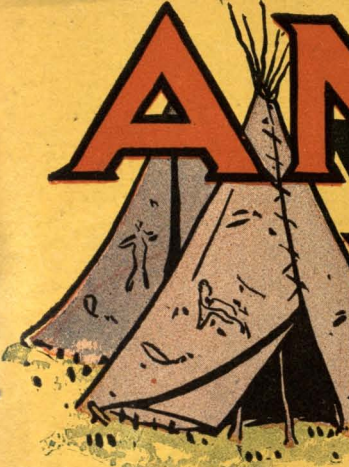


EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WESTERN INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGE



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BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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THE SQUAWMAN'S REVENGE OR Kidnapped by the Piutes

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

CAPTAIN RUDOLPH ARCHER—A young officer who, tiring of the life in the National capital, goes out to a Western Fort. The other officers are jealous of his wealth and social position and in the absence of the Colonel commanding, send him on the trail of the most desperate desperado in the Southwest. In ignorance of the character of the man, the captain saves a cowboy from death by a knife and then, learning that the fiend who sought to use it was the very man he was after, persuades the cowboy to accompany him on his manhunt and to enlist the aid of three of his friends. The desperado sends a threat to the captain that if he does not drop the pursuit he will kidnap his baby girl from the Fort. The captain defies him and after many hair-raising adventures finally rescues his child.

FIREWATER IKE, THE SQUAWMAN—Who is married to the daughter of a Piute medicine man and is supposed to enjoy mysterious powers which make it impossible to kill him. For a long time he has terrorized the Southwest, running off with young women whom he gives to his braves. After his defeat in a fight in which the captain

takes part, he kidnaps the officer's child but is sent to the end he so well deserves.

HAPPY JACK—A cowboy of the Three Star ranch whom the captain saves from the Squawman and afterwards rescues the officer, joins with him in the pursuit of the outlaw and recovers his sweetheart whom the Squawman has kidnapped.

HANDSOME DAN, LUCKY FLYNN, QUICKSHOT—Cowboys of the Triangle ranch whose sweethearts have been stolen by the Squawman and who join with the captain in the manhunt.

SERGEANT MAGUIRE—A member of the Mounted Scouts who is sent to rescue Captain Archer and afterwards joins in the hunt for the Squawman.

COLONEL ROBERT HALFORD—Officer commanding Fort Henry who sends Maguire to the aid of Archer and leads all his troops to his rescue after the Squawman kidnaps the child from under his very nose.

LIEUTENANT STOTES—The officer who taunts Captain Archer into going on the dangerous mission of rounding up the Squawman.

OFFICERS, GIRLS, INDIANS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIGHT IN THE COWBOY'S DELIGHT.

"Drop that knife! Use your fists if you want to—but fight fair!"

Sharp, incisive, like the crack of pistol shots, these

words sounded through the smoke laden air of the Cowboy's Delight.

Instantly, the hum of voices and the clink of glasses ceased as men and women sprang to their feet, forgetting their carousing and gambling to learn the cause of the startling words.

Turning toward the bar, they beheld a swarthy-hued

man, big of bone and tall, his arm drawn back as the sudden command had arrested it in the very act to delivering a blow.

Facing him was a fairhaired cowboy, wiry but so small beside his adversary that it seemed the giant could have broken him in two had he so desired.

Directly back of the combatants stood a clean cut man, lithe and well put up, whose uniform bespoke him as a captain of the Mounted Scouts.

"That's the Squawman!" exclaimed one of the spectators in a low voice, as he caught sight of the giant's face.

"Who's he trying to bully *now*?" queried another.

"Happy Jack, of the Three Star outfit!" chorused several.

But further questions or comment were prevented by the actions of the three principals.

"Keep out of this, *you!*" snarled the giant, uttering a volley of curses at the officer. "Better vamoose before I finish with this cowpuncher or I'll give you what I'm going to give him!"

And disdaining to pay more heed to the man in uniform who had interrupted his quarrel, the bully again faced his smaller victim, clenching his fist the tighter.

The officer of the Mounted Scouts refused to be intimidated by threats or curses, however!

Instead of going away, as he saw the giant preparing to drive home his blow, he hastily drew his sabre.

"Drop that knife, you cur!" he snapped, leaping between the fighters.

With a bloodcurdling snarl, the bully lunged a wicked blow at the captain.

Knowing it was the hand in which he had seen the knife, the officer turned his wrist so that the back of his sabre was uppermost, than raised his arm and dealt the giant's hand a terrific rap with the broadside of the sword, directly across the knuckles.

So unexpected was the blow and so intense the pain that the bully's fingers relaxed.

And as they did, a knife clattered to the floor!

"Shame on you!"

"Greaser fighter!"

"Aren't you big enough to lick Happy Jack without using a knife?"

Such were the comments with which the bystanders greeted the disclosure of the bully's stooping to the most despicable of all acts—the use of a knife in a fist fight.

A moment, the giant glowered at the faces peering at him from the smoke haze, then suddenly turned, grabbed a bottle from the bar and hurled it at the big hanging lamp which furnished the sole light for the room.

Shrieking shrilly in their terror, women stumbled and fought in mad endeavor to escape from the place, men shouted and cursed while the crashing of glass, as

some of them knocked out the windows, increased the pandemonium.

Fortunately for all within the Cowboy's Delight, the bottle had put out the flame of the lamp so that the horror of fire was not added to the scene.

Of a sudden, above the din, rose the cry:

"Help! Help! I've got the cur down!"

Recognizing the voice of the captain, several of the men drew matches from their pockets, lighted them and held them aloft that they might discern from what part of the room the appeal came.

"There they are! In front of the bar!" shouted an excited voice.

And as the matches flickered in the direction indicated, those holding them saw the giant slowly rise from the floor despite the frantic efforts of the officer, turn, place an elbow under his chin and begin to force his head back!

As the captain had beheld the bottle speeding toward the lamp, he had leaped upon the giant with such force that, taking him off his guard, he had borne him to the floor, burying his fingers in the other's throat in an effort to choke him.

Realizing, however, from the frenzy with which the bully struggled that he would be able to hold his advantage only for a minute or so, the officer uttered his calls for assistance.

But he reckoned not upon those to whom he appealed!

Few towns contained more desperate characters than Santa Anna—and scarce a soul was there in the Cowboy's Delight at the time the quarrel started who had not run afoul of the Mounted Scouts on more than one occasion.

Consequently, when the excited men and women saw that the giant bade fair to put a speedy end to the captain, not one of them made a move to go to his assistance, some of them yelling:

"Serves him right for butting in!"

"What's he down in Santa Anna for, anyhow?"

"Let Squawman alone. He'll put the 'Blue Coat' where he can't cause any trouble and then the hunt will be for him!"

The pain as his head was shoved back was excruciating but as the captain heard the comments of those upon whom he had called for help and realized that they were only too glad to have him done to death—so long as they could keep their skirts clear—his courage returned.

"You can stand by and see me murdered if you want to *but each one of you will be an accessory after the fact—and as guilty as Squawman!* Remember, you are refusing aid to an officer of the Mounted Scouts—and the Scouts never forget!"

It was with the utmost difficulty that the brave captain spoke, each word causing him agony.

But his only answer was a mocking laugh!

"Come on! Let's get out of here! Squawman will finish him and if we're not round to see the roundup, we'll never know how it happened so we can't be used as witnesses!" shouted a voice, excitedly.

And to the officer in the death grip of the giant, the sound of scuffling feet brought word that the advice to fly was being followed.

But just when the captain believed he could not take another breath, he felt the elbow suddenly withdrawn!

CHAPTER II.

THE SQUAWMAN SWEARS REVENGE.

Stupefied for the moment by the unexpected turn of events, the cowboy whom the captain's timely interference had saved from a knifing, had just whipped out his shooting irons when the lamp had been extinguished.

With the others, he had heard the cry for help. But ignorant of where his rescuer was, he groped about until the flicker of the matches showed him—and then he lost no time.

Even as the rest of the men and women sought safety in flight from the scene of mortal combat, Happy Jack leaped toward the giant Squawman.

The second bound brought him upon the bully's back.

Hissing defiance, the giant strove to shake him off but the cowboy only dug his fingers the deeper into the other's throat.

By good fortune, he managed to get his thumb against the Squawman's Adam's apple and so hard did he press his advantage, that the giant was compelled to abandon his elbow hold upon the officer and use both hands to break that upon his own neck.

With the sudden relaxation of the awful pressure, the member of the Mounted Scouts closed his eyes, staggering as though he were going to fall when there rang in his ears the cry:

"I've got him, Captain! Trip the cuss up and it won't be any trick at all to beat him up so he'll never give us any more trouble!"

His fast waning senses rallied by the words, the officer exerted all his will power and, once more master of himself, sprang for the spot whence the labored breathing of the struggling men sounded, sweeping the space in front of him with his foot.

Realizing that he could not hope to withstand the two determined assailants, the Squawman summoned all his strength, clutched the fingers pressing into his throat in his more powerful ones and tore them from their grip.

Then, with a lightning movement, the giant shifted

his hold to the cowboy's wrists, swung the fellow clear of his back and sent him crashing into the bar.

At the sound, the captain cried out:

"What's that?"

And while he waited for an answer, the Squawman glided stealthily from the den!

Again the captain called:

"Is that the Squawman or you, Jack?"

When, as before, no answer greeted his inquiry, the member of the Mounted Scouts drew his Colt, at the same time lighting a match.

But all that greeted his anxious gaze was the huddled form of the cowboy lying against the base of the bar, unconscious from the force with which he had been hurled against the boards.

Hastening toward the body of the man who had obtained his own release from the clutches of his giant antagonist, the officer cast a hurried glance about him to ascertain the direction of the door and then, having got his bearings, dropped the match, picked up the cowboy and groped his way from the building.

The town of Santa Anna consisted of not more than a score of dwellings and combination stores and saloons, all lining the street on which the Cowboy's Delight was located. Before the drinking dens were lamps and in the uncertain light cast by them, the officer made out the forms of several men.

"Come here and lend a hand!" he shouted, as he saw the men start to enter the nearest door: "I command you to help in the name of the Mounted Scouts!"

Realizing that it would be but courting trouble to ignore the call when it was backed by the authority and power of the Government patrol, the man advanced toward the captain.

Nightly brawls were so common in the little settlement that none of the denizens in the other dives had thought it worth while to investigate the sounds of disturbance from the Cowboy's Delight. But having been pressed into service, one of the men exclaimed, as he approached the captain:

"Get the man you are looking for?"

"What makes you think I was looking for any one?"

"Mounted Scouts don't generally come to Anna unless they're on somebody's trail."

"Well, this is one of the times when they do," exclaimed the officer, dryly. "Just give a hand here with this chap. He isn't a prisoner. He saved my life. Take him in somewhere and make him comfortable. He'll come to—unless his skull's fractured. I'll be back as soon as I find the sheriff."

"You'll have a long hunt if you're going after him, pard," grinned another.

"Why, where is he?"

"Out yonder in the graveyard. Slickfinger Thurston, who runs the Cowboy's Delight, and a couple of others decided there wasn't no use of having a sheriff in

Santa Anna. Calculated it kept business away, I reckon. Anyhow, they planted him."

Nothing could have given the captain a better understanding of the desperateness of the inhabitants of the little settlement than this statement and he was beginning to realize that it would be necessary for him to use every precaution not to rile the natives if he were to get away with his own life, when one of the men exclaimed, catching a glimpse of the cowboy's face:

"Cut my throat, if it ain't Happy Jack!"

"There ain't no danger of *his* head's being broken," grunted another. "His skull's tougher than a brick—and it's harder to get anything into it. If it wasn't, he'd never left the Three Star after we'd sent word to him Firewater Ike was on his trail."

At the mention of this name, the captain started for it was the name of the man to try to trail whom the officer had come to Santa Anna.

Mindful of the fate of the sheriff, however, the officer quickly recovered his composure, determining not to make any inquiries until he could feel more sure of his ground.

During the conversation, the men had been carrying Happy Jack toward a shanty in which one of them said he lived, and as they entered the door and were preparing to place him on a blanket-covered bunk, the cowboy opened his eyes.

"Did you nail Firewater?" he demanded, looking into the eyes of the officer.

"Firewater? What do you mean?" returned the captain.

"Why the Squawman, of course," rejoined the cowboy.

"Do you mean to tell me that giant was Firewater Ike?" asked the member of the Mounted Scouts, excitedly.

"Sure thing. There's only one man like him in the whole country," replied the cowpuncher.

"If I'd known *that*, I wouldn't have taken the trouble to draw my sabre. I'd have used my Colt instead," declared the captain.

"So *you're* after Firewater, too?" inquired one of the denizens of Santa Anna, exchanging significant glances with his companions and then looking at the officer.

Instantly realizing that he had made a serious blunder, the captain sought to remedy it.

"Oh, I'm not exactly looking for him. Just like to talk with him, that's all," he replied, in as matter of fact a tone as he could assume.

"Well, you'd best take the advice we sent to Happy Jack—and keep away from Anna until Firewater gets good and ready to quit the town. He's got a powerful lot of friends here and from the way he was talking before this little fracas started, I don't think he's in any mood to be interviewed."

"Oh, don't worry about *me*. If that big fellow,

Happy and I mixed it up with, really was Firewater, I guess I can take care of myself," smiled the officer, deeming it wise to assume an air of confidence he did not feel for the sake of impressing the rough men about him. "This Colt's an automatic and about the niftiest thing in the line of a shooting iron I ever saw."

As he spoke, the captain again drew his revolver and exhibited it to his companions.

While the men were examining it, there came a sound at the door.

Instantly, the inmates of the room wheeled, whipping out their six shooters as they turned.

But there was no one to be seen.

From outside, however, there came a jeering laugh.

"You Scout, get out of Anna and back to the Fort, lickety-split and leave Firewater's trail—or I'll strike you where it'll hurt. I'll get your wife and baby!"

CHAPTER III.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

With a leap, the officer was at the door, his automatic Colt cutting the air with its almost instantaneous shots.

To his surprise, the captain found, as he gained the door, that every light along the street, which had been gleaming when he and his strange companions had entered the shanty, had been extinguished, leaving the settlement in a darkness that was only broken by faint rays, flashing from a couple of houses at the Southern end of the thoroughfare.

But as he gazed in their direction, his eyes beheld the forms of a horse and man racing through the splashes of light.

"A rifle, quick! Somebody give me a rifle!" shouted the officer, turning hurriedly toward the men who stood behind him. "I can see him up the street!"

"Don't be foolish, pard," warned a voice. "Men in the clothes you're wearing ain't any too well liked in Santa Anna, anyhow. But if you go to shooting at a flying horseman in the dark, they'll know you ain't got no sense—and your uniform won't be no protection to you."

"Never mind about *me*!" snapped the captain in a tone that would have made one of his subordinates tremble with fear. "Give me a rifle! *That's* what I want! He's got to ride through another ray of light!"

With seeming reluctance, one of the denizens of the settlement handed the officer a Winchester.

Hastily throwing the butt to his shoulder, the member of the Mounted Scouts waited until the form of the horse was visible in the shaft of light that spread across the street, then pressed his finger against the trigger.

But only the click of the hammer was audible. The shell had missed fire!

Suppressing an oath, the officer quickly worked the magazine lever and again pressed the trigger.

For a second time, no report followed.

"Well, if that ain't just Firewater's luck!" exclaimed one of the townsmen. "There probably ain't another two shells in the whole town that would have missed fire. It's no wonder there can't no marshal nor anyone else catch the Squawman when he has such luck."

Such a coincidence, happening as it did to the gun of a man who might need it at any time to defend his life, struck the captain as queer and he turned back into the room, walked over to the wall where the one lamp sat in a bracket and "broke" the rifle open.

Not a shell was in the magazine!

