued, his face becoming paler than ever as a terrible thought entered his mind. "She—is she isn't dead, is she?"

"There ain't no dead woman round these yer diggin's," replied Alkali Allen. "Whar did you leave her?"

"She went down into the pool with me." He was now on his feet. "If she isn't here with you boys, she's at the bottom of the pool. I am going to find out."

He staggered toward the water and would have waded in if Captain Stair had not caught him by the arm.

"You stay here, Bill," was the captain's command.

"We'll attend to the search."

Buffalo Bill submitted, and Allen and half-a-dozen soldiers entered the water. In the deepest place it did not come up to their armpits, and as the hole was small, it did not take many minutes to complete the investigation.

There was no dead body in the pool.

Below, the channel was so narrow as not to permit the passage of a human body. The conclusion was obvious. Nancy Fulton, dead or alive, had been carried off by the Apaches.

No forward movement of the soldiers had been made since the arrival at the pool. The officer in command, Captain Haltren, a slender, wiry man, with a grizzled mustache and a thin, bronzed face, was awaiting the report of the king of the scouts.

Buffalo Bill, in savage humor over the misfortune of the night, told his story in as few words as possible. He made no suggestions. A condition approaching calmness must come to him before he could give sane and valuable counsel.

Captain Haltren regarded the famous scout and Indian fighter with respect tinged with sympathy.

"Bill," said he gently, "I know what is in your mind. You are anxious to start after the Apaches and rescue Miss Fulton, who, I believe, is alive. You shall have our aid. But—would it be advisable to move before daylight?"

"It would not," was the reply which the scout forced himself to give. "The rocks, high up on either side of the defile, are probably lined with Indians, and to proceed while the night lasts would be to invite a terrible slaughter. There will be difficulties enough when the light comes, and the thought of them could prevent any desire to prematurely add to them."

He looked at the ground for a few moments and then continued:

"If you want advice, here it is: The time before daylight should be devoted to the carrying out of plans to render abortive the Apache scheme of slaughter. A short
distance below ways for scaling the sides of this defile will be found. A portion of your force, captain, should be detailed to scale the rocks and be ready to move along each ridge when you give the command to advance up the defile. Unless I am at fault in my reckoning, these tactics will throw the redskins into confusion, and render more easy the work of rushing the defile and entering the basin. Once you get to the Indian rendezvous your chance of wiping out the band is first-class, that is, if your force is as large as I think it is."

"I have eighty-five men, trained soldiers and Indian fighters, and supporting them are one hundred and forty cattlers, the majority plainsmen and used to this sort of work."

"Good. You have enough men to carry the works. I will try to help you out if my life is spared. I am without a rifle. When I set out to play the part of Jumping Tarantula I was obliged to leave my faithful Winchester with Newt Ferguson."

"Take mine," said Captain Stair promptly. "It can be depended upon."

So saying, he handed to Buffalo Bill as fine a weapon as the scout had ever looked upon.

With the rifle in his hands, the border king turned to Alkali Allen.

"Old pard," said he, "I reckon it's time we were off."

"Now yer whisperin'," returned the gaunt plainsman.

I 'spicioned a cat in ther meal-tub all ther time ye wuz workin' yer jaw fer ther benefit of Cap'n Haltren. I'm yer gooseberry. Whar to?"

"To find Nancy Fulton."

The words were spoken quietly.

"You don't mean to say that you are going off now in the night?" said Captain Haltren, with a shake of the head.

"I do. I shall ascend the bluff below and make my way along the ridge. I can't wait until morning. Every moment is fraught with danger to Nancy Fulton, if she is, as I hope, alive."

The officer knew it would be useless to try to dissuade the determined scout from undertaking his perilous mission.

He saw the two valiant men depart, and then addressing Captain Stair said: "Bill is a thoroughbred. It isn't every man who would risk his life in this way."

The night passed and daylight came without a shot having been heard by the waiting force of Americans.

Before the sun was up there began a conflict memorable in the annals of Western warfare.

The advance up the defile was temporarily checked by the attacks made by the Indians concealed in the rocks above.

But soon these marksmen were routed from their holes by the detachments sent to flank them.

And now the soldiers and settlers pressed forward, defying death and pushing over the bodies of fallen comrades to finally reach the open basin, where the remnant of Black Bear's band had massed for a last stand.