Instantly, the truth flashed through the captain's mind—the men were all friends of Firewater Ike but not daring to openly oppose the uniform of the Mounted Scouts, one of them had resorted to the expedient of handing an empty rifle to him, thereby insuring a safe getaway to the Squawman.

But the officer was not without courage.

"Who did this?" he demanded, gazing sternly from one dark face to another of the group about him.

"What you going to do about it?" snarled one of them.

"It'll be time enough to talk about that when I know who played such a trick on an officer of the Mounted Scouts!" exclaimed the captain.

"Well, I reckon you'll have to do whatever you're agoing to do to the whole of us," drawled another. "Will you take us one at a time or all in a bunch. Either way'll be agreeable to us, eh, boys?"

"Sure, anything to suit the uniform," sneered several of the others.

Nothing would have indicated more plainly than the contemptuous tones, the utter lack of respect or fear for the uniform of the Mounted Scouts in the breasts of the tough characters about him and as the officer faced the surly visaged men a spirit of hopelessness seized him as he remembered his automatic was empty and that he had left his sabre where it had fallen on the floor of the Cowboy's Delight.

With thankfulness, however, he felt the rifle still in his hands and instinctively tightened his hold upon the barrel, he prepared to use it as a club upon the first man who made any overt move.

But Happy Jack had realized, even more than the captain, the desperateness of the situation and, without giving the others time to act, had raised the muzzle of his six shooter to the lamp and pulled the trigger.

Commingled with the report was the clatter of glass as the chimney and base crashed to the floor.

So unexpected was this act that Firewater's sympathizers were taken completely off their guard and, being cowards in the dark, after a moment's indeci-

sion, rushed precipitately for the door, as their hurried footsteps on the board floor announced.

Having been intent upon watching the men about him that he might detect the first hostile move, the captain had not seen the cowboy raise his six shooter and, naturally supposing that it was a plan of his enemies to rush him when he could not see to defend himself, determined to gain the outside of the shanty where he could, at least, be able to take to his heels without running into a wall.

Ere he had taken more than a step, however, he felt his elbow seized.

"It's Happy! Come with me. Softly and quick!" whispered a voice in his ear.

The loyalty of the cowpuncher had been proved too conclusively by his attack upon the Squawman which had ended in his being knocked unconscious for the captain to doubt him and accordingly he allowed himself to be guided from the scene of danger by his companion.

"Where'd you leave your horse?" demanded Happy, as he led the way through the back door.

"Over in front of the Cowboy's Delight."

"Then there's no use going there for it. Mine's there, too. We've got to help ourselves to the first cayuse we come across and we've got to find one mighty soon."

"But that'll be horse stealing, won't it?" demanded the officer.

In amazement, the cowpuncher heard the words.

"Say, you must be all-fired green," he returned.

"Don't you know a Mounted Scout is privileged to help himself to horses, guns or shells whenever he needs 'em?"

Had it been light, the cowboy would have seen a flush of embarrassment rise to the face of the man to whom he was explaining the prerogatives of his own command. But in the darkness, he could only hear the voice say:

"I am green. I've only been out at Fort Henry for five days!"

"And yet you're on Firewater's trail!"

Such patronizing pity was there in the tone with which the cowpuncher uttered the words that the officer felt it was due himself to offer an explanation.

"I did it on a dare," he declared. "Some of the older officers were making my life miserable and when Stotes came in and said Firewater Ike was either over at Santa Anna or headed for there, I offered to locate him."

For the moment, the conversation between the two men was interrupted by the actions necessary to thrust bridles into the mouths of a couple of ponies to which Happy Jack had made his way and to put several hundred yards between the flickering lights of the settlement and themselves.

"I ought to have known you was new on the patrol,"

asserted the cowboy, as soon as he had led his companion a distance out onto the plains that he considered safe.

"Why?"

"Because there ain't another Scout, officer or enlisted, who'd dare to come into Santa Anna alone, to say nothing of facing the Squawman singlehanded. But I don't see how old Bowlegs let you come. He ought to know better—if the rest of them gilt-braided snobs don't."

"The colonel was not at the Fort when I started," returned the captain, seeking by the dignity with which he uttered the title of his superior to administer a rebuke for the flippant reference to him by the cowpuncher.

"Then that explains it," muttered Happy Jack. "What do you propose to do now?"

"Go back to the Fort, get reinforcements and then hunt the Squawman to his doom!"

Silence of several minutes followed this announcement, during which the captain promised himself that he would take it out of Stotes for making such a fool of him as soon as he returned to the Fort. Then his thoughts were roughly diverted by his companion.

"Have you really got a wife and kid?" asked the cowpuncher.

"Yes. Why?" returned the officer, surprised at and resentful of the question.

"Because if you have, I'd take Firewater's advice and shake his trail instead of going back for reinforcements!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN AND HAPPY JACK MAKE A PACT.

Had these words been uttered under different circumstances and by other than a man who had twice intervened to save his life, the officer of the Mounted Scouts would have resented them in no uncertain manner.

When Rudolph Archer had graduated from West Point, he had immediately been detailed to a position of much show and little work at the National Capitol. For a time, because of the social rank of his family, he had taken keen delight in the gay whirl of Washington society. But finally he had married and there had come a change in administration which had brought an influx of other officers with whom he had little in common and his enemies had quickly set to work to oust him from his post, declaring that it should be given to men older in the service who were less fit than he to do duty in the West.

For a time, Archer and his family had sought these place seekers but with the advent of his daughter, Catharine, he announced that he wished to get away from the bickering and petty jealousies of the capitol and had

finally succeeded in being sent to Fort Henry, welcoming the opportunity to enter the Mounted Scouts where the strenuous work would be a relief from the inactivity to which he had been subjected for so long.

His only misgivings, however, had been about the safety of his wife and child, than whom there was nothing dearer to him on earth.

In consequence, the words of the cowboy sent a thousand vague fears to his mind. But to his credit, he remembered that he was a soldier first and a man of family second.

"When my fellow officers taunted me with being a tenderfoot back at the Fort, I told them that I would take Firewater's trail—and nothing that has happened since will deter me. Indeed, if I had three good men at my back I would not even think of returning to the Fort."

"That's all right for *you*. But how about the wife and kiddie?" asked Happy Jack, for the dangers they had shared during the fight and subsequent flight from the shanty had removed all difference in rank from between them. "When the Squawman says he'll do a thing, he usually does it! It strikes me you ought to think of your family before yourself."

"That's just what I *am* doing. If I should give up this manhunt, now I've once started on it, my record would be blackened beyond repair—and my wife and child would be forced to suffer untold humiliation in the years to come because of my faint heartedness, or what my enemies would call faintheartedness.

"*An officer's first thoughts must always be of his duty!*"

"That sounds all very fine," returned the cowboy, evidencing by his tone a lack of appreciation of the spirit which actuates Uncle Sam's soldiers, whether of the rank and file or of the gold braid and chevrons. "But if Firewater had made such a threat against *my* family, I'd look out for them first and then tend to Uncle Sam's business afterwards!"

"Which shows that you would never do for an officer, Happy," returned the captain. "Furthermore, my family are at the Fort—and surely no harm can befall them there?"

This last remark was uttered with a rising inflection, showing plainly that though the captain's words were brave, in his heart he had many misgivings which he hoped the answer of his companion would allay.

But the officer was doomed to disappointment.

"Which shows rather that you don't know Firewater," exclaimed the cowboy dryly, repeating the words of the captain.

"Oh, come now, I may be green but you can't make me believe a man for whom there is a warrant out would be fool enough to try any funny business where a thousand men could jump him any minute."

"What do you suppose the Squawman cares about warrants? Those fellows who sent you out after the

cuss are surely a rum lot. Didn't they tell you there are more than twenty warrants out for Firewater, covering everything from murder to selling liquor to the Injuns?"

"Why, no. From the way they talked, I judged that this was the first one that had ever been issued against him."

"I sure hope old Bowlegs hears about this business of sending you out," exclaimed the cowpuncher. "It's all right to have fun with a tenderfoot—but it ain't a square deal to send him up against Firewater single-handed. Why man dear, returning warrants against the Squawman is a regular pastime of the Grand Jury. When there ain't nothing else for them to do and they wants to earn a little more expense money, they just whirls in and charges him with any old crime they can think of—and he's guilty of 'em all and plenty more."

This statement opened the eyes of the young captain to the feeling against him at the Fort among his fellow officers as nothing else could and in contemplation of the meanness of spirit which had sent him, unwarned, against the most dangerous desperado in the Southwest, he lapsed into silence for several minutes.

"How soon do you have to be back at your ranch?" he suddenly asked.

"Why?"

"Because I have a proposition to make to you—if you can take a few days off."

"Let's hear it. Things ain't so pressing down to the Three Stars that I couldn't take hold of a thing that was right. If they had been, I couldn't have got off to come up to Santa Anna, looking for Firewater. What's on your mind?"

"Those fellows over at the Fort have tried to make a fool of me—"

"No doubt about it," interposed the cowboy, emphatically.

"Now what I was thinking is this: I hate to let any one put some thing over on me. If you haven't anything more pressing, I'd be glad to make it well worth your while to round-up three or four of your friends and then start out on Firewater's trail and get him! It would make those duffers over at Fort Henry sit up and take notice, what?"

"Well, rather, seeing as how they've been hunting him now for a year or more. What do you mean by 'worth my while?'"

"Oh, say a thousand dollars to be split up between yourself and the cowboys you bring with you."

"Um-m. How about the rewards?"

"Are there any rewards on Firewater?"

"Any rewards? Say, if there's a cent there's all of five thousand!"

"Then you can have the rewards, too. It'll be satisfaction enough for me to show Stotes and the rest of his crowd that though I'm green, I was able to do

what they couldn't—and bring the Squawman into the Fort a prisoner."

For some time, the cowboy deliberated the proposition. That it was fraught with danger, he knew only too well. Furthermore, he was aware that they could hope for very little assistance from the people living near the desperado's haunts because they were either friends of his from their very love of daredeviltry or from fear of him.

"Well?" exclaimed the officer, puzzled by his companion's silence.

"I'll go you, captain! I ain't got any love for the Squawman myself, seeing as how he ran off with my gal. That's why I'm on his trail. I was just trying to think who we could get to go with us. There ain't many men who care to mix it up with Firewater. There's only four that I know of, and one of them is Slick-finger Thurston, proprietor of the Cowboy's Delight, who's over at the A-Bar-V ranch now waiting till this little business of planting the sheriff blows over. He—"

"We'll cut him out!" exclaimed the young officer, emphatically. "But why is he against the Squawman? From the way his men acted to-night, I should think they were hand in glove with him."

"That's because they're afraid of him. Firewater held up the Delight one evening when there was more than five thousand dollars on the tables—and Slick-finger is afraid he'll do it again."

"H'm. If he hasn't got any more sand than to let the Squawman come into his place after pulling off a trick like that, it doesn't strike me he'd be a very valuable addition to our force, anyhow. Who are the other three you spoke of?"

"Handsome Dan, Lucky Flynn and Quickshot, all of 'em belonging to the Triangle outfit. Dan and Flynn are white men and Quickshot is a combination Greaser, Injun and white man—but he's got the nerve."

"What makes you think they'd be willing to hit Firewater's trail with us?"

"Cause he ran off with their gals, just like he did mine."

"What does he do with them, for mercy's sake?"

"Sells them to the Piute bucks with whom he hangs out."

"The fiend! I suppose he has one for himself?"

"Not much. He married old Leaping Bear, the Piute medicine man's daughter, Laughing Sun. That's why he's called the Squawman. There's some that say it's because he tied up with Leaping Bear's daughter that the old medicine man has given him stuff that makes him impossible to kill."

"Nonsense. There never was a man in the world, Happy, who wouldn't fall in his tracks if a bullet hit him in the right spot. The Squawman's simply got everybody scared to death of him. Come on, lead the

way to the Triangle and if we can persuade your friends to join us, we'll show the people round here that it's no trick at all to land Firewater!"

"I'm your man, captain! To the Triangle it is—and if we don't round up the Squawman we won't be alive to explain why!"

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG CAPTAIN SHOWS HIS COLORS.

Hours before the captain and the cowboy had made their pact to hunt the notorious and feared Squawman to his tepee without regard to the officers and soldiers back at Fort Henry, things were being made exceedingly unpleasant for Lieutenant Stotes and the others of his clique who had sent the tenderfoot officer on his dangerous mission.

Scarce two hours after the young captain had ridden boldly forth, after kissing his wife and child good bye, the colonel had returned from his trip.

Drawing rein in front of the officers' quarters where the commissioned men were having afternoon tea with their wives, the man whom Happy Jack had irreverently termed "Bowlegs" looked over the bold array of chevrons.

"Why, where's Archer?" he demanded, as he dismounted and gave his horse to his orderly.

"Gone after Firewater," returned one of the younger officers.

"What? Who sent him? How many men did he take?" roared the colonel, the smile which had wreathed his face when he rode up vanishing the instant he received the information.

"He didn't take any men. He's gone alone," rejoined the captain's wife.

Even more amazed than when he had been told of the mission which caused the absence of his subordinate, the commander of the Fort gazed from one face to another.

"Whose doings are these?" he finally blurted. "Stotes, were you in the Fort when Archer started?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you let him go after that fiend *alone*, practically ignorant of the country and our manner of doing things out on the plains?"

Flushing at the tone of his superior, and realizing that he had probably got himself into a serious mess, the lieutenant sought to shift any blame from his shoulders.

"We were talking about the Squawman, mentioning that another warrant had been issued for his running an illicit still in which he made whiskey to sell to the Indians when Archer volunteered to go and round him up. Naturally, none of us took his offer seriously and before we knew it he was—"

"Colonel Halford, that isn't so!" indignantly pro-

tested Mrs. Archer, interrupting. "Lieutenant Stotes and his friends were twitting Rudolph about being a tenderfoot and *dared* him to go after the—the—"

"Squawman," completed the colonel. "I see. Well, Archer is a boy who has some sand. He's only anticipated my orders by starting before I returned. Firewater has just run away with another girl, Molly Jenks, who was over on the A-Bar-V and I was going to send him to round up the brute—seeing as none of the rest of you have ever been able to do it.

"H'm, how long's he been gone and where did he go, does anybody know?"

"About two hours. He said he would strike first for Santa Anna to see if he could get on the Squawman's trail," returned another young officer.

"Well, he'll *find* him all right! Firewater was headed for there, the last report they had at the Triangle.

"Orderly, send Sergeant Maguire to me immediately. Stotes, come with me to my quarters!"

Colonel Robert Halford, the commander of Fort Henry was not an impressive man to look upon. But what he lacked in height, he made up in temper and as he heard the order for him to accompany his superior, the lieutenant who had sent the tenderfoot captain on his dangerous mission wished that he were in the Philippines rather than about to face his irascible superior.

And as he arose to obey, the other officers exchanged significant glances.

Their thoughts, however, were quickly turned to other channels by Mrs. Archer.

"Do you mean to tell me that the Squawman and the terrible Firewater, about whom I have heard so many stories, are one and the same?" she asked.

"Yes," admitted one of the officers, sheepishly.

"And you let Rudolph go after him alone?"

"We really didn't think he would go," interposed another lieutenant. "But don't worry. There isn't practically any danger. The colonel is probably going to send a detail of men after him and by hard riding they'll arrive before any harm's done—provided Firewater is really at Santa Anna, which I doubt."

"It isn't that I'm afraid for Captain Archer," hastily retorted his wife, flushing at the imputation that she wished her husband to have only the easy turns of duty. "It's the thought that any of his fellow officers would play such a trick on him that amazes me."

Smarting under this stinging rebuke, the rest of the officers were wondering what they could do to propitiate the angry woman when the sergeant who had been summoned by the colonel passed out and broke into a run toward the barracks.

"I say, what is it, Maguire?" shouted one of the men at tea.

But the sergeant either did not hear the question or pretended he did not and continued his run to the

barracks whence the call of Boots and Saddles quickly rang out.

"Funny the colonel hasn't sent for any of us," exclaimed an officer, twisting in his chair uncomfortably. "Reckon I'll go and see if he wants me."

"Reckon you'll sit where you are and wait till you're sent for," returned another. "If Halford wants you, he'll send for you, never fear."

"But here comes Maguire at the head of twenty men and we don't know yet who of us is to be in command," protested the lieutenant who had suggested that he go to his superior.

"Maguire's in command. If you'd been here as long as I have, you'd know that without asking. I heard Halford saying only the other day that if he ever got into a tight place, he'd rather have Maguire with a dozen men than any of his officers with fifty. Besides, he's punishing us for what we did to Archer by making us stay at the Fort. Confound the luck, anyhow! You mark my words, this hunt will result in the Squawman's capture—and we won't be in on it!"

But though the others accepted his prophecy, every officer and every trooper at Fort Henry was destined to be in on the roundup of Firewater!

In the meantime, the lieutenant who had sent the tenderfoot captain on his dangerous mission was having a bad five minutes with his colonel.

Making him stand idly by while he delivered his instructions for the sergeant to take twenty men and ride for all they were worth to Santa Anna and join the young officer, when the lieutenant offered to atone for his act by leading the rescue party, the colonel snapped:

"When I want to hear from you, I'll let you know. Now Maguire, this boy Archer has sand to throw away. If Firewater's in that town, he'll find him and mix it up with him. Our only hope is that he won't run into him before you men can get there. Now be gone. You know enough to handle your men, I'd only be losing precious time by giving you instructions. Save Archer. Get Firewater, that's all!"

Waiting only until his sergeant had saluted and left the room, the colonel turned on his subordinate. A moment he glowered at him, then all his grievances against the man for four years surged to his mind.

"Stotes, you're a fool!" he roared. "But you're a dishonest fool, that's the worst of it. I know all about the time when Firewater got the drop on you and let you go because you begged off and he realized it would add to his prestige immensely to be able to boast that he had spared the life of a Mounted Scout!"

At this charge of cowardice, which he believed was known only to himself and the notorious desperado, the lieutenant blanched.

"I suppose I should have reported you and had you court-martialed," continued the colonel. "But I have

been waiting to get a chance to send you against Firewater again. So I am practically, or more strictly speaking, ethically as blameworthy as you.

"Your act to-day, however, is past endurance! You'll be transferred to some other post just as soon as I can get the orders through.

"I know you are jealous of Archer. You're jealous of every man who has a spark of manhood in him. How you ever managed to get through West Point, I don't know. I should have thought they'd found you out.

"But it's too late now to talk about that. I'll have your transfer by morning. In the meantime, if you have any sense of decency, you'll keep to your quarters, out of sight of your fellow officers. And you can console yourself with the thought that if anything happens to Archer before Maguire and his men get there that you will be his murderer!

"Now go!"

Seldom in the history of the army has there been such a bitter excoriation of an officer as that which the colonel of Fort Henry gave his subordinate and as the latter, with head bowed, slunk from the presence of his denunciator, the elder man sank back in his chair, exhausted.

Not long was he idle, however.

Finally summoning his orderly, he gave him a message, asking for the transfer of the cowardly lieutenant, to be delivered to the telegraph man of the signal corps and then sought out Mrs. Archer, to whom he uttered apology for the treatment accorded her husband, saying everything he could think of to alleviate her fears for his safety.

What had happened to the young captain at Santa Anna, the reader already knows.

After making their compact, the officer and the cowboy had headed their ponies toward the Triangle ranch in quest of the three punchers whom the Squawman had also wronged.

As it lay about fifteen miles to the South of Fort Henry, they rode much of the way over the trail to the post, the going being better and, therefore, quicker.

And in consequence of this fact, after about an hour's hard riding, they caught the sound of hoofbeats.

"Must be somebody from the Fort," exclaimed Happy Jack. "There's a whole pack of them, whoever it is. Shall we let 'em go by?"

Ere the captain could reply, however, they were hailed.

The keen eyes of the sergeant had made out the forms of the two horses ahead of him and as Archer and his cowboy checked their speed, he shouted:

"Who goes there? If it's friends, give your name!"

"Archer, Captain Archer!" returned the officer, immediately.

"Maguire and twenty men!" yelled the sergeant. "Glory be, captain, are yez hur-rt?"

"Not a bit, Maguire. Who sent you?"

"The ol' Colonel Halford, sir. The saints be praised we found you before that fire-eating divil got his peeps on yez."

"But I've seen the Squawman and I'm on his trail," laughed the young officer.

"And we're going with you, sir."

By this time the two groups were close together.

"Oh, no you're not, sergeant," rejoined the captain.

"The men at the Fort thought they'd play a joke on me—and I'm going to turn it on them!"

"Spoken like the broth of a biye yez are," grinned the sergeant. "But it will be no joke to go back to the colonel without yez. Whirra, man there'll be glory enough and to spare if the twenty-two of us gets Firewater. Shure, afther seeing the divil, you ought to have sinse enough to know it will take more than one man to nail him!"

"Oh, I'll have men enough, Maguire, don't worry about that. Just 'bout face and ride back to the Fort. Tell Mrs. Archer that I'm all right and the colonel that I'll have the Squawman for him in less than a week."

"It would be as much as me stripes are worth, captain dear," exclaimed the sergeant.

"Then I'll give you a note. Here, some of you, hold a match while I write."

And quickly taking a note book from his pocket, the young officer wrote:

"On Firewater's Trail.

"Col. Halford:

"As long as my fellow officers at the Fort thought to make fun of me, I have decided to go on the trail of the Squawman with the aid of a few friends, one of whom saved me from Firewater at Santa Anna. If you wish to do me a favor, please keep a close watch over my wife and child as the Squawman has vowed he will kidnap them if I keep on his trail.

"With good luck, we should be back at the Fort within a week.

"Maguire does not want to go back, but I am sending him.

"RUDOLPH ARCHER."

Handing this remarkable communication to the sergeant, the young officer exclaimed:

"If I'm not back at the Fort in a week, you can look for me—where Happy?" And he turned to the cowboy.

"Faith and are you Happy Jack of the Three Stars?" demanded Maguire, looking intently at the cowpuncher.

"Uhuh."

"Then you're in good hands, captain. My, but I wish I could jine yez. There'll sure be some fun on this trail. Tell me, Happy, where I can meet yez tomorrow."

"Come over to the Triangle before noon."

"Oh, Captain, let me go with yez *now*. The old man'll never let me get away in the morning. Please, captain."

The young officer had taken a great liking to the genial sergeant and many were the stories he had heard of his cleverness and prowess. In consequence, upon such urgent entreaty, he pondered over the suggestion, deeming it might not be amiss to have one of his own men along with him.

"But who would take the men back to the Fort, Maguire?" he asked.

"Shure, yez can pick out any one of them, captain. They're all good biyes, I chose them meself. Say Hennesy, for instance."

"All right, Hennesy. Take the note Maguire'll give you and deliver it to the colonel."

"Wouldn't it be well to say you'd kept me?" inquired the sergeant before handing the note to the trooper.

"If you wish," laughed the captain. And taking the note, he hastily wrote on the bottom that he had decided to keep Maguire with him, after all.

Then, transferring the saddles from two of the army horses to those the captain and the cowboy were riding and taking what ammunition the sergeant thought they would need, the trio bade good bye to the squad of troopers and rode away into the night.

CHAPTER VI.

HAPPY'S FRIENDS JOIN THE MANHUNT.

For a while, as they galloped along, the captain and the cowboy regaled the sergeant with a graphic account of the meeting with the Squawman and the altercation in the shanty.

"Sure 'tis lucky for you, Happy Jack, that it was Captain Archer and not one of the other fine officers from the Fort who saw the knife in Firewater's hand. If it had been any of them, they would have thought too much of their precious skins to say a word to the divil, let alone mixing it up with him."

"That's what I've just been thinking, Maguire. It's because the captain's a man and not a peacock that I've consented to ride with him to hunt the Squawman. If he hadn't taken a hand in the business, I'd be lying in Nolan's back room waiting for him to hammer together some pine boards instead of being on the back of this cayuse."

"But it's more because of Happy that I'm here than because of me he's here," interposed the young officer. "I sure thought my head was being torn from my neck just before the Squawman took away his elbow."

"Then suppose we call it quits between yez," chuckled the sergeant. "If yez keep on presinting one another with these fine compliments it's back at the Post I'll think I am—and I want to find that divil, Firewater."

Laughing at the Irishman's blunt words, his companions forewent any further allusion to the exciting scenes through which they had so miraculously passed and turned their attention to getting as much speed as possible out of their ponies.

When they had parted from the troopers, very much disappointed as the soldiers were to be denied the sport of a dash over the plains and into the mountains and the exciting skirmishes they felt certain would result when the Squawman and the Piute braves should learn that the hunt for the lawbreaker was on in earnest, the sergeant rode on one side of the captain and the cowboy on the other.

In this manner they were not alone able to safeguard him against any stray shots but, by having the officer between them, there was no danger of his becoming separated from them.

"Where do you be thinking the Squaw divil was

heading for after he left Santa Anna, Happy?" asked Maguire when they had covered about fifteen miles of the distance to the ranch for which they were headed.

"I'm no mind reader," returned the cowpuncher. "But that he's got some ornery idea in his mind is sure."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because it ain't like Firewater to light out of a place, especially where everybody, for one reason or another, is his friend as they are in Anna, just on account of a scrap. He usually stays to see the fun!"

"True for yez," rejoined the sergeant. "I hadn't thought of that. I'd given two months' pay to have been on a horse when he hiked out, so's I could have followed him and seen which way he took. As fur as I can see, we've just got to get the biyes from the Triangle and then sort of skirmish round until we get some word of where he is. Captain, and your pardon for saying so, it was rash of yez to write the old man we would have the divil within a week. I've known months to go by with never a word of his whereabouts."

"I think you're wrong this time, Maguire," returned the young officer. "Considering the threats the Squawmah uttered, I shall be very much surprised if we don't hear from him within a day or two."

And the captain was right! Before night descended upon the little band of manhunters they heard from the desperado in a most terrible manner!

The members of the Triangle outfit were up and about when the trio of horsemen cantered into the yard of the home ranch and as they caught sight of the two uniforms, they started at them in surprise.

"What's up, Happy?" demanded Quickshot gruffly, at the same time keeping an eye on the Mounted Scouts while his right hand hovered suspiciously close to the butt of his six shooter which protruded from his belt.

Realizing that the cowboy whom he had described to the captain as part Indian, part Greaser and much white man feared the appearance of the men in uniform might have to do with some of his past exploits, the member of the Three Star outfit quickly replied:

"This is Captain Archer and Sergeant Maguire, boys," and he swept the gathering of cowmen with his glance.

"We know Maguire," interposed Handsome Dan and Lucky Flynn, grinning at the non-commissioned officer.

"Right yez are, biyes, and I've heard of Quickshot, I'm thinking."

But Happy Jack permitted no further interruptions.

"The captain and the sergeant here are on a little hunting expedition for Firewater and I 'lowed you-all might be persuaded to join in with it."

At the mention of the Squawman's name, the faces of the cowboys had become black and sullen.

"I should think you had the most call to be going with 'em, considering what the cuss did over to the A-Bar-V, instead of coming over here and putting it up to us," snarled Quickshot.

"And I *am* going with 'em, don't you forget that for a minute," exclaimed Happy.

At these words, the expressions on the faces of the men of the Triangle outfit brightened perceptibly.

"Then why didn't you say so in the first place?" demanded Lucky Flynn.

"Because I supposed you'd have sense enough in your heads to know that I wouldn't be along unless I

was going," retorted Happy. "Come, speak up lively, we haven't got time to fool round here all day. The question is, will you three duffers go with us or won't you?"

"Is there going to be any more in the bunch?" asked Handsome Dan, with more earnestness than grammar.

"No," replied the cowboy.

"No Scouts nor nothing?" persisted Quickshot, still eying the two members of the Government patrol with suspicion.

Fearing that they were losing valuable time and that a misunderstanding might arise among them that would retard their working by interfering with their harmony, the young officer took a hand in the conversation.

"There'll just be the five of us, provided, of course, that you boys decide to go. I offered Happy a thousand dollars to be split up among you four if he should succeed in persuading you to join the manhunt. Yes, and all the rewards will go to you, too," he added, anticipating the question he saw being framed in Lucky Flynn's mind.

"That sure sounds good to me," declared Handsome Dan.

"Same here," chorused the other two members of the Triangle outfit whose assistance had been sought.

"Will you have any trouble in getting off?" queried the captain, his delight at their willingness to take part in the quest of the desperado evident in his face.

"Not much," chuckled Lucky. "The old man is away for a week or so, up to Denver and there's enough of the boys left to take care of all the critturs in the corrals. Just you-all go into the grub house and get some chuck. We'll take your ponies and make our own ready."

"You go with 'em, Dan, and I'll go to the corral with Lucky," quickly exclaimed the puncher from the Three Stars, for he wished to acquaint the latest recruits to the manhunting troop with the reasons for the captain's desire to take up the trail of the Squawman.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNWELCOME MESSENGER.

Agog with curiosity to learn what Happy had to say about the Mounted Scouts and the manner in which he had met them, Lucky had no sooner escorted the captain and sergeant to the mess shack and ordered the cook to give them breakfast than he made some trivial excuse and hastened out to the horse corral where he found the boy from the Three Stars surrounded by an interested group of the Triangle outfit, all listening intently to the story of the trick the officers at the Fort had played upon the tenderfoot and the run-in with the Squawman at the Cowboy's Delight.

"It shows he's got plenty of pluck, all right, all right," exclaimed the foreman of the Triangle, as Happy finished. "I'd sure like to be with him myself. It—"

"Then why don't you come?" asked Happy.

"Simply because I can't with the boss away, especially as you're going to take three of my men and I reckon, all things considered, they've got more reason for going than I have."

This allusion to the great wrong the Squawman had done the three members of the Triangle outfit in running off with their girls roused the cowboys to a high pitch of excitement.

"Then you don't mind our going?" asked Lucky, eagerly.

"Not a bit—but it's a good thing the boss is away. If you don't get back before he does and he puts up any holler, I'll just tell him you went. Now hurry and get a move on."

Well did all the cowpunchers know that the foreman in his reference to the owner of the Triangle was hinting at a connection between the notorious desperado and the ranchman which they had come to suspect, chiefly from the absolute immunity the herds of the Triangle received from the Squawman and his renegade Piute bucks while the steers of the neighboring ranches had been forced to pay heavy tribute.

Accordingly, they lost no time in roping the ponies they intended to ride and making ready for the start.

"Hold on," called the foreman, as Happy turned to go back to the grub shack. "Guess I'll go with you," he continued as he caught up with the cowboy. "I'd rather like to get my peepers on this nervy young captain."

"You see we're making ourselves right at home," smiled Archer when the formalities of introduction had been accomplished.

"That's right," asserted the foreman. "Eat hearty—and all you can. If you have any luck at all, you won't get a good meal for several days, I'm thinking. Hey, José," he added, turning to the cook, "Get five bags and put every bit of food you've got cooked into them. Step lively!"

"Whar they goin'?" demanded the Mexican, suspiciously.

"Don't ask questions but do as you're told," yelled the foreman.

But the cook had kept his ears open and though the two Scouts had talked in a low voice, he thought he had detected the mention of the Squawman's name.

"Me no put up grub for men who hunt Firewater!" he announced, defiantly.

In a trice, the foreman had his sixshooter out and levelled at the rebellious cook.

"Who said anything about Firewater?" he fairly shrieked. "I told you to put up some grub for the captain and the rest *and you do it*—or there'll be another Greaser hit the Long Trail, and mighty sudden too!"