The massing, if the arrangement could be given the name, was characteristic of Indian warfare. The Apaches were not gathered either in a solid body or formed in hollow square, but were placed in a continuous line along the rim of the basin.

Captain Haltren smiled when he saw the plan of battle, and he halted his men at the mouth of the defile. He was not to be caught in a trap.

His commands given, the soldiers and settlers dashed forward in three lines, which separated just before coming within range of Indian bullets. With a line for each long side of the oval which the Apache force had formed, the third, pressing through the center, rushed the ends of the oval and also prevented an attack from the rear upon the other lines. It was a sharp, spirited, and deadly fight.

But the Apaches, though at bay, did not exhibit the concert of action expected. Nor was there that wild and desperate spirit evidenced in the conflicts of the past.

The cause of all this soon became apparent to Captain Haltren. The Apaches had no leader. Black Bear was absent.

For an hour the battle waged. There was no way for escape open to the cornered redskins. The one outlet was guarded by soldiers, and the ridges had been cleared of the foe and were held by the Americans.

At last the bugle sounded the note of victory. Of the Apache band of two hundred, which had assembled in the basin to fight for their lives and their homes, but thirty remained alive, and they were wounded and prisoners. The American loss was twenty killed and fifteen wounded.

Where were Buffalo Bill and Alkali Allen? This question flew from mouth to mouth. No one had seen either of them during the fight, and the men who had come up
from the ridges had found no dead bodies—Apaches not considered.

Captain Stair thought he had solved the riddle when he said to Captain Haltren: "Bill and Allen have struck the trail of Black Bear, and they won't show up until they have rescued the girl. My belief is that the Bear pulled the girl out of the pool and ran off with her. He is a selfish scoundrel, and he has wanted to possess Nancy Fulton for a long time. You must remember what Buffalo Bill said. Black Bear would have prevented the ceremony of sacrifice if he could have done so, as he wanted the captive for his squaw, but Jumping Tarantula worked up some prophet locus-pocus, which put the ice on the chief's design."

"It seems strange that Black Bear should desert his band at the moment of battle. He had craved a conflict and he had made all preparations for it."

"I will admit it," replied Captain Stair, "but when you come to consider the happenings of the last twelve or fourteen hours you must see how circumstances could well alter cases. It was Black Bear's plan to open the war by descending on the settlement at Sandy Hollow. That plan was disarranged by the bold ruse of Buffalo Bill, the rescue of Miss Fulton, the numbers of Apaches slain by the border king, and the appearance of your command. Black Bear is no fool. He knew that his band would be wiped out, and knew, also, that to remain and direct the fight in the basin would likely mean his own death, and so he sneaked away, taking with him the young woman, whose possession he had so greatly coveted."

"If the chief has gone off with the girl, he must have followed the ridge down into the valley and have passed around us as we were coming up the defile."

"Correct; and the trail of the Indian must have been discovered by Bill or Allen soon after their climb up the bluff."

Captain Stair's explanation of the absence of Buffalo Bill and his companion was accepted, but not until every part of the basin had been investigated.

The soldiers and the settlers left the basin after the dead bodies of their unfortunate comrades had been interred.

Captain Stair and Tom Masters did not go on to the fort, but made their way to the place where the geodetic outfit was being guarded by Newt Ferguson.

As the services of a guide were absolutely necessary, the captain resolved to stay on the mountain for a week at least. If Buffalo Bill did not reappear before the expiration of seven days, he would ride to Sandy Hollow and endeavor to procure a guide at that place.

On the afternoon of the day following the battle in the basin, Buffalo Bill and Alkali Allen were approaching the small village of the Moquis, situated on a wooded mesa near a branch of the Rio Grande. Their Indian disguises had been discarded.

After ascending a bluff a short distance below the pool where the king of the scouts had narrowly escaped death, they came upon a small moccasin which Buffalo Bill instantly recognized as one of those that had been worn by Nancy Fulton. It was lying upon a flat rock, and the rock as well as the ground below was wet.

"Allen," said the border king to his companion, "here is where she rested, or, rather, where the Indian who carried her away rested."

"I shan't agree with ye, Bill. But which way did they mosey when they started on ag'in? That's the big question afore this yer inquirin' meetin'-house."

"We'll soon find out. The water droppings should tell us. Before investigating I'll make a guess. The route was down toward the valley."

"What perdoes ther ijee thet they meandered that away, Bill?"