Believing rightly that it had been his incaution that had caused the rebellious outburst of the cook, the young officer exclaimed:

"What's that he said? Who's this Firewater, anyhow?" And he looked blandly from one to another of the cowboys who had entered the shack during the altercation.

Grinning appreciatively at the manner in which the captain sought to allay the Mexican's suspicions, the foreman replied:

"Oh, he's a good for nothing Squawman who occasionally makes a raid on our herds and drives off a few calves."

"Then what's the Greaser scared of?" demanded Maguire.

The ruse of the captain had been successful in throwing the cook off the track and, desirous of making amends for his stand against the Mounted Scouts, for it had suddenly occurred to him that sometime he

might want their friendship or assistance and want it badly, he declared:

"Don't you pay no 'tention to what Shorty says, Senor Capitan. Firewater bad man, very bad man. He marry Leaping Bear's daughter, Laughing Sun, and Leaping Bear give him medicines so white man no can hurt him."

This repetition of what Happy Jack had said about the Squawman's apparent immunity from injury or danger gave the young officer an insight into the conditions which he believed were largely accountable for the fear in which the desperado was held but he determined not to take issue with the superstitious Mexican.

"All right, cook," he laughed, "I'll remember what you say. Here's five dollars to pay for the food you're going to put in our bags and the trouble you'll have in preparing some more to take its place."

"Gracias, Senor Capitan," murmured the cook, pocketing the crisp bill with avidity. "All will be ready pronto."

"Then we'd best be getting the ponies, captain," interposed the sergeant. "It's a long ride to Chapultas."

The mention of this town as their destination, lying as it did in the very opposite direction to that of the Indian village frequented by the Squawman, removed any trace of suspicion that might have been lurking in the Mexican's mind and he fell to packing the bags with food as the members of the Mounted Scouts and the cowboys left the grub shack.

"That was a clever piece of work, captain," exclaimed the foreman, when they were out of earshot of the Mexican. "Despite José's words describing Firewater as a bad and dangerous man, it has long been my opinion that he is in the pay of the Squawman, oh, not for money, just for immunity, you understand," he added quickly, noting the look of interrogation that appeared on the young officer's face. "For that reason, if he'd thought you-all were going to hit the trail of the devil, while I might have forced him at the point of my gun to pack the food, as like as not he would have stuck some poison into it, and it's dollars to a doughnut that as soon as you were out of sight he'd have taken his pony and set out to carry word of your pursuit to the Squawman."

"What I don't understand is how you people can live with a man like that around, suspecting him as you do," asserted the young officer.

"After you've been in these parts longer, you'll realize it's often policy to have the good-will of such men, even of Firewater himself, captain. You see there are more than a thousand acres in the Triangle range and if we didn't have some sort of an arrangement with the Squawman, it would take a regular standing army to patrol and protect the steers. Isn't that so, Maguire?" and the foreman appealed to the sergeant.

"It's sinse, of course," drawled the Irishman, "but it would be more sinse if you'd have taken all the punchers on your range and run the divil to cover long ago."

"Provided the boys could have been persuaded to hit the trail—which they couldn't," returned Shorty. "Take the cowmen—and everybody else, as far as that's concerned—in these parts and they're so scared by the stories about it's being impossible to kill the Squawman that they're more than half licked by fear whenever they run across him. That's why I think with

you and Maguire in the game, you'll be able to get results this time. For there isn't another bunch of boys that's so keen to get the cuss as the ones you'll have with you."

By this time, the Scouts and the punchers were on their ponies, all powerful, rangy animals, capable of maintaining great speed, and quickly they cantered up to the door of the grub shack where José stood awaiting them, the bags of food at his feet.

"I suppose I can look for you boys when you get back," smiled the foreman as the last bag was made fast to Handsome Dan's saddle.

"Not before," chuckled Happy and, with the "Good Luck" of the foreman ringing in their ears, the little troop of manhunters who were bent on such a dangerous mission set out on their way.

"Where shall we head for, Santa Anna?" inquired Lucky when the home buildings of the Triangle were no longer visible. "So long as we don't know where the crittur is, seems to me that would be the quickest way of picking up his trail."

Readily the other cowboys fell in with this idea and as they gave their opinions, they looked to the young officer in expectation of his confirming them.

But Captain Archer had other plans in mind.

"The trouble with that idea is that it would enable Firewater's friends in the town to get word to him that we were on his trail and he would have plenty of time to give us the slip," he returned. "What I was thinking of is this: We'll go to the Piute village where the Squawman makes his headquarters and round up the bucks and squaws, allowing a few of them to escape and carry the news of the raid to the man we're after. From all that I can gather of the fellow, such word would bring him as fast as horseflesh could bear him to the assistance of his tribe—and then we'd be able to ambush him."

This plan, which would make the notorious desperado fight where and in the manner they wished him to, appealed to the cowpunchers strongly and even the sergeant nodded his head approvingly as it was unfolded.

"Cap, you sure have a great head," exclaimed Lucky Flynn, admiringly. "Always before, the posses have fought just where the Squawman wanted—and got licked." And then, the capture of the village seeming already accomplished in the mind of the enthusiastic cowpuncher, he added: "But this time we'll beat the devil at his own game!"

Agreeing heartily with the sentiments of the member of the Triangle outfit, the other boys eagerly turned the heads of their ponies to the South toward the rugged cliffs where the Piutes lived.

As they rode, they discussed the probabilities of their success in taking the village by surprise, basing their belief in their ability so to do largely upon the fact that no one knew exactly where they were going and only the foreman back on the Triangle and the officers and men at Fort Henry were even aware that they had taken up the hunt for the notorious desperado.

But just as twilight was beginning to fall, their assurance received a rude shock!

Of a sudden, three shots rang out from their rear!

Throwing their rifles to their shoulders and turning as the reports sounded over the plains, the manhunters

were amazed to see an Indian brave, hideous in his war paint, riding toward them.

"What the divil can that mean?" exclaimed the sergeant. "Steady, biyes. Don't go to wasting ammunition. The buck ain't within three hundreds yards of the range. Wait till I give the word and then let's see how many shells we can put into his miserable red carcass."

Still another surprise was in store for the manhunters, however.

The brave had seen the men face about and as soon as he realized that he had succeeded in attracting their attention, he lowered his rifle and proceeded to tie a piece of white cloth to it.

And as the Scouts and cowboys sat their ponies, fingers on the triggers of their Winchesters, impatiently awaiting the word from the sergeant that the Indian was within range, they were amazed to see their intended victim wave the white cloth in the air.

"That's a flag of truce, Maguire," exclaimed the young officer, no less astounded at its appearance than his men. "Let's ride up and see what the fellow wants."

"Be the cats of Killarney, what the divil can a red skin be doin' with a flag of truce?" grunted the sergeant. "Aisy, captain dear, them red devils don't know the meanin' of a flag of truce. It's probably some scheme to get the jump on us."

But veteran Scout and cowboys were to be given proof of the intrepidity of the young officer.

"I'll ride up and see what he wants. Maguire, you bring the others and keep at least thirty yards behind me. Beter spread out, so if you have to shoot you won't hit me instead of the buck," he added with a smile.

"Sure you're crazy entirely," muttered the Irishman as his captain leaped his mount forward. "No one but a tenderfoot would trust a white rag in the hands of one of them red devils. Biyes, open out till you're twenty yards apart and then ride in. Keep your guns to your shoulders—and don't wait for the crittur to shoot, if you see a dangerous movement."

But the sergeant's suspicions were groundless.

As the young officer reached a spot fifteen yards from the Indian, he drew rein, at the same time dropping his hand to the butt of his Colt automatic.

"What do you want?" he called.

"Injun got letter for paleface chief."

"You have a letter for me?" repeated the captain, in amazement.

"Uhuh."

"Then bring it to me."

"Palefaces no shoot?" queried the buck, looking suspiciously at the array of rifle barrels with their death-dealing muzzles pointed at him.

"Not unless you try some trick," retorted Archer. "Bring the letter to me."

So imperious was the manner of the young officer that unconsciously the Indian yielded to it and almost before he realized what he was doing, he urged his pony forward.

Eagerly the captain held out his hand for the mysterious letter, opened it and glanced at the signature.

"Close in, men!" he shouted, as his eyes fell on the signature. "It's a communication from Firewater!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A TIMELY SHOT.

Their surprise evident upon their faces, the man-hunters leaped their ponies forward in obedience to the command of the young officer.

Ere they had approached more than fifty feet, however, the Indian, in fear of some treachery, whirled his pinto preparatory to making a dash for his life.

Divining his motive, the captain raised his automatic, menacingly.

"Come back here—if you don't want your body riddled with bullets!" he yelled.

Between the risk of becoming the target for every one of the grim visaged men and his desire to get away from them as soon as possible, the brave was sorely perplexed. But he deemed it the part of wisdom to draw rein, though he made no attempt to turn his pony's head toward the manhunters.

"I said 'come back here!'" thundered the young officer, rising in his stirrups to give emphasis to his words.

"What for paleface want Injun?" demanded the buck. "Injun give um Firewater letter. Injun want to go."

"Never mind if you do. I told you to come back here. That's enough," exclaimed Archer and then, seeing that the brave made no move to obey, he added: "I'll give you till I count ten. If you're not right along side of me by that time, your blood will be on your own head! One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—"

"All right, Injun come. No count more," shouted the buck, who, having glanced about him and noted that not only was he threatened by the revolver in the hand of the young officer but by every rifle in the hands of the Scout's companions, wisely decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

And as he reluctantly rode close to the captain, Maguire signalled to the cowpunchers to surround him.

"That's the way. If you'd only done that in the first place, you'd have saved us all this delay," commented the officer. "Sergeant, you and your boys keep your eye on our red friend while I see what the Squawman has to say."

"Read it aloud, cap, that'll save a lot of time," suggested Lucky, for he as well as the others were agog with curiosity to learn what the letter contained.

Realizing their eagerness and having decided to avoid any semblance on authority or superiority over his men, in the belief that by so doing he would obtain more hearty support, the officer of the Mounted Scouts cleared his throat.

"Dere Cap i here you done sent the boys old bolegs sent to you back to the fort. you done well. i like yure pluck wich is wy i am giving U 1 more chance to save yure skin. just go back to the fort like the boys U sent and ill see that U aint never bothered by any of my men. Be wise—or Ull be in a hole in the ground like the sherif. Remember yure wife and kid. i mean what i say. Firewater ike."

The peculiar spelling and almost illegible handwriting caused the captain to pause many times before he had read the strange missive through.

When at last he had finished, there was a silence significant in its intensity for several minutes, then, as

though actuated by a common idea, the cowpunchers crowded their ponies against the pinto on which the brave sat, forcing it over onto that of the young officer.

"Easy, easy, boys!" cried the captain.

"But the nerve of the divil, sir. I niver heard the likes of it!" growled Maguire.

"From what you all tell me, I should think the Squawman was chiefly noted for his nerve," smiled Archer. "It isn't that part which bothers me so much as how he found out about the troopers from the Fort and the manner in which he was able to trail us with this fellow here."

"That miserable Greaser cook, José, probably told him," snapped Quickshot. "I wish Shorty had put a bullet through his good-for-nothing hide when he had his six shooter pointed at him this morning."

"But that doesn't explain how the Squawman knew I had gone to the Triangle. Besides, we particularly told José that we were going to Chapultas."

At this statement, a look of fear flashed over the faces of the cowpunchers as they remembered the stories they had heard of the mysterious powers of Firewater and, divining what was passing in their minds, the sergeant determined to take a hand in the proceedings before the terror had taken too great a hold of the cowmen's hearts.

"There's nothing so wonderful about that," announced the Irishman in his rich brogue. "It wouldn't be like any of the muts in Santa Anna not to have followed you and Happy when you lifted the ponies. They was probably in hailing distance when I met yez with my men and then they seen us turn and followed us until we headed for the Triangle, carrying the news back to the dirty little town as fast as they could and then passing it on to the Squawman who'd probably come back to see if the captain and Happy was still there. It don't need no great mind to dope that out."

"But you haven't accounted for the way this Indian was able to get on our trail," returned the young officer.

"Nothing mysterious about that. He just used his eyes," rejoined the sergeant. "For a man as cunning as these red divils, it was no trick at all to follow our trail from the ranch. But what's the use of spending all our time wondering? Why not ask the divil, if you don't believe me?"

This solution of the mystery was so simple that the cowboys, their fears of the supernatural powers of the Squawman allayed by the common sense reasoning of the sergeant, looked at one another sheepishly.

"There'll be time enough for that, later," announced Archer. "We're losing valuable time here when we ought to be looking for some waterhole where we can rest our ponies and feed ourselves."

During this exchange of ideas, the brave had been watching his captors closely and noting that they had relaxed their holds a trifle upon their weapons, as he heard the words of the young officer which meant plainly that he was to be taken along with the man-hunters, with a lightning movement he whipped his scalping knife from his belt and lunged viciously at the captain.

But Archer, suddenly becoming conscious that danger threatened him, chanced to look up just as the wicked blade was speeding toward his heart.

Twelve more inches and the knife would be in his heart.

Yet the young officer, the tenderfoot whom his fel-

lows back at the Fort had sought to make sport of, was as calm as though he were looking at a tea cup being handed to him by the wife of some officer at their quarters, instead of a weapon that was seeking his life's blood!

Leaning as far back in his saddle as he could, the captain raised the muzzle of the automatic which he had held in his hand while reading the letter.

Click! went the trigger—and the amazed cowboys saw a knife drop from the buck's hand while a piercing shriek burst from his lips.

So quickly had the danger threatened and passed, that they were scarcely aware of it before it was over. "Seize the fiend! Bind him!" shouted the young officer, still keeping the muzzle of his automatic levelled at the treacherous redskin. "As for you, you sneak, if you try any more tricks I'll put a bullet through your worthless heart instead of sending it into your shoulder!"

Evidently seeking to make amends for their lack of attention, which had come so near to costing their leader his life, by the haste in which they uncoiled the ropes from their saddles to bind the brave, the cowboys gave no heed to his wound and, seizing him roughly, soon had him trussed up, hand and foot.

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"It's a good thing you were more alive than the rest of us, captain," remarked the sergeant, shuddering at the closeness of the call. "But what I don't understand is why you didn't put the bullet through his black heart instead of into his shoulder."

"Because I want to ask him some questions," quietly replied the young officer, "providing, of course we can get him to answer."

"Oh, he'll answer all right, all right, don't worry about that," exclaimed Quickshot and the significance with which he uttered the words made the others look at the cowboy curiously.

"Well, if you can make a redskin talk when he don't want to, you're a bird," declared Maguire.

But the cowpuncher refused to enlighten his companions as to the method of suasion he intended to adopt to obtain the desired information, instead suggesting that if they were to find a waterhole before dark they had best get under way immediately.

"There's a drink over yonder about five miles, as well as I remember these plains," announced Lucky. "The only trouble is, it's pretty close to where the Squawman and his Piutes have their teepees and there may be some of them hanging round."

"If there had been, the shots would have attracted their attention and we should have seen them," asserted Happy.

This statement suggested an idea to the sergeant.

"Be the cats of Killarney! You don't suppose Firewater hit it out last night for his village and that he and his fellow divils spotted us and sent this buck out as a sort of blind, knowing we'd be likely to make for the waterhole where they're planning to surprise us?" he asked, excitedly.

"It's possible, of course," returned his captain. "Anyhow, it won't do a bit of harm for you and

Handsome Dan to ride ahead and reconnoitre, sergeant."

Scarcely had the words left the young officer's mouth than the two men leaped their ponies forward and were soon racing over the plains, peering carefully at every clump of sage brush and turning their heads ever and again to listen or to sniff the air, which was blowing from the South.

Keeping within striking distance, that they might rush in to their assistance should the two manhunters jump any Indians, the others galloped along, occasionally plying the captive brave with questions which he disdained to answer.

Nothing that aroused their suspicions did the scouts see, however, and after riding around the waterhole several times, beating the brush in all directions, they waded for their companions to come up.

But that there were eyes watching their every movement, the little band of intrepid manhunters were soon to learn!

Quickly dismounting when they arrived at the drink, the captain ordered Happy and his sergeant to attend to the horses, designating Lucky and Dan to prepare the grub while he and Quickshot untied the feet of their captive and lifted him from his pinto.

"Let's see if the cuss will talk," whispered the cowboy in the officer's ear.

"Not now. Wait till the food is ready. When he smells it, we may be able to exchange some of it for some information," returned the captain, shrewdly, while aloud he said: "Bring the fellow up to the campfire and make him sit down."

In amazement, the other members of the party heard the words.

"I won't touch a mouthful with the man who tried to take your life sitting at the same grub, captain," exclaimed the sergeant, angrily.

"Just forget about that business for a while, Maguire," returned his superior.

"But it ain't natural," protested the Scout. "If I had my way, it would be dragging him about behind my horse I would be this very minute."

"We'll have time enough for that later," grinned the young officer, at the same time winking meaningly at his sergeant. "Got the bacon fried, Lucky?"

"Aye and as crisp as I'd like to see Firewater's heart," rejoined the cowboy. "Here, some of the rest of you, lend a hand with the coffee and doughnuts and we'll soon be eating."

Readily the others responded and quickly were they all squatting on their saddles, tin cups full of steaming coffee at their feet and plates laden with bacon from which rose an odor that was appetizing, hungry as the men were after their long ride.

Closely the captain had been watching the buck while the food was being served and noting the famished look which appeared in his eyes, he purposely set his own plate of bacon at the Indian's feet where the aroma would be rafted directly into his face.

"Smells pretty good, eh?" he finally asked. "Like some?"

"Uhuh."

"I don't doubt it. It does look mighty good." As he spoke, the officer took a piece of the savory food on his fork and raised it toward the captive's mouth.

Eagerly the buck prepared to seize it between his teeth, leaning forward that he might get it the sooner.

But just when it was almost touching the paint daubed mouth, the captain set it down again.

And the look of disappointment and rage that swept over the brave's face told plainly that a way of torturing him had been found that would not necessitate the use of knives or guns.

Twice the captain repeated the move while the cowboys and Irishman showed their enjoyment of the scene by rolling about and shouting gleefully, now and then throwing some stinging taunt at the helpless red man.

Archer, however, was watching his victim intently and when he believed he had keyed the buck's appetite up to its highest pitch, exclaimed:

"I tell you what I'll do, bo. I'll trade some of this bacon and two cups of coffee for the information as to where you got that note from the Squawman."

As the words left their leader's lips, the other members of the manhunting party stopped their hilarity and awaited breathlessly the captive's reply.

"Paleface too smart. Injun tell, then he fool um," grunted the brave.

"No I won't. You tell me—and tell me the truth—and you shall have just what I promised you, a plate of bacon and two cups of coffee."

"Make it t'ree doughnuts, too," bargained the Indian.

"Not on your life," retorted the young officer, firmly.

"Paleface sure no fool Injun?"

"I said I wouldn't and I won't. Now decide quick. We can't wait all night for you to make up your mind."

"Give Injun piece of bacon first, then he tell and get rest."

"You're an old fox all right," chuckled the captain.

"But to show you that I'll keep my word, I'll do it. That bacon's so good, when you get your teeth into a slice of it, you'll want all we've got in our bags."

And suiting his actions to his words, Archer cut a piece of the crisp food with a fork and fed it to the buck.

Ravenously the Indian devoured it, then a cunning look came in his eyes.

"Nother piece, Injun tell more," he wheedled.

"Not much. Now tell us where Firewater was when he gave you that letter for me."

An instant the brave hesitated as though he would refuse to keep his part of the agreement unless his additional request was granted. But the taste of the savory food finally overcame his obstinacy and he capitulated.

"At Triangle ranch house!" he announced, adding in the next breath; "Gimme bacon! Gimme bacon!"

No answer could have more surprised the manhunters and as they heard the statement that the very man they were seeking had been at the spot whence they had so recently set forth, they gazed at one another in astonishment.

"When was he there?" demanded the captain, excitedly.

But the buck only grunted:

"Gimme coffee now."

"Never mind about the time, cap," interposed Happy. "I looked the devil's pinto over when I hobbled him and I ain't any judge of horseflesh if he'd been ridden for more than five hours."

"How can that be? Here we've been riding ever since early this morning from the ranch and yet he overtakes us in not more than five hours, you say?" demanded the young officer.

"That's not hard to answer," returned the member of the Three Stars outfit. "We haven't been pushing our ponies and the pinto has been ridden to the limit."

"That's the truth, captain," chimed in the sergeant. "Any one who can ride like these devils could cover the ground we've come in about four hours, that is, of course, providing they pushed their mount for all there was in him."

Forced to believe the statement as to the length of time the Indian had been on their trail, especially as Lucky and Quickshot went over to look at the animal and upon their return added their confirmation, the officer pondered for several minutes.

"According to that then, the Squawman must have been at the ranch about two o'clock," he finally exclaimed.

"Some where's along there," agreed Happy. "Try another plate of bacon; perhaps that will loosen the critter's tongue again."

But though the captain endeavored to extort more information from his captive, his efforts were vain—yet he and his companions were destined to hear a plan of Firewater's action from the brave's own lips that made them gasp with rage and helplessness!

When it became evident that food would not tempt the Indian to say anything more about the Squawman, Lucky turned to Quickshot.

"You said you could make the ornery devil speak when we wanted him to, now suppose you make good," he exclaimed.

"Shall I try my hand, captain," asked the halfbreed, eagerly.

"Time's getting along and the devil may be able to tell us somethin' will change our whole plans," interposed Maguire, fearing from the look which appeared in the young officer's face that he would not hand the captive over to the tender mercies of the cowboy.

Realizing from these words that he was taking part in a matter of actual life and death and not one of the play affairs that he had been accustomed to both at West Point and while on his station in Washington, the captain replied:

"All right, Quickshot. Only remember you're not a savage."

"You're to keep hands off," exclaimed the cowboy.

"Unless you try to go too far."

"You can't go too far with a man who would ram his scalping knife into you, cap," returned the man from the Triangle outfit, then turning his attention to the captive, he gave him a vicious kick, commanding him in a volley of terrible oaths to get to his feet.

Upon the face already hideous with war paint, there appeared a look of fury and hatred such as the young officer had never seen in a human being and unconsciously he dropped his hand to his automatic revolver.

But the kick had the effect of bringing the buck to his feet with a bound.

As he gained them, however, he cast a hurried glance toward the southeast and the expression on his face instantly changed.

Wondering at the cause, the cowboys sprang to their feet and followed the direction of their captive's momentary gaze—and what they saw made them gasp with alarm!

Dancing along the horizon like evil sprites revelling in some orgy, tongues of flame leaped and bounded into the air!

"The plains have been fired! Quick, to the horses! There's no creek within fifteen miles of here!" cried Happy.

CHAPTER X.

DESPERATE MOMENTS.

Confronted by this unexpected peril, the manhunters rushed to their ponies, thinking only of the desperate work that was ahead of them if they were to outrun the fire which, even as they glanced at it while frantically saddling and bridling their horses, seemed to have come hundreds of yards nearer.

In the excitement, the Indian was forgotten.

Scarce believing his eyes, the buck gazed at the frightened cowboys and Scouts an instant, then cast about for some protecting bunch of grass where he could hide. Not seeing any which could serve him, powerless as he was to drop to his hands and knees and worm his way along, he decided to seek safety in the waterhole. And thither he made his way, crouching as low as the rawhide bonds permitted.

But he had not gained his haven when his absence was noted.

"The buck's gone! The buck's gone!" shouted Lucky, in dismay, as suddenly remembering the captive, he turned to see where he was.

The announcement filled the manhunters with consternation.

"We've got to find him!" exclaimed the sergeant. "If he gets away now, the chances are he'll be able to get back to Firewater or the Piutes and then our goose will be cooked, for fair! Everybody get busy and beat the grass for the devil!"

"But we can't stop to search for him—if we're going to make a fifteen mile run for the creek Happy spoke of," retorted the captain. "The buck won't be able to live through the fire and surely he won't be able to outrun it! Let him go and look to yourselves!"

Just as the young officer finished speaking, the keen ears of Quickshot detected what he thought was a splash.

"Look in the drinkhole!" he shouted.

With one accord the men whirled their ponies in the direction indicated and when they were upon it, Lucky slid from his saddle and began to feel round in the water with his hands.

"Here he is! I've got the cuss!" he suddenly yelled, exultantly as his fingers tightened upon the strands of rawhide with which the prisoner was bound. "Lend a hand and we'll have him out of here and on his pony in no time!"

Willingly the others dismounted and seized whatever part of the buck's anatomy they could get hold of. But the Indian was determined to make all the trouble possible, evidently with the purpose of delaying his captors so long that they would never be able to make the creek, and he struggled with incredible frenzy to prevent his being drawn from the hole.

"We can't linger any longer over the cur, boys," suddenly exclaimed the captain. "I'm afraid we have lost too much time, as it is. Stand aside and we'll start him on the way to the happy hunting ground!"

"Shooting's too good for the devil. Leave him be where he is, captain! The fire'll soon make an end of him," called the sergeant.

"And of us, too, I'm thinking," commented Handsome Dan, gazing out over the plains.

Surprised at the tone of terror and hopelessness in their companion's voice, the others gazed toward the flames.

"We can never outrun them," announced Quickshot. "Don't sit there and talk that way, man, ride!" shouted the young officer, roughly. "The time has come for action—not words!"

But none of the cowboys moved, however.

"What's the matter? Have you suddenly been bereft of your wits?" demanded Archer, beside himself at the inexplicable inactivity of his men.

"Quickshot's right, captain," returned the sergeant. "It would be simply seeking death to try to reach the creek ahead of the fire."

"Well, you men can lie down without trying to save your lives—if you want to. I won't! I have a family back at the Fort that I'm mighty fond of and I'm going to take the chance that will let me see them again!"

Ere the young officer, who was seeking so valiantly to inspire his men with courage, could leap his pony forward, however, Happy and Lucky laid firm hold of the bridle of his pony.

"What do you mean by such actions?" roared Archer, trying to shake the cowboys from his horse.

"Listen, cap," exclaimed the member of the Three Stars outfit. "It would be sure death for you to ride for the creek. You wouldn't get half way there. We've got to stay here and make our fight. This waterhole's big enough to cover all of us. The buck knows that and it's because he does he made the sneak for it instead of striking out in any other direction. What we've got to do is to set the grass afire around us. Hey, you punchers, get busy and scatter some matches in the grass as far out as you can ride and get back!"

In a flash it came to the captain that he had read of men sorely pressed by prairie fires who had saved their lives by starting a counter blaze and accordingly he yielded command to Happy.

No sooner had the orders to fire the grass left the cowboy's lips than his companions were away, riding their ponies for all they were worth. With that intuition which enables some men to do the right thing at the right time in emergencies, the manhunters spread out in a huge semi-circle and when the matches they dropped flared up, they had started fires that would extend along a line of some quarter mile in length.

But never an instant did they dally over their work. Whirling their ponies even as they dropped the blazing bits of wood, they rode with quirt and spur back to the waterhole.

Realizing that it would take a few minutes for the grass to catch and the fire to get a headway, they had calculated on these facts to allow them to regain the one haven of safety and all arrived without mishap.

"What'll we do with our ponies?" gasped Lucky as he swung from his saddle, "turn 'em loose?"

"Can they live through the fire?" demanded the young officer.

"No, indeed."

"Then give them a bullet and put them out of their misery," returned Archer. "We'll be in a bad fix without horses but we can't let the poor beasts suffer. Get the saddle bags and chuck them into the hole."

Already the flames and smoke, suffocating in their

heat and density were so close that the ponies were snorting and leaping in terror. But the manhunters were all good shots and the fear of the faithful creatures was of only momentary duration.

The loss of their mounts, however, effected the cowpunchers deeply and chancing to espy the cringing form of the Indian, Quickshot sought a vent for his feelings.

"Here you red devil, come here!" he bellowed, his voice audible above the roaring of the flames. "You're to blame for all this. Now take your choice and answer any questions I ask or I'll throw you out into that fire!"

The threat was so terrible that even the other cowboys gazed in amazement at their companion. But he, unmindful of their looks, clutched the buck by the nape of the neck and shook him as a terrier does a rat.

"Is this fire part of the Squawman's plans to get us?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Uhuh. Firewater him heap smarter than palefaces. Him and Piute braves been watching palefaces ever since me meet um—"

"That's a lie!" interrupted Happy. "There wasn't another buck within ten miles of where you met us. If Firewater had been along, he never could have resisted the temptation to start a fight, especially if he had any of you red devils with him. So cut out such rot and tell us the truth."

"Me tell um truth!" protested the captive. "Me and t'ree other braves at Anna with Firewater. In morning we hear paleface captain send back sojers to Fort and hit trail for Triangle. We ums follow. Get to ranch and talk José. Him say gone Chapultas. Firewater no think. Write note, send Flying Horse with um. Him send other braves to Piutes tell um no see me and palefaces riding back to ranch 'fore dark, set um plains afire."

"Paleface think um heap smart, heap fool. Injun make um heap fool. Firewater take Piute bucks and raid Fort, get paleface chief squaw and papoose!"

This exultant repetition of the threat against his family coming as it did when the young officer and his companions were face to face with death, was more than any of them could stand and even as the last word came from his lips pistols barked on all sides and the insolent brave toppled over.

Who had fired the shot that had sent the Indian to the doom he so richly deserved, none of the manhunters knew—and they had no time to think of the action further.

From all sides sparks and burning brands of grass, borne on the wind, were falling upon them and the air was so hot that only by bending close to the surface of the pool could they breathe.

"It's time to begin ducking," gasped Quickshot. "Every man stay under as long as he can."

Only too eager were the men to try anything that promised relief from the terrible heat and some sitting down, others dropping to their knees and bending their heads, they immersed themselves.

Unable to stay submerged for more than a minute or so at a time, the men were constantly bobbing up and down.

So terrific was the heat that the water in which they had taken refuge became uncomfortably hot.

"If it isn't over within five minutes, we'll be boiled!" groaned Lucky. And then, with an earsplitting shriek, he ducked under, his hair a mass of flames.

To the stifling, choking men, it seemed that the seconds were hours. Wildly they splashed about, finding relief in the water only to have its heat force them to raise their heads.

"Here she comes! Everybody keep under!" bellowed Happy, raising his head ever so little and glancing about hurriedly.

And even as the cowboy spoke, there came a thunderous roar—and the flames had passed, the leaping wall of fire bringing terrible and certain death to every thing and creature in its path.

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE REFUGE.

Gasping and spluttering, one by one the members of the manhunting party that had passed through such a terrible ordeal raised their heads and gazed about them.

The sight that met their eyes, the half burned carcasses of horses and even the body of the brave that lay scarce a yard away from the waterhole, together with the remnants of their saddles, was sickening and, as with one accord, the men turned and watched the fast receding wall of flames.

"We forgot to put the grub bags into the pool, now we'll have to go hungry as well as horseless," exclaimed Lucky Flynn, disconsolately.

"Don't be complaining, man dear," hurriedly interposed the sergeant. "'Tis down on your knees you should be this very minute offering thanks to the blissid saints for preserving your life, not finding fault."

And, amid the scene of awful desolation wrought by the fire, the veteran Scout climbed from the waterhole that had been the salvation of himself and his companions, dropped on his knees upon the still smouldering plains and bowed his head in silent thanksgiving.

Rough men though the cowpunchers were, the sight could not fail to impress them and they reverently kept silent until the sergeant sprang to his feet.

As he did so, however, the rest of the manhunters pulled themselves from the drink and proceeded to wring out their shirts and chaps.