"The toe of the moccasin is pointed in that direction. Nancy Fulton is no fool. She got rid of the moccasin unbeknown to her captor, and she pointed it to indicate the direction they were going. Come, let us see if I am not right."

A search was made, and in less than five minutes came the discovery of droppings on the stones below the flat rock.

At the foot of the defile the two scouts rested until daylight. The moon had sunk so low that a large portion of the valleys was so deep in shadow that it was impossible to follow the trail of the Indian and her captor.

Buffalo Bill had made up his mind that the abductor was Black Bear. There was no other Indian, as far as he knew, who was interested in the girl, while Black Bear's talk and expression had convinced him that the chief was anxious to make the lovely girl his wife, according to the Indian fashion.

The wait permitted a few hours' sleep, of which they were greatly in need. By daylight they were up and moving. Alkali Allen had thoughtfully provided him-
self with a wallet of jerked beef and hard-tack while at the fort, and on this layout they made their breakfast.

It was easy for these experienced mountain and plainsmen to pick up the trail of the fugitives. Footprints in sandy places, flattened grass, and bent and broken branches guided them swiftly and surely along the route Black Bear and Nancy Fulton had traveled.

For a portion of the way there was plain evidence that the Indian chief had borne his captive in his arms. It was not until half the forenoon had passed that Buffalo Bill and Alkali Allen saw signs that convinced them that the girl was walking.

This discovery caused the brave king of the scouts to heave a sigh of relief. If Nancy Fulton could walk she had not been seriously injured by the desperate plunge to the lower pool.

Up ravines, over water courses, across table-lands, and through rocky gorges went the two scouts, until, late in the afternoon, they stood upon the summit of a butte which overlooked the mesa upon which the village of the Moquis was situated.

Before they reached the mesa the tracks made by the Indian and the girl became so plain that there was not the slightest difficulty in following them.

Buffalo Bill knew that the Moquis were friendly to the whites, but he also knew that there had been intermarriages between them and the Apaches, and it was probable, therefore, that Black Bear would find friends among the villagers and that any effort to rescue the white girl would meet with determined opposition.

"I wish we could enter the village in disguise, Allen," said the border king, as they halted in a grove just outside the village. "But I don't see how it is possible to do that."

"Black Bear has never seen me with my face washed," answered Alkali, "an', therefore, I'll be ther hombre ter waltz inter ther village an' git ther how o' things."

"And what I am to do? Wait here until you come back?"

"I reckon that's about ther ticket, Bill."

The king of the scouts considered the matter a moment, and then said: "It will be dark in about an hour. Don't start until then. And while you are gone, I'll do a little prospecting. If you don't find me here when you return, squat down and wait."

"Not by a thumpin' majority. Ef you ain't here I'll perceive ter find what's keeping ye."

Buffalo Bill smiled. "I believe we shall meet in the village, Allen. I've got a hunch that says so."

The hour passed, and Allen set forth. He had been gone but a short time when Buffalo Bill cautiously made his way to the outskirts of the village.

He was near a large lodge occupied by the patriarchs of the tribe, when a venerable Indian stepped out of the door and began to walk on his hands and knees.

The border king moved on until he stood in front of the peculiarly acting patriarch. The light streaming from the lodge door fell upon the scout's face. The Indian looked up, and then, with a savage cry, reached out his long arms and grasped the white man by the legs.

CHAPTER IX.

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE.

The countenance of the Indian was that of one near the century mark, while the hands that gripped the famous scout's legs were those of a strong man in his prime.

The effort to throw over the tall, muscular American might have succeeded had not Buffalo Bill used his own hands at the moment his enemy made his hostile demonstration.

The result was that both soon were rolling over and over, each struggling for the mastery.

Buffalo Bill had not the remotest idea of the identity of his assailant, but he was satisfied on one point—the Indian was masquerading. He was no centenarian, but a young and vigorous man.

He was also an accomplished wrestler, and had the power of a bull, but in the border king he met more than his match. He was underneath and the scout was sitting on his chest when a number of Moquis, attracted by the Indian's cry, came rushing up. Buffalo Bill hurriedly explained the situation. Angry glances were directed toward the prostrate brave, and angry words were uttered. "Apache dog!" "Son of a coyote!" and other epithets were hurled at his head.