"It was an almighty close call, that," declared Quickshot, gazing at the black, steaming ground. "But we're saved. Look there, to the South, the other fire is upon the part we burned. Where'd you have been if we had let you ride for the creek, cap?"

But a shudder of the young officer as he saw with what incredible swiftness prairie fires advanced was his only answer.

For even as the men stared blankly at the wall of flames which, baffled by the absence of grass to feed them, seemed to leap forward as though they were seeking the little group of men silhouetted against the receding fire, they beheld a fresh danger!

From all directions, shrieking and moaning, denizens of the plains, roused from their lairs by the relentless flames, swarmed into the already burned area, their instinct seeming to guide them to it and tell them that in its confines lay safety.

Never was there a more strange sight! Coyotes and stray calves, prairie dogs, chickens and other animals that the manhunters could not name ran side by side, all natural hatred and antipathies apparently forgotten in the common effort to escape from

the roaring, bounding wall of flames that bore down upon them, scattering sparks and brands of fire which now and then set the fur of some creature ablaze, causing it to add its terrified wails to the din.

Fascinated, the cowboys and the young officer gazed at the spectacle.

Suddenly, pointing to a spot ahead of the fleeing beasts, Happy cried:

"What's that?"

Following his direction, the men beheld a writhing, squirming black mass.

"Be St. Patrick! it's snakes, thousands of 'em!" gasped Maguire. "Quick, fill your canteens at the drink. Once the varmints sense the water, they'll charge for it!"

And even as the Irishman spoke, the reptiles seemed to have become aware of the presence of the water-hole—and in one terrible horde, turned toward it.

Realizing all too well that they could never hope to withstand the onslaught of the crawling, creeping mass, the manhunters sprang to fill their water bottles. But even before they succeeded, some of the serpents threw themselves into the pool.

"Quick! To the North, where our fire swept! There's none of the varmints there!" shouted the sergeant, seizing the captain by the arm and dragging him along. "It's the beasties we've got to look out for. Club your rifles, biyes and stand shoulder to shoulder. If we don't divide 'em they'll trample us into sausage meat!"

And timely, indeed, was the veteran scout's warning!

In a seemingly irresistible horde, the fleeing denizens of the plains surged over the ground, the ones in the rear leaping over or grinding beneath their feet the luckless ones in front which had stumbled, the pressure from behind being so great that they never had time to rise again when once they lost their footing.

At the sight of the human figures, some of the leaders seemed to hesitate a moment, then continued their flight without swerving.

"Now, biyes! Swing your rifle butts!" yelled the veteran Scout who, with the acquiescence of his captain, had assumed command of the desperately situated band of men.

With a will, the cowboys obeyed, beating about them furiously.

"Careful, not too hard or you'll break the stocks," cautioned the sergeant. "A tap will do as much to turn the poor devils as a blow that would kill 'em."

Realizing instinctively from the actions of the leaders that the black group of objects in front of them represented danger in a new form, the terrified animals split as much as they were able when they came upon the manhunters. But the pressure all about them did not permit of much leeway and the young officer and his companions were compelled to beat back the fleeing horde as best they could.

Their exertions, coming as they did on top of the smoke and heat which had filled their lungs and parched their mouths, caused the little band of men to cough and sputter, bringing great beads of perspiration to their faces that finally turned into veritable streams.

To the stress of the scene was added the din of the reptiles and animals as they fought to gain the water-hole. But at last the horde of beasts passed and, exhausted, the manhunters sank to the ground.

"Better take a swig at this flask," exclaimed the sergeant, producing one of imposing size from his pocket.

"It'll do yez more good than water because yez won't want so much of it and besides it will put some of the life into yez ye lost keeping off them devils. Here, Captain, you're first."

Though he wished the others who had done more than he should drink first, the young officer realized that it would only delay them in getting the stimulant they so badly needed were he to object and accordingly he reached out his hand, took the flask, raised it to his lips and gulped down a big mouthful of the refreshing brandy, then passed it to the puncher nearest him.

"What's to be done now?" queried Handsome Dan when all had partaken of the stimulant.

"Strike out for some place where we can round up some ponies, I should think," returned Happy. "According to my reckoning, it can't be more than fifteen miles to the Piute village and we can walk that distance before daylight. Say, wouldn't it be great stuff to lift some of their ponies and raid the teepees on their own animals?"

The suggestion met with the noisy approval of the rest of the cowboys.

"And it wouldn't be stealing horses, either, cap," added the member of the Three Stars outfit, mindful of the young officer's objection to taking the horses at Santa Anna. "I doubt me if there's a cayuse in the whole herd that hasn't been rustled from some ranch, so we'd only be taking from the Indians what they took from some one else."

"The Scouts don't have to bother about thinking whether or not they are lifting horses," exclaimed Maguire, repeating the information Happy had already told the captain. "But before we think about taking any ponies, or even starting for the village, the thing to do is to look to our shooting irons. We're liable to need them—and if they're not in working order we'll be in a sad mess."

Realizing that the advice was sound, for now that they were bereft of their mounts, their only means of protection lay in their firearms, the cowboys turned their attentions to inspecting their Winchesters.

Fortunately for them, the weapons had lain on the edge of the waterhole and thereby escaped destruction, being none the worse for wear than the need of cleaning, which was quickly begun. The sixshooters of the men, having been in their belts, and therefore in the water, needed more attention and fully an hour was consumed in getting them into working order.

"By thunder! what'll we do for cartridges and shells?" suddenly demanded Quickshot.

Having been too occupied in saving their lives to think of the disastrous consequences of wetting their ammunition, as the other cowpunchers heard these words, they gazed at one another and then at the members of the Mounted Scouts in consternation.

"We sure *are* up against it!" groaned Happy. "No horses, all our shells wet and the nearest ranch forty miles away!"

"Don't worry about that," hastily exclaimed the sergeant. "The captain and I have ammunition aplenty that'll do all the work we want of it. But it's sure lucky I thought to take some extra rounds from the biyes before they went back to the Fort. Happy, you took some too, didn't you?"

"Yuhuh. But what of it?"

"Only this, that every army cartridge or shell is always greased before a man puts it into his belt or wherever he carries his extra supply. So no matter

whether it rains or he's dumped into a river, his ammunition is always right. You biyes would do well to take a leaf from the habit."

"We will!" chorused the cowpunchers. "Provided we ever get back to our ranges again," added Handsome Dan.

"Now don't go to slinging any such lingo as that," snapped the sergeant, gruffly. "We'll get back, never fear about that—and something tells me we'll have the Squawman with us, into the bargain!"

"Say, Maguire, I wish you'd give me some of the stuff you eat or drink that always makes you think things are coming out right," exclaimed Lucky. "I'd sure rather be that way than anything else I know."

"There's no secret to it, me lad," smiled the veteran Scout. "Just get all fool notions of spirits and Injun hoodoos and such like out of your head and remember that it's the man who's the quickest on the draw that will always win out."

"That's the best philosophy I've heard in a long time," interposed the captain. "But now that we've cleaned up our guns and divided the shells and ammunition, don't you think we'd better be starting, considering that we have a tramp of fifteen miles ahead of us?"

But ere the manhunters could leave the scene of their nerve-wracking escape from the prairie fire they were subjected to another ordeal!

Of a sudden, just as they were making ready to get to their feet, the air was rent with bloodcurdling war-whoops!

"The Piutes!" gasped the cowboys, in dismay.

"Firewater's messenger evidently told the truth when he said that the devil had got word to the village and the braves were on the warpath," added Quickshot. "Probably they've come to see if they can find any scalps left on our heads after being burned, as they think, by the fire they set."

"Well, it's no time to argue," snapped the sergeant. "There's only one thing to do. *We've got to hide under the carcasses of the animals around the drinking hole!*"

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST BLOOD.

Repulsive as the idea was to the manhunters, one and all realized that the veteran Scout spoke the truth as he proclaimed a hiding place beneath the steaming, half burned animals as the only spot where they could hide and be safe. And accordingly, crouching that their bodies might not be seen by the Indians, the cowboys and the young officer crawled on their bellies over the mass of sticky, smelling bodies of snakes and animals till they had for the second time reached the waterhole.

"Take another pull at my flask and then dive into it!" whispered the sergeant who, alone of them all, seemed to retain his senses throughout the terrible ordeals to which the manhunters were subjected.

Desperately the men pulled at the stimulant then, as each completed his gulp, with a look of mute appeal at his fellows, one after another of the cowpunchers burrowed a hole with his hands and disappeared beneath the indescribable mass.

"I may be a coward, but I can't do what they have done, Maguire!" gasped Archer. "Surely, there must be some other way to fool the Indians!"

"Mebbe. But I don't know what it is, sir," returned

the veteran Scout. "What's a few minutes discomfort to saving your life and being able to avenge your wife and kiddie?"

The mention of his dear ones, instead of pacifying and rendering tractable the young officer, as the Irishman had hoped, turned him into a man of frenzy.

"Leave my family out of this, please, sergeant," he hissed in a tone that told all too plainly that he would brook no further allusion to them. "I may be a tenderfoot but I'm a man! I'd rather have them know that I died fighting like the person they think I am than being found hiding under a mass of putrid flesh!"

"The saints preserve yez, captain, but you're a man after me own heart!" exclaimed the sergeant, reaching out his hand and seizing that of his superior, impulsively. "I was only thinking of your safety, sir. But since my suggestion doesn't appeal to you, there's a chance—a desperate one it is, but still it's a chance—to turn the tide of battle that's been going so strongly against us in our favor!"

"What is it, man? Don't delay beating around the bush! I'm game, no matter what it is! Speak and let me know!"

There are times when a man's very soul is opened to his fellows—and the sergeant, gruff Irishman that he was, understood that the moment was the one when the young officer's was bared to him. In a flash, there passed before his mind the taunts to which he had been subjected since he had been at the Fort, the bravery of the captain's wife in turning a deaf ear and unseeing eye to all that passed and the final determination of the man from the East to undertake, singlehanded, the capture of the notorious desperado in the effort to gain a moment's peace from innuendo and insult for his wife.

And as the understanding came to him, the veteran Scout vowed then and there to give his life to helping the young officer carry out his plan.

"If we crouch down behind one of these carcasses and when the red devils come up utter a groan, we'll bring them upon us—and then we can fight. Man dear, but it'll do your soul good to get a little worruk!"

Intuitively, the captain realized that his sergeant's reference to work meant a hand to hand encounter with one or more of the braves. But the understanding did not deter him.

"Just show me where to go—and I'm your man!" he replied.

"Then go to that carcass right in front of you," directed the Irishman. "It's in line with the waterhole and that's the place the devils will look for us. Have your automatic and rifle handy. But if you can, close in with them! When the biyes hear the rumpus, they'll break cover and help. They're a bit afeared of the reputation the Squawman and his cut-throats have built up. But once they see that their friends are fighting it out body to body with the bucks, they'll forget everything and do their best to win out!"

And how true were the words of the veteran Scout was evidenced within a brief quarter of an hour!

Picking his way among the half burned and steaming bodies, the captain finally reached the one selected by the sergeant as his cover and dropped down behind it, stretching himself out full length and using the carcass as a support for his Winchester.

Waiting only until he had seen his superior safely concealed behind the body, the veteran Scout picked

out another, less than ten feet away, and took up his position.

Thanks to the rashness of the redskins, the manhunters were not compelled to wait long in their awful hiding places.

Shouting and whooping with glee, the Indians approached, stopping only when the mass of bodies suggested to them that it would be impossible to find the cowboys and Scouts.

"We've sure wiped them out," exclaimed one of the bucks, in his native tongue. "When an animal couldn't live in this mess, surely a white man couldn't. The thing for us to do is to ride back and carry the good news to Firewater. He said he'd be through at the Fort by ten o'clock—and if there's any chase, he'll surely need us."

"Now don't be in too much of a hurry," retorted another brave. "It's all right for Firewater to laugh at the soldiers and play with them—but we're not all married to Leaping Bear's daughter and the immunity from injury or death doesn't extend to us. If you take my advice, you'll stay here a while and then ride back to the village."

"But suppose Firewater asks why we didn't ride out to meet him?" objected still another redskin.

"We'll say we had a run-in with the palefaces which delayed us," returned the Indian who had suggested the subterfuge.

"Where are the scalps he'll ask to see?" persisted the first one who had spoken.

"That's easy," answered the faint-hearted buck. "We'll just cut some hide from one of these carcasses and hang it onto our saddles. If the Squawman asks to see them, we'll wave them at him and then before we get to the village and dismount, we'll throw them away, saying that they must have fallen from our belts."

"But he'll never believe such a story," declared another.

"He won't have time to get nosy," announced the conspirator. "It is my belief that this time the Squawman has bitten off more than he can chew. It is easy enough to get in and raid the Fort—but old Bowlegs isn't the man to sit still and let any one get away with such a feat. He'll not only have every man in the Fort mounted and in pursuit of Firewater within half an hour after the stunt has been pulled off but he'll send word to all the other Forts and have them rush all the troops they can up here. If I'd had my way, this thing never would have been tried at this time. It's all right for the Squawman to be sore at the little devil of a captain who plugged his game and prevented his stabbing Happy Jack but he could have waited till the thing had cooled down and then sneaked up to the Fort and run off with either the wife or kid—or both. I tell you he was in too much of a hurry!"

As the sergeant heard these words, thanks to his knowledge of the tongue in which they were spoken, he suddenly realized that the Squawman was not without enemies among the Pjutes and the idea suddenly flashed into his mind that could he but capture the bucks, of whom the different voices, together with what he could see from behind the carcass, told him there were only three, he might be able to win valuable assistance by promising them immunity from arrest by the soldiers from the Fort.

But unfortunately for his plan, the captain did not understand the language in which the bucks spoke.

Noting only that they were advancing steadily to-

ward the waterhole while they talked, he remembered the veteran Scout's statement that if he uttered a groan when the Indians were within hearing distance it would bring them up with a rush, he bided his time until the foremost brave was opposite him and then emitted a bloodcurdling moan.

And the effect was all that he could have desired!

Instantly becoming the cunning savages who thought only of stalking their quarry, the bucks slid under the bellies of their ponies with incredible swiftness. Thus while they offered no mark at which the members of the Mounted Scouts could shoot, they were able to scan the surrounding mass of bodies.

"We may be able to take a real scalp back after all," the sergeant heard one of the Indians remark, after cautioning his companions to be on the lookout for some trick.

But the warning was too late!

Intently the young officer had been watching the approach of one of the bucks. Gradually rising, until he was in such a position that he could bring the strength of his legs into play, the captain calculated the distance that separated him from the brave he had singled out as his particular victim.

And even as the words of caution left the lips of the other Indian he made up his mind that the time had come to strike!

With the agility of a tiger, the young officer launched himself at the leg of the Indian nearest him—and clutched it in a vice-like grip.

Taken entirely by surprise, as he felt the captain's fingers close around his ankle, the redskin emitted a shriek of terror.

Frantically he strove to kick himself loose from the grasp, at the same time firing his rifle wildly from the other side of his pony.

But he was no match for the maddened officer and struggling and yelling he was torn from his mount.

Realizing that the time had come for concerted action, the instant he had heard the buck yell, Maguire had leaped to his feet, shouting to the cowboys to come from their hiding places and join in the fight, at the same time firing at the belly of the pony nearest him.

Wondering at the cause of the tumult, yet eager to be in the fray, the cowpunchers sprang up and rushed forward.

"There are only three of the devils and they're skulking under their pintos!" bellowed the sergeant as he saw his companions advance. "Don't shoot the ponies! We'll need them! Close in on the bucks! Some of you go to the Captain, he's over on the left!"

Rejoicing in the chance for action, the cowboys pumped their six shooters at the outlines of the ponies and the piercing yells that resounded told clearly that some of their shots, at least, had struck home.