As he arose to his feet wrathful hands tore the disguise from his face and head and rubbed off the paint and powder by means of which the appearance of old age had been counterfeited. He was then rushed into the lodge, where many torches flared, and the king of the scouts following the crowd saw that his assailant was an ill-favored Indian of not more than twenty-five years of
age. As he turned a sullen visage toward the white man, Buffalo Bill’s eyes gleamed with understanding. In the features, in the expression, there was an unmistakable resemblance to Black Bear.

The assault was explained. The Apache chief, anticipating pursuit and knowing that the false medicine-man had escaped death in the pool and was no other than the invincible king of scouts, had hastened to the Moqui village and made plans to take his enemy by surprise.

The evidence that Black Bear had rested on the flat rock above the wall of the defile sustained the theory that the Apache chief had learned that the foe who had circumvented him in the basin had not been killed in the passage through the water from the upper to the lower pool. From his position on the rock he could have easily overheard the conversation of the soldiers, and thus have learned, first, that the pseudo Jumping Tarantula was Buffalo Bill, and, second, that he was still alive and intended to pursue the girl and her captor.

“Who is this fool?” the scout asked in the Moqui language of one of the Indians.

“We call him Snake Head,” was the reply, “His mother was an Apache.”

“Any relation to Black Bear?”

“His half-brother.”

The conversation caused all eyes to be turned on the scout. He was instantly recognized by more than half the Indians present.

“Buffalo Bill, the king of the border, the great warrior, who bears a charmed life!” These and other expressions in awed whispers passed from lip to lip. As they crowded about him, Snake Head, seizing the opportunity, tried to sneak out of the door.

But he never reached the open air. Thrusting the Indians aside, Buffalo Bill grasped the treacherous half-brother of Black Bear by the shoulder and swung him around into the circle.

“This contemptible hound tried to take my life,” he said to the Moquis. “He must be punished. What is your will?”

An old Moqui spoke up. “Our chief is away hunting the antelope,” he explained, “and we dare not take action while he is away.”

“But you can lock him up or place guards over him, can’t you?”

“Yes, we can do that.”

The order was made, and Snake Head was led away. All the faces about him appeared to be friendly. Noting this circumstance, the king of the scouts was emboldened to ask: “Where is Black Bear?”

“He is here.”

“Alone?”

“No. With him is a pale-faced girl who is ill and cannot proceed farther.”

“Dangerously ill?” Buffalo Bill asked, in marked anxiety.

“No. She is exhausted, and the fever that possesses her will soon pass away.”

“Who is attending her?”

“The woman of the tribe. Black Bear waits outside the door of the teepee within which she is resting.”

“Black Bear is a scoundrel, and he stole the girl. He is more than a scoundrel. He is a coward and a traitor. He deserted his band of braves while they were fighting the white soldiers.”

Rapidly but with dramatic effect Buffalo Bill recited the stirring events that preceded the battle in the basin.

The Moquis listened with impassive faces. No comment was uttered. What did such conduct mean?

“The Moquis can have no respect for a coward,” the scout remarked sharply.

The old Indian who had before been the spokesman replied slowly: “We have talked with Black Bear. In a sense he is our brother, for in the veins of many Moquis flows the blood of the Apaches. We must be charitable as well as just. Black Bear’s words are the words of a sinner who has repented. Not until the bullets of his braves were directed toward the white soldiers did he realize the terrible mistake he had made. He ceased to war with the United States. He fled and he took with him, in order to protect her, the white girl who had lived with the Apaches for ten years.”

“Do you take any stock in such a flimsy yarn?” the border king disgustedly ejaculated.

“We are pleased to welcome any one who is not an enemy of the Great Father at Washington,” returned the old Indian stiffly.

“See here, grandfather,” persisted the wrathful border king. “You say Black Bear has repented. Was this recent attempt to murder me in the line of repentance? I never saw Snake Head until to-night. Why did he attack me? Why? Because he is Black Bear’s half-
brother, and he got his orders from the Apache chief. That white girl went with Black Bear unwillingly. She was trying to escape from him when he slipped up and recaptured her. Ask her, if you don't believe me. Why, man, she would be a dead woman now but for me. The Apaches had doomed her to death. They were going to burn her at the stake, and if I hadn't butted in at the right moment they would have succeeded in their horrible design. Stick up for the thieving son of Satan, if you like, only give me the girl, so that I may restore her to her father."

The Moquis heard this speech with unmoved countenances.