For a few minutes, the barking of firearms, as the manhunters and Indians worked their guns, was incessant and then there came a cessation of the firing from their enemies.

"Watch out!" cautioned the Irishman, getting to his feet. "I think we've got the devils but they may be playing fox. Shoot at anything suspicious but keep your eyes open for the captain!"

"I'm over here!" shouted the young officer, to whom the words of his sergeant came. "I've got a buck under me but he's raising all kinds of trouble and if

you've finished with the rest of them, I wish you'd give me a hand!"

"Put a bullet into him!" yelled Happy.

But the young officer, believing that the Indian would be of more value to them alive than dead refrained from acting on the suggestion and continued to hold him down until the other members of his party arrived and quickly rendered him helpless.

"Well, this ain't so bad!" chuckled Quickshot as the sergeant took off his belt and tied the redskin's hands behind him. "We've killed two of the devils and captured a third. Were there any more, Maguire?"

"Nary a one," returned the sergeant. "And it's a good thing there wasn't. While we could have used more ponies, I misdoubt if we could have worked the jump on a whole pack of them so well. Get the horses lively, biyes, before they have a chance to break away." And when the cowpunchers had captured the animals, he told his companions of the conversation between the braves which he had overheard.

"Then we've no time to lose! We must strike out for the trail from the village to the Fort so we can intercept Firewater when he returns!" exclaimed the captain.

"This fellow will be in the way, then," exclaimed Happy and before any of his companions could prevent the cowboy's six shooter barked—and the buck fell forward.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIREWATER'S DESPERATE RAID.

Despite the incredulity of the manhunters, the messenger they had captured when he brought the note to the captain had spoken the truth when he said the Squawman had rounded up a large body of Piutes before starting to carry out his threat against the wife and child of the young officer at Fort Henry.

Indeed, as he raced from the little settlement of Santa Anna after his encounter with the officer of the Mounted Scouts, it had been his intention to ride directly to the army post and wreak his vengeance without delay.

But not far had he gone on his way ere he caught the sound of distant hoofbeats and, by cautious riding that would have made them green with envy, he had discovered the detail of troopers sent out by the colonel under the leadership of Sergeant Maguire.

"Surprised at their coming, the Squawman had trailed them until they met the captain and the cowboy. So close was he to them, in fact, that he heard the reading of the letter written by the young officer to his superior announcing his intention of taking up the pursuit of the notorious desperado.

For a moment, he had even thought of shooting into the group of manhunters then and there. But discretion had prevailed as he realized that even if he did succeed in bringing down one or two, they would undoubtedly

encompass his capture because of their numerical superiority—and well did Firewater know that his old foe, Sergeant Maguire, would never select a detail of troopers who were not his equal in bravery—as near as could be.

Accordingly he had curbed his desire to make his presence felt and had contented himself with following the trio composed of the two Scouts and the members of the Three Star outfit until, from their course, he was satisfied they were bound for the Triangle ranch.

"If they really are headed for there, I can find out all I want to know about their movements," he had chuckled grimly to himself and then had wheeled his pony and ridden back to the little settlement to round up his braves who were carousing in the different saloons.

This last task had proved no simple matter and it had been daylight before he had been able to persuade them by threats and force to leave the gaming tables and ride with him.

But once on the way, he had done his best to make up the time he had lost!

By use of spur and quirt, the trio of marauders had reached the ranch close on to noon.

Finding, to his surprise and delight, that none of the cowboys appeared to greet him, the notorious desperado had shouted loudly for the cook.

Recognizing the voice only too well, the faint-hearted José had gone to the door of his shack.

"Where are the punchers?" Firewater had demanded.

"Some on range, some far away," he replied.

"How many went away and who did they go with, anybody?"

"Me no know," gasped the cook, his fear of the wrath of the foreman overcoming for the moment his loyalty to the outlaw.

"None of that nonsense! Tell me—and tell me quickly—or I'll put a bullet into your miserable black heart!" retorted the Squawman.

Telling himself that he had showed all the loyalty to the cowboys and Scouts necessary, José had poured forth all that he had heard.

"H'm, that captain's got more nerve than I gave him credit for," Firewater exclaimed as the cook concluded his story. "I'm all-fired sorry that he mixed up in the fight in the Cowboy's Delight. A dozen Happy Jacks wouldn't make one man the cut of him. I reckon I'll give him one more chance to get out of it. So long as Maguire's with him, the old Irishman may be able to persuade him to give up the trail—knowing that when I make a threat I carry it out!

"Hey, you sneaking José, get me pencil and paper!"

Though the providing of the necessaries for his communication had taken only a few moments, the composition and writing of the message had consumed almost an hour.

After gazing at it with satisfaction, the Squawman had ordered Flying Horse to bear it to the captain, at the same time instructing the other buck to ride like mad to the Piute village and round up all the braves.

"Tell Leaping Bear that I must have all the men I can spare and that I want them to meet me at the drinkhole a mile south of the Triangle home ranch just an hour after dusk. Let him select three of them to ride out and watch Flying Horse deliver the message to the Scouts—and if the palefaces do not turn and give up the chase, let them fire the grass on the plains, wait until it has swept the spot wherever

the band is and then ride over it to make sure that my enemies have not escaped."

The result of the offer to Captain Archer to forsake his manhunt and the burning of the prairie, the reader already knows.

In due course, the messenger had arrived at the Indian village and had delivered his instructions to the medicine man who had immediately sent thirty braves to the rendezvous at the waterhole appointed by his terrible son-in-law.

Idling away the afternoon, when twilight had begun to fall, the Squawman had terrorized the Mexican cook into a promise to keep silent about his visit and had then ridden forth to the drink to await the coming of his bucks and the return of his messenger.

As the minutes wore by without the appearance of the latter, Firewater began to believe that his offer had been spurned—and a sudden light glowing in the heavens confirmed his suspicions.

Uttering terrible oaths, he sat gazing at the lurid flare for several minutes.

"So you refused my offer, did you, you proud young dog?" he sneered. "So be it! It will be the sorriest act of your life! I said I would strike your wife and daughter—and Firewater never makes any threats that he does not carry out! By this time tomorrow night, your child will be in the hands of the Piutes—and when she is old enough she will be married to a brave I shall select! I will teach you—and all other palefaces—that I am a man of my word, one whose ill will is to be feared more than anything else in the world!"

As the Squawman uttered these terrible words, he rose in his saddle and shook his fists furiously in the direction of the glow in the sky and then in that of the Fort.

Never had the braves seen him so awful in appearance and as they beheld his rage-distorted countenance, they shrank back in terror.

The first paroxysm of his fury over, the terrible desperado addressed them.

"You dogs, listen to what I have to say!" he fairly shrieked. "To-night we must ride to Fort Henry. There is a white child there I want. When we get within five miles of the post, you-all are to go to the North and swoop down on the sentinels as soon as you are challenged. When the alarm is given and the soldiers rush out, each one of you is to head in a different course and ride for your lives. In that way, the troopers will be forced to divide up into groups and none of them will know whether they are following the right bunch or not. Consequently they won't ride very hard and after they find they cannot overtake you, they will give up the pursuit at the end of about ten miles.

"As soon as you are sure you are clear of being followed, head for our village. Don't linger for I shall need you. Old Bowlegs will send his entire force against me—but I shall have the upper hand because I shall send him word that if he fires a shot at any of my people I shall put a tomahawk into the head of the captain's little daughter!

"Remember, if any of you bungle, I, Firewater and my father, Leaping Bear, the greatest medicine man of the Piutes, will curse you, bringing trouble upon your own heads and those of your children and your children's children!"

In awed silence, the bucks had listened to the fiend-

ish scheme of the Squawman but none of them dared to raise a voice in protest though one and all knew that a raid upon the Fort was the most desperate undertaking the outlaw had ever attempted—and many an one would have welcomed the chance to escape from the task and sneak back to the village. But in such fear did Firewater and his cunning old father-in-law hold them that they gave no second thought to such a plan.

Indeed, had they really been minded to disobey, the threat of the awful curse to be invoked against themselves and their families would have deterred them. But it was a silent and surly band of braves that took the course toward the Fort when the Squawman gave the command to start.

Nothing could have better shown the dangerous resourcefulness of the notorious desperado than his instructions to his braves to create a diversion at the opposite side of the post from which he intended to approach himself and then, as soon as they were sure of being pursued, to separate and lead their followers in as many different directions as possible—and added to this resourcefulness was the villainous cunning of the wretch in realizing that by threatening to kill the innocent little daughter of the captain he could probably prevent any bombardment of Leaping Bear's village!

But right always prevails and though the notorious desperado laid his plans with marvelous skill and craftiness, disclosing a remarkable understanding of human nature, he had overrated his prowess!

During the stirring and soul-trying events through which the young officer had passed and while the wicked plan for the kidnapping of his little daughter was being laid, the objects around whom the storm centered were in blissful ignorance of their danger.

When Hennessy and his men had returned to the Fort, bearing the message from Captain Archer, the colonel had first been angry and then had laughed.

"Good for Rudolph!" he had chuckled. "I sure hope he'll be able to put the joke on the rest of my officers by rounding up the murdering devil. So long as he has Maguire with him, if there's a chance for any one to get out alive, he'll get out!"

But when his eyes fell upon that part of the message in which the young officer spoke of the Squawman's threats against the persons of his wife and child, the veteran commander's face clouded.

"I wish Firewater hadn't brought them into it!" he muttered under his breath while aloud he said: "Hey, Amesbury, as officer of the day, when dusk comes, I want you to put a guard of three men around Captain Archer's quarters with orders to shoot to kill if they come upon anyone who cannot give the password."

"Yes, sir, nothing serious I hope, sir?" returned the lieutenant, his curiosity deeply aroused by the words of his superior.

"No, I don't think so—but mind you keep my orders about the extra guard to yourself. There's no use of alarming the ladies unduly!"

The words of the colonel, however, failed to assure the young officer and as soon as he could, he sought out Hennessy and asked him if he knew the contents of the message he had brought from the captain to the commander of the Fort.

"Only that he wouldn't come back, sir, and said he was taking Maguire with him," responded the trooper.

"Sure there wasn't anything about Mrs. Archer?" persisted the lieutenant.

"Not that I know of, only that he had heard some threat against her and wanted the colonel to keep an eye on her, just like all young husbands do, sir."

"Only—" began the officer and then checked himself suddenly, realizing that the trooper had ascribed the fear of the captain to an unnecessary anxiety. But before he left the man, he commanded him not to mention a word to any of his fellows about the request to look out for the captain's wife and daughter.

"Sure I won't sir," returned the man, with a wink. "The captain seems a fine young feller and I won't do anything that would queer him with the men and make them think him a 'softy!'"

"Blessed be ignorance," murmured the lieutenant to himself as he walked away. "If anybody else than that bone-headed Hennessy had heard that request it would reach the ears of Mrs. Archer and the rest of the ladies before breakfast. Poor old Rudolph, he must be worried to death!"

Being one of the young captain's friends, Lieutenant Amesbury kept his own council but he noticed—and not without a feeling of deep concern—that during the entire day the colonel did not go far from Archer's quarters, as though keeping a friendly eye on them. Even the orders for the transfer of Lieutenant Stotes, which had come in due course, and the attendant gossip had not taken him from his watch and his care was further disclosed by his inviting Mrs. Archer and several of the other ladies to dine with him, after little Catharine had been safely put to bed.

But though the colonel had devised this plan out of the goodness of his heart, it proved the very worst thing he could have done!

With that strange perversity of fate which seems to prosper evil doers, the Squawman and his band of Piute braves approached the Fort on their fiendish mission without any incident that interfered with their wicked plan or gave any suggestion of their purpose.

Arrived at the place where he deemed it wise for the bucks to leave him to ride to the north whence they were to make their attack, Firewater told them not to hurry for he realized that it would not take them so long to cover the distance as it would himself to work his way past the sentinels and to the quarters of the young officer against whose innocent family he had vowed such diabolical vengeance.

Realizing, however, that his braves sensed the danger of the raid, the Squawman gave further evidence of his cunning by producing half a dozen flasks which he handed to the bucks just before he separated from them.

Greedily they squabbled among themselves for the liquor they craved but all obtained some and the result was what Firewater had counted upon—their bloodlust awoke and instead of fearing the pursuit of the troopers, they were openly expressing their hopes that the entire quota at the Fort would give them chase.

Approaching within what he considered safe distance from the army post, the Squawman dismounted, hobbled his pony and then proceeded to worm his way through the grass toward the lights that glimmered brightly from the officers' quarters, with all the skill of which he was master.

The first part of the way was easy for him but as he crawled nearer and nearer his goal, he used more and more caution.

No sentry had been patrolling the side of the post from which he had come and, taking the soldier's absence as an omen of success, Firewater had advanced half way to the quarters when he halted in order to study the problem of how he should find the particular part which the young captain's family occupied.

No solution of the difficulty suggesting itself to him, he was on the point of making up his mind that he must wait till his braves created the diversion at the Northern side of the Fort and then, in the absence of the troopers, search through all the quarters until he came upon the child—for he had been informed by an emissary that Archer was the only officer who had a family consisting of more than a wife at the post—when he noticed one of the guards the colonel had ordered walking around an isolated cottage.

"That must be the place," he exclaimed, chuckling silently to himself at the unexpected solution of his difficulty. "Evidently Archer has sent word to old Bowlegs of my threat. So much the better. I'll show them that Firewater cares not for any number of guards—once he has decided upon a thing!"

But the approach of the house required all the skill of which the desperado was master.

For a time, he simply watched the guards as they followed one another around the house. Then, when he had fixed in his mind the interval at which they appeared at the rear, he timed his movements so that he only advanced when they were on the other sides, lying as still as the proverbial mouse when they passed the direction from which he was worming his way.

At last, however, he reached what he considered striking distance and he was debating in his mind whether it would be best for him to knock the guard on the head with his pistol butt upon his next round and repeat the action upon the other two, after which he would be able to enter the house, or await the diversion caused by the attack of his braves when the question was settled for him.

Of a sudden, the air was rent with maniacal shrieks! In alarm, the guards about the captain's quarters, instead of staying the closer, dashed away in the direction of the sounds.

"Soldiers sure are boneheads!" chuckled the Squawman as he leaped to his feet and rushed for the house.

From all sides came the sound of bugles crying the alarm and the shouting of orders as troopers and officers ran to their posts.

And under cover of the confusion, the villainous outlaw made his way into Archer's quarters, noted with satisfaction that wooden shutters covered the windows, hastily struck a match, picked his way to the crib in which the innocent little girl was sleeping, seized her in his arms and rushed at his highest speed toward the spot where he had left his pony!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COLONEL TAKES PERSONAL COMMAND OF THE PURSUIT.

One fatal blunder the colonel made in the disposition of his troops—a blunder which, to one not present

when the terrible shrieks broke with such suddenness upon the calm of the Fort, seems inexplicable—he sent no soldiers to the house of the absent captain to see if the child were safe and to guard it against anything that might occur.

No need to tell either him or Lieutenant Amesbury was there that the furore had been caused by the Indians. Intuitively each man felt that the bloodcurdling yells announced the arrival of the terrible desperado to make good his threat against the wife and child of Archer—but neither of them gave the fiend credit for the cunning he had shown.

"Sit still! None of you leave my quarters!" had cried the colonel as the ladies had jumped to their feet at the first alarm. "Amesbury, you're in command for the moment. Have every man jack in the post called out for duty. I'll take personal charge as soon as you send ten men to protect the ladies here!"

"But my baby, my Catharine! I must go to her!" exclaimed Mrs. Archer, seeking to force her way past one of the other officers who had stationed himself at the door.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" retorted the colonel. "Your child is protected by a guard I have had thrown about your house," he added, in the belief that the men he had ordered Amesbury to put on duty had remained at their posts instead of running to learn the cause of the tumult.

But the mother did not share the confidence of the officers.