Soon they drew away into a corner, and for a few moments conversed in whispers. Finally the aged spokesman announced the decision that had been reached.

“What is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong. We admire and respect the great warrior of cunning and courage who has come to our village to-night. But blood is thicker than water. So the wise men of your nation say, and so the red men have ever believed. Black Bear must be heard in his own defense. The white girl must also be permitted to speak. Remain here until we return. You shall know within an hour what the Moquis have decided to do.”

“Let me go with you,” urged Buffalo Bill. “Black Bear is the biggest liar out of jail. He may fool you if you go without me. But you'll get something like straight goods if I am along.”

The Indians shook their heads. “The truth cannot escape us,” said the old Moqui. “Have no fear.”

“But I do have fear,” muttered the scout, as the Indians moved away. “Yet, I suppose I'll have to wait. I might not gain anything by going contrary to their wishes, and I might make them so angry by butting in that they would side against me to a man. As the girl is ill she can't leave the village for some time, so a little delay won't hurt. I wonder what Alkali Allen is doing? That rare old boy has probably struck something worth knowing.”

A few minutes later the lanky plainsman stood at the door of the lodge.

“I wuz onter ther fack thut you wuz herdin' yere-about,” he said. “A Moqui friend put me wise.”

“A friend. Good. Who is he, Alkali?”

“Moqui Charley. I saved his life onct. He shore wuz glad ter see me.”

“Well, what have you discovered? Did you see either Black Bear or the girl?”

“I seen Black Bear, Bill, but I didn't clap my peeper onto ther gal. She's a sick 'un, an' that's a hull raft o' squaws tendin' out on her. Nothin' se'rs'us, as I made out.”

“Where was Black Bear?”

“Squattin' in front of ther teepee thet holds ther gal. He allows he's got you fixed, all right, Bill.”

“What's put that idea into his head?”

“His standin' among the Moquis. Charley's onter ther game. You air ter be held here, under arrest, you wanter understand, until Black Bear has had twenty-four hours' start with ther gal.”

“The Moquis won't stand for such an outrageous proceeding, Allen. They have gone to hear the story of the girl. When they shall have heard it they won't feel like turning her over to the Apache chief.”

Alkali Allen put a large quid of tobacco into his capacious mouth. After he had worked his jaws a moment he said: “They won't hear the story, Bill.”

“They won't?” in surprise. “What's to prevent them?”

“A neat little trick of that Black Bear. The girl has been doped. When ther Moqui delergation gits to ther teepee Nancy Fulton will be non pompous meningitis, as the doctors say. She'll shore be dead ther world. Poppy extract'll do ther business. Air ye catchin' on? Not bein' able ter intervoo ther maiden, the Injuns will act on ther testimony thet's available, which is ter say thet they'll match yer spiel agin' ther spiel of Black Bear. As ther Apache will hev ther last say-so, he'll land ther persimmon.”

Buffalo Bill frowned.

“You may have sized up the situation correctly, Alkali,” he rejoined, “but I still have the faith to believe that the Moquis won't turn me down in so summary a fashion. There are square men among them, and as much as they may desire to stand in with Black Bear, they will not go so far as to accept every detail of his villainous program.”

He said nothing more for several minutes.

The situation was a perplexing one, and his brow was clouded. At last he said: “This Moqui Charley—has he any influence?”

“Sure. He is one of the chief's advisers.”

“And the chief is away.”
"Wrong, Bill. He's shore back. He met ther deler-
gation afore it arriv at ther teepee."

"I know something of Eagle Eye, and I believe he will
side with me. There is half-an-hour before us. Go out
and find Moqui Charley, if you can. Bring him here. I
want to make use of him."

Alkali Allen departed.

After a lapse of ten minutes he returned.

With him came Moqui Charley and Eagle Eye, the
chief of the tribe.

The chief was a tall, fine-looking Indian, of middle
age. His face was grave as he shook hands with Buffalo
Bill, and his first words, spoken in English, were: "I be-
lieve your story. I do not believe the story of Black
Bear. My uncle has told me what you said to the
deleation. No decision has yet been made. A council
has been summoned, and at my suggestion you will be
permitted to come before it and confront Black Bear.
Will you promise to abide by the decision of the counci-
? I think you may safely do so," he added slowly.

"I promise."

CHAPTER X.

THE DUEL IN THE DARK.

Alkali Allen had told the truth. Nancy Fulton lay in
the teepee with eyes closed and breathing stertorously.
Her state of unconsciousness would last many hours.
The opiate had been administered by a squaw, the sister
of Snake Head and the half-sister of Black Bear. There-
fore, the girl's testimony could not be taken, and the
statement made by the squaw, who was an authority on
disease, that the girl was in a dangerous condition and
that her only chance of life lay in an immediate removal
to the nearest white settlement where lived a certain white
doctor credited with marvelous powers, was received as
the truth.

The suggestion that Buffalo Bill be permitted to at-
tend the council had been bitterly opposed by Black
Bear, who contended that an hour's delay might cause
the white girl's death. He had almost carried his point.
The Indians had listened to his lying tale, and the ma-
majority would have decided in his favor had not Eagle
Eye and Moqui Charley insisted that Buffalo Bill be
given opportunity to face his opponent. Each could
speak and the truth would be sure to come out. After
much debate it was resolved to summon the king of the
scouts, and to limit the speaking to one-half hour, fifteen
minutes to each speaker. Lots were drawn. Buffalo
Bill was to have the closing talk.

The council was to be held in a large lodge constructed
for council purposes.

At the appointed time the members squatted in a circle
about the room, with Eagle Eye in the center.

When Buffalo Bill entered, the chief directed that his
weapons be removed from his person.

A moment later Black Bear, scowling and uneasy, made
his appearance. He, too, was disarmed.

The two deadly foes sat opposite each other, the border
king near the door, the Apache chief at the farther end
of the lodge, some ten feet back of Eagle Eye.

When all was ready, the Moqui chief lifted his hands
high in air. Instantly each member of the council drew
his hunting-knife and buried it to the hilt in the ground
in front of him.

The chief arose and made the opening address. His
words were few and well chosen. His tribesmen were
present in council as a court of justice. White men's
ideas were one thing, Indian ideas were another. Ju-
tice was sought and justice would be done. The Great
Spirit would control the outcome.

Having concluded his address, the chief motioned to
Black Bear.

The Apache came forward and stood by the side of
Eagle Eye. He was nervous, and his first words came
haltingly. But he soon got command of himself and
spoke with a fluency and eloquence that surprised and
alarmed the listening king of the border. He had been
a warrior, he said, and he had stained his hands with
the blood of the white man. But he had seen the error
of his ways, and was now eager to accept the rule of the
Great White Father.

Soon he switched to the subject upon which his heart
was set. The white girl was in his charge. He desired
to take her to the nearest great white city, where she
might find friends who would tell her where her father
might be found. Now she was ill, and might die if not
taken quickly to the great white doctor, thirty miles
away. As for this burly desperado, Buffalo Bill, he was
the girl's enemy. He had tried to possess her, and would
have succeeded if he, Black Bear, had not intervened.
The girl was thankful to Black Bear for saving her from
a terrible fate, and it was the deadly fear that this des-
perado would follow and recapture her that had brought
on her illness. The speaker said that he knew that Buf-
falo Bill drew the long bow, but he believed that the shrewd and wise men of the council would have no difficulty in seeing through him. In closing, Black Bear made an impassioned appeal for justice.

"The famous Indian fighter and scout saw the Apache chief move away to his corner, and a grim smile played about his lips."

When, at a sign from Eagle Eye, he walked forward to speak, he felt dubious as to the result. Indians like Indian talk, and Black Bear had given them full measure. The scout could not hope to thrill them with his eloquence, and it was doubtful if common sense would penetrate their thick skulls. He would present his case clearly and forcibly, and abide the issue.

"My friends," he began, in a voice musical as a bell. "I am no orator. I will speak plain words in a plain manner, and my earnest hope is that you will weigh carefully what I shall say to you. Black Bear has called me a liar. That was but the accusation of a coward. He will not call me a coward, but when you hear to-morrow that his band has been wiped out, and he, in the very beginning of the fight, has sneaked away like a frightened coyote, you will then perhaps conclude that the dishonorable designation fits him like a glove."

Black Bear, writhing under the cut, arose, and with features distorted with rage was about to speak, when Buffalo Bill thundered: "Sit down, you cur! I did not interrupt you."

The Apache chief resumed his seat, while low murmurs ran around the circle.

The king of the scouts, making the most of his time, then presented his case. His honest face, his sincerity and earnestness, had an effect. He saw that he was being attentively listened to, and the fact encouraged him. After imploring the Moquis to reject the false statement of Black Bear and to accept as the truth the statement that Nancy Fulton had been drugged to prevent her from denouncing her captor and corroborating the story of her escape from Lolite Basin under the protection of the speaker, of her enforced removal to the Moqui village, and the villainous designs of Black Bear, he left the ring.

There were more formalities to be carried out before the room was cleared of the speakers and spectators. Pending the decision, Buffalo Bill and Black Bear must submit to arrest. Guards would not be sufficient. Each must be bound hand and foot.

"I won't run away," said the border king indifferently. "It might be well to tie up the Bear."

The members of the council, with Eagle Eye soon arrived at a decision. It was announced to the two opponents lying on the ground outside the lodge-room.

The council could not decide either in favor of one or of the other. Fifteen stood by Black Bear. Fifteen supported Buffalo Bill.

"Then let us fight it out," suggested the border king.

"That is just what the council has decreed. There must be a duel to the death. The survivor will take the girl."

"Pistols?" inquired Buffalo Bill.

"No," was the answer—the council's spokesman was Eagle Eye—"the weapons will be knives, and the combat must take place in the lodge-room and in the dark."

Black Bear shivered. The white man's face hardened.

"If either of you shall refuse to accept the decision," the chief went on calmly, "his action will be construed as a confession of defeat, and the other man shall be given possession of the white maiden."

The chirp of a cricket was heard close at hand. The Apache chief pricked up his ears, and when the sound was repeated, a feeling of security stole over him. He now spoke:

"The Black Bear is no coward. He will abide by the decision."

"I'm agreeable," said Buffalo Bill.

"It was the order that the duel take place at once."

The cords which bound the two enemies were cut, and all the members of the council having left the lodge-room, taking with them the torches which lighted it, the combatants were given each a knife and escorted to the door.

As soon as the entrance had been closed, guards were stationed there, and also along the sides and at the rear of the lodge.

For some moments not a sound from within was heard. Then came a cry of mortal agony, succeeded by a heavy fall. A long pause followed. Then those listening outside heard a shriek of pain.

A heavy silence fell upon the assembly.

Before the entrance stood Alkalie Allen, an expression of grief and despair on his homely face.

"Open," he said to the guard. "Ther scrap is over. Open, you onfeelin' brute, or——"
The Indian lighted a torch and drew aside the curtain of reeds which formed the door.

Allen brushed past him into the room.

What he saw caused a cry of joy to issue from his lips.

Lying motionless on the ground were two Indians, and near them, struggling to his feet, was Buffalo Bill.

The hands of the king of the scouts were covered with blood, and blood was issuing from one side of his neck.

Quickly Alkali Allen stanch'd the flow, and made a temporary bandage.

"Hurt anywhere else, Bill?" he asked anxiously.

"No, I reckon not. And that cut doesn't amount to much. Only the point of Snake Head's knife reached me."

"Snake Head? Oh, yes; he's ther varmint that imitated ther cricket. I shore thought thar wuz treachery afoot when I heered it."

Eagle Eye came in, turned over the bodies of the two Indians, saw that both were dead, and then said to Buffalo Bill: "The Great Spirit has protected you, and at the same time has exposed the black heart of the Apache dog who was once chief. Your vindication has come from the sky."

"I think Bill's little old cleaver hed suitin' ter do with ther vindication," remarked Alkali Allen, with a dry laugh. "But in ther name o' Christopher Christmas, how did you work it? 'Twouldn't hev been any trouble fer you ter hev got away with a dozen redskins in ther light o' day, but in plumb darkness, two is as good as a regiment."

"North American luck favored me, I reckon," returned the victorious scout quietly. Then noticing the eager, admiring faces about him, he went on modestly:

"When I stepped inside the room, there was an instant of light before the door was closed. In that instant I saw that I was the victim of treachery. In one corner, crouching for a spring, was Snake Head. How he got there I don't know, and now I don't care. Quick as a flash I darted for him. He met me half-way, and it was his knife which punctured the skin on the side of my neck. He never struck but once. As he rolled over dead, I flattened beside him. For a few minutes you could have heard a pin drop. I knew Black Bear was near me, and I believed that his inaction was due to his inability to locate me. He must have known that Snake Head had gone to the happy hunting-grounds, for if the treacherous half-brother had been victorious, the fact would have been made known. Perhaps he figured that I was badly wounded, but he dared not come near enough to make an investigation. So he waited for me to move. That would be his cue.

"After a time a scheme to fool him occurred to me. Without rising, I began to push Snake Head's body toward the side. The body had not moved more than two feet before a knife was buried in the dead redskin's breast. I heard the thud, and I was not slow to act. With a bound I was on Black Bear, and he at once became my meat."

"Big man—Buffalo Bill!" commented an interested listener.

"He's sorely a crackerjack," remarked Alkali Allen. "A man's got ter git up mighty yerly in ther mornin' ter walk his log, son."

Before leaving the scene of blood, a careful examination of the border king's wound was made. It proved to be trifling, and never gave him any inconvenience.

Next morning Nancy Fulton, recovered from her stupor, looked with eyes of gladness into the handsome, sympathetic countenance of Buffalo Bill. When assured that her trials were over, she burst into a flood of happy tears.

The next day the two scouts and the rescued girl left the village on ponies purchased from the Moquis. The animals would have been given outright, but Buffalo Bill refused to accept them. He preferred not to increase the obligation he already owed to the friendly tribe.

In due time the trio reached Fort Doubleday. Nancy Fulton promised to stay there until the king of the border, his contract with Captain Stair carried out, could conduct her to her father.

Accompanied by Alkali Allen, Buffalo Bill hastened to the point where he had left Newt Ferguson, and where he expected to find Captain Stair.

The leader of the geodetic party was there, and was overjoyed at his guide's reappearance.

The thrilling story of the rescue of Nancy Fulton was not told without interruptions and ejaculations of astonishment and admiration.

Buffalo Bill had already heard of the slaughter in Lolite Basin. After referring to it, he said: "We can now go forward without risk. In two days, the weather permitting, we should be on Red Mountain."
This prediction was verified.

On the topmost rock of the mountain was a clear block of granite, four feet wide and eleven feet long, having a sharp drop of one hundred and fifty feet on one side. At this rock Ferguson and Masters got out a drill and sledge and cut a hole two inches deep, and after sulphuring therein a copper bolt, placed upon it the mark of the geodetic survey station. Over this was mounted the heliotrope mirror, which was pointed at Eagle Peak. The sun was shining and the signal light was seen and answered.

At Sandy Hollow Buffalo Bill parted with Captain Stair and his men.

The officer and the scout had known each other but a short time, long enough, however, to give birth to a friendship that was lasting.

Returning to Fort Doubleday, Buffalo Bill found Nancy Fulton in fine health and spirits.

After a few days' rest, the king of the scouts, with an escort furnished by Captain Haltren, left for St. Louis.

The journey was uneventful, and one balmy evening the party reached the great city on the Mississippi.

Nancy Fulton could not wait until next morning—she must see and embrace her long-lost father at once.

After leaving her in pleasant quarters at the Planters Hotel, Buffalo Bill went out to find Lieutenant Fulton and prepare him for the meeting.

The former army man was at his home on Jefferson Avenue and greeted his old friend with unfeigned pleasure.

When, as gently as possible, Buffalo Bill told the father what kind fortune had done for him, the former lieutenant's joy was so great that there was danger of a serious collapse.

But he finally pulled himself together and insisted upon an immediate departure for the hotel which held his child—the child he had long mourned as dead.

The meeting between father and daughter may be imagined. It cannot be adequately described.

- It was a different person who next day entered the land office of which he was the head. One night with his wealth of happiness had changed the man of gloomy reserve to a sunny-faced man at peace with all the world.

Buffalo Bill, as the highly favored guest of Lieutenant Fulton, remained in St. Louis for a fortnight. Then the call of the plains and the hills became so insistent that he could no longer resist it. Cities interested him little. His heart was in the great solitudes. As they parted, Lieutenant Fulton said: "Don't forget, Colonel Cody, that my house is your home whenever you come this way. It would please me if you could live with us always."

"Good-by," said Nancy Fulton, with trembling lips; "good-by, best and bravest of friends. You may in time forget me, but I shall never forget you—never!"

Buffalo Bill clasped her warm hand and looked sadly into her eyes. His hand was leaving hers when on the impulse of the moment she bent forward and kissed him.

THE END.

The next issue of The Buffalo Bill Stories, No. 259, is entitled "Buffalo Bill's Daring Rescue; or, Hunted by Wolves."
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