"How can you hold me back?" she demanded, angrily. "My place at such a time is with my child!"

"Your place, madam, is where you are safest!" retorted the colonel, with all the courtesy he could summon under the stress of the attack. "If you realized the nature of Indians as I do you would understand that."

The woman, however, was not to be placated.

Deeming the truth the only way to quell her determination to join her daughter, the colonel finally exclaimed:

"If you won't take my advice, Mrs. Archer and remain here quietly, I must tell you that Indians always seek the women first in any place they raid."

Abashed by this blunt statement, Mrs. Archer forwent her endeavors to leave the commander's rooms and calling upon the God in Heaven to protect her baby, she sank into a chair and rocked to and fro.

In the meantime, Lieutenant Amesbury had taken command of the troopers and riding like mad at their head, led them toward the side of the Fort whence the ear-splitting yells had come.

But when they reached the boundary of the post not a brave was to be seen!

Waiting only until they heard the pounding of the horses' hoofs as the soldiers dashed over the hard ground, the Piutes had whirled their ponies and, separating as the Squawman had instructed them, sought the protection of the darkness which enveloped the plains.

"Search all sides of the Fort! Shoot at anything that moves!" shouted Amesbury, surprised for the second time at not finding any of the Indians who had raised the turmoil.

Eagerly the troopers obeyed, their officers giving the necessary orders to divide them into squads and leading them to different parts that no time might be lost by two platoons searching the same territory.

Worried by the absence of the foe, Amesbury waited

only until he saw the horsemen dashing in all directions in accordance with his orders and then raced back to consult with the colonel at the unexpected turn of affairs.

But before he had covered more than half the distance, he met the commander and quickly reported to him.

As he heard the statement of his subordinate, the truth flashed through the colonel's mind.

"We've been tricked, Amesbury!" he gasped in a voice that was so low only the lieutenant heard it. "Quick, ride with me to Archer's! The attack to the North was but a diversion to cover the real raid upon Rudolph's quarters!"

Fearing the worst, both men sent their horses at top speed toward the quarters of the absent captain.

"Where are the men I told you to station here?" demanded the commander in amazement, as he and his companion rode up to the house without being challenged.

"I can't tell you, sir," replied the lieutenant, as much at a loss to explain their absence as the colonel.

"You posted them, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the worst has happened, Amesbury," groaned the veteran officer. "They've been murdered and the child's been taken! Poor woman! Poor woman—and I refused to let her leave my rooms!"

Horror-struck at the thought, the lieutenant sought to reassure his superior.

"Perhaps they're inside with Catharine, sir," he suggested. "I can't see any bodies. Besides, if any rush had been made upon the house, they would have fired and I am positive there hasn't been a shot during all this excitement."

"The devil's wouldn't resort to the use of guns. They'd strike the guards down with the butts of their six shooters," returned the colonel. "I've been fooled, old as I am, that's all there is to it! What will Archer say to me?"

But it was only for an instant that the veteran of many a fight with the treacherous redmen gave way to his feelings.

"Have all the men called in from the search. I'll go and get Mrs. Archer. It may be only a false alarm after all and we'll find the child asleep in her crib."

But the reader knows that the hope of the colonel was vain.

With the tender ministrations of a father, Halford led the wife of the absent captain to her house. Yet when the woman found that her daughter had been kidnapped he was powerless to assuage her suffering.

So frantic was the poor mother's grief, however, that the colonel, in fear for her reason, sent for the post surgeon and when the officer came in ordered him to administer an opiate strong enough to send her immediately into unconsciousness, adding that he must keep her in that condition until they either brought back her daughter or returned with Archer.

Deeming the course the most merciful, the surgeon quickly obeyed.

Waiting only until he saw the woman quiet, the colonel exclaimed:

"I'm going to leave you here, Barnes, in charge of the Fort. I'll give you five men and a signal sergeant. While I don't believe the Squawman will try to return and carry out his threat against Mrs. Archer, I want you to stay right in this house, night and day,

till I get back. The other women will be safe enough—but if they get finnick, have them come and live here, too. Remember, I shall hold you personally responsible for any harm that may befall this poor mother—I've failed in my duty to her, see if you can't do better."

And stifling a sob, the colonel hastened from the room.

As soon as he was out of sight of the young mother upon whom, by what he pleased to consider his remissness, he had brought such overwhelming grief, the commander of the Fort became the iron man all wrongdoers had come to fear so deeply, however.

"Send the signal officer to me!" he bellowed at the first man he saw as he left the bereaved house. "I'll be at my quarters. Then get word to Amesbury to divide the men into four squadrons and await my coming."

Quickly the signal officer entered the room of the colonel and saluted.

"Send word to every Fort within a radius of one hundred miles that Archer's three year old daughter has been kidnapped by Firewater and ask the commanders to put all the men they can in the field to scour every nook and corner of the country hereabouts. Tell them that the poor mother is in such a condition that we are obliged to keep her drugged.

"When you get that message off, detail your cleverest sergeant to remain here at the Fort with Barnes, I've put him in command. Order him to stay on duty night and day till we get back. If any report comes from the other Forts, have him send it to you instantly. Join me as soon as you can. You'll go with me. Detail a man to each of the three other divisions and see that they have every kind of signal with them."

Following close upon the heels of the signal officer, Colonel Halford hastened to his horse, mounted it and galloped to where Amesbury held the troopers in waiting.

What the cause of their officers' stress was, the men did not know and all sorts of rumors were flying from mouth to mouth. But as the colonel halted in front of his troops, they became silent.

"Men, Captain Archer's little daughter has been kidnapped by Firewater from under our very noses," he shouted at the top of his lungs, that all might hear. "The disgrace is bad enough, but it will be time to look into why the special detail of guards failed to protect the captain's house and how a band of Indians could approach close to the North side of the Fort without being seen by the sentries when we get back.

"The thing to do now is to find little Catharine Archer!"

"I've sent the alarm to all the other Forts—but I want my men to be the ones who restore her to the mother that is almost dead with grief!"

Lapsing into silence, the colonel waited a moment for the import of his words to sink into the minds of the troopers, then continued:

"We'll ride first for the Piute village where the Squawman lives. The divisions will ride five miles apart. *Forward, march!*"

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTURE OF THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

Ignorant of what was transpiring at the Fort, the little group of manhunters out on the blackened plains hastily mounted the ponies which the braves had been riding, the captain and the sergeant taking the most powerful animal while Happy and Quickshot took another and Lucky and Handsome Dan straddled the remaining pinto.

Though the young officer had expressed his intention of trying to head off the Squawman in the hope that he might recover his child, provided the fiend had been able to carry out his daredevil scheme of snatching the baby from under the very noses of the thousand and odd soldiers, before she was carried into the retreats of which the Piutes alone knew, the Irishman had no idea of allowing him to. And no sooner were they under way than he began to object to the plan.

"In the first place, captain, there's no certainty that the devil has got the little girl. Considering the message you sent the old man and the attentiveness of our sentries, you know the Fort won the prize last year for preventing surprises by night, it don't seem possible that he could have her. Consequently, the thing for us to do is to go to the village as fast as we can and capture it. The bixes here have gals in the place—and if you don't show some sign of wanting to help them recover their sweethearts they'll be leaving us entirely. You must know, though I don't like to say it, that it wasn't love of you that made them take this trip with you."

"I suppose you're right, sergeant," returned the young officer, after thinking over the hard words for several minutes. "It's selfish, I know, to think only of my baby—but man, you don't understand what she is to me. And it would drive my wife insane if anything should happen to the child."

"Sure I know it—and it's more praise to yez that yez feel as you do, captain," consoled the Irishman. "But if the fiend has got the little darling, *the surest way to get her back again is to capture the village!*"

"I don't see why," objected the young officer.

"Nor can I tell yez," returned the sergeant. "But it's just a hunch I have. However, leaving that aside, it don't stand to reason that the six of us, and being doubled up the way we are makes us practically no more than three, can stop Firewater from reaching the mountains. There's a good twenty miles he can take to reach 'em—and we can't cover all that stretch of ground. But if we take the village, we'll have the key to the situation as they say, because the devil will come to it as soon as he can to consult with the witch of a father-in-law he has as to what's best for him to do."

"I guess you're right, Maguire. I hadn't thought of it in that light. But if I could only know that my wife and child were safe!"

"Well, seeing as we can't know, just think they are, sir. It'll do you a heap more good than to think they ain't."

This cheerfulness of his companion did more to keep the young officer from wearing himself out with worry over what was transpiring at the Fort than anything else could have and grateful was he, indeed, that he

had chosen him to ride with him rather than one of the cowboys.

Having communicated the change in his plans to the others of his little band, the announcement of which met with the hearty concurrence of the cowpunchers, thereby confirming the sergeant's idea that they had their minds on their sweethearts who had been stolen from them, the lead was entrusted to Happy.

Notwithstanding the fact that they were carrying double burdens, the tough, wiry little ponies made good time and it was still dark when the cowboy guide drew rein and announced that they had reached the foot of the trail which led to the village.

"How far up is it?" asked Maguire.

"Not more than three or four hundred feet. It stands in a sort of canyon and the path on this end is not more than twenty feet wide," replied Happy.

"Any idea of the number of teepees inside?" inquired Quickshot.

"A dozen or so, I should think."

"Then we'd best leave our ponies here and walk up," exclaimed the sergeant.

But with the demand for action and the planning of the method of their procedure, the captain again asserted himself.

"On the contrary, it seems to me we should ride them right up into the canyon. When we get there, if we aren't discovered, we can place them across the entrance in such a way that they will prevent any of the Indians from escaping on this end."

"When it comes to planning, you sure have the head, cap," declared Lucky, in open admiration of the quickness of the young officer in devising a scheme of campaign.

"But won't some of the devils hear us going up?" objected Handsome Dan. "Knowing what Firewater is trying to pull off, I should think old Leaping Bear would be on the anxious seat."

"Never mind if they do hear us," returned Quickshot. "The bucks have got to come back, haven't they? The ponies know the trail so there won't be any stumbling to give it away we ain't their precious braves."

This reasoning set at doubt any misgivings the member of the Triangle outfit had and, after drawing their shooting irons, they gave the wiry little pintos their heads—and the attack upon the Indian village was begun!

After subjecting the intrepid band of manhunters to so many soul-trying hardships, Fate at last smiled upon them—and they reached the narrow entrance to the canyon-village without being challenged or arousing any of the inhabitants.

"Funny they ain't even got any dogs," whispered Lucky, as they drew rein and slid from the backs of the ponies to the ground.

"That's because the Squawman is afraid they'd give the place away by barking," returned Quickshot. "I heard the crittur telling about it over to Anna one day. He was aboasting that there couldn't a white man find the place."

"Well, I've fooled him," chuckled Happy. "Cap, you tell us how you want these cayuses hitched and we'll hitch 'em."

"Just tie them nose to tail," replied the young officer and as the cowboys hastened to obey, he said to the sergeant: "We ought to have some torches, don't you think so, Maguire?"

"We'll make a torch out of one of their wigwams, sir," returned the veteran Scout. "If we go to scratching round trying to find some wood or anything that will burn, we're liable to wake some of the devils up and then it may not be so easy for us."

All the while the manhunters had been speaking in tones scarcely audible to one another and when word was passed that the ponies had been hobbled as the captain had directed, he ordered the cowboys to fall in behind the sergeant and himself.

Six shooters clasped in both hands, the little band crept forward until the veteran Scout espied the outline of a teepee.

"When she blazes up, give 'em a yell that'll make 'em think the dogs of hell are after them!" he breathed.

Excitedly the young officer and the cowpunchers waited while the sergeant crept toward the wigwam.

But before he reached it, he stumbled over an edge of rock that protruded, step-like, and the clatter of his weapons as they struck the stone rang out with startling loudness.

"Who's there?" demanded a voice in Piute dialect.

And then, as no answer was forthcoming—for the very good reason that the Irishman could not speak the language though he understood it—the air was suddenly rent with wild cries of alarm.

"Fire your guns, biyes and whoop it up!" yelled Maguire as he held the match to the dried pelt that formed the cover of the teepee.

With a will the cowpunchers obeyed.

The sharp reports of the shots as they reverberated back and forth between the cliff-like walls of the canyon, mingled with the earsplitting yells of the cowpunchers, raised a pandemonium that brought every squaw in the rocky retreat to their feet.

And as their heads emerged from their teepees, the flames rose in the air from the one the sergeant had set on fire.

"Don't give them time to get their guns. Rush 'em!" ordered the captain.

"Hands up!" yelled the cowpunchers, bounding forward.

"Keep on firing! We've got to make 'em think there's a lot of us!" shouted Maguire. "Captain, you and Happy attend to the shooting and the rest of us will round up the devils!"

But just as the cowboys started forward, a fair-haired girl rushed toward them!

"It's Molly Jenks, as I live! Here, Happy!" bel-lowed Quickshot. Then before the girl's sweetheart could get to her, he cried: "Where are Sally and Lucy and Fannie?"

"Oh, Quickshot, how did you ever get here?" gasped the girl, sobbing and laughing at the same time.

"Never mind now. We're here. Tell me where the other girls are!"

"Up in the last wigwam at the other end. They're—"

But the sentence was never finished, partly because the member of the Three Star outfit seized the girl and clutched her wildly to him and partly because the other cowboys, having learned that their sweethearts were also in the canyon-village and where, rushed to greet them.

"Hey you, get busy and help us with the Injuns! There'll be plenty of time for spooning bye and bye!" shouted the sergeant. "First thing you know, some

of the old devils will get the drop on you and then where'll you be?"

But the fears of the veteran Scout were quickly allayed by the girl who had been kidnapped from the A-Bar-V ranch.

"There isn't a man in the whole place!" she exclaimed. "All the young ones went with that devil of a Squawman and the old ones have gone over into Mex with Leaping Bear."

"What have they gone there for?" demanded the captain.

"The tribe's going to move as soon as Firewater gets back."

"The saints be praised—then we come just in the right time!" ejaculated the sergeant.

But the words alarmed the young officer to whom the sight of the reunited lovers had recalled the fear for the safety of his wife and child.

"Are you sure he's coming back?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes. He said he'd be here a little after sunrise."

"Then we must get busy with the squaws," declared the veteran Scout. "Hey, you punchers, lend a hand while we rope these red women. Firewater'll be here soon after sun up and we must have them out of the way before then!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SQUAWMAN'S REVENGE IS FOILED.

With the eager assistance of the girls to whose rescue they had so unexpectedly come it was no task at all for cowboys to rope the squaws together and when the feat had been accomplished, they turned to the young officer for further orders.

"Better gag them, too, boys," he suggested, after inspecting the surly-visaged band of women. "If you don't some of them may give the alarm to the Squawman—and that would be too bad, just as everything seems set for our rounding him up."

"That's a sure enough sensible idea," returned Quickshot.

And without delay, the squaws were securely fastened with gags made from pieces of blankets which the white girls brought.

"Now that we've got the beauties, what shall we do with them?" grinned Happy, looking over the thirty Indian women. "It sure won't do to keep them up here. The minute Firewater lays his eyes on them, he'd know that something had gone wrong with his

plans and he'd vamoose before we could get our hands on him."

"We've got to take them somewhere, of course," returned the sergeant. "The question is, where?"

"There's a cave down at the foot of the trail you just came up in which I should think you could hide them," exclaimed Molly.

"We certainly can, girl! Show us the way to it!" rejoined her cowboy sweetheart, taking the words from the mouth of the captain.

"All right, come on."

But before the girl could obey, the young officer spoke.

"So long as the Squawman is coming back here, Maguire and I will remain in the canyon while the rest of you go down to the plains. After you have hidden the squaws in the cave, I want you boys to keep an eye out for Firewater."

"That's what we will!" chorused the cowpunchers, vehemently, while Quickshot added: "You've been the means of our getting back our girls and you can gamble we won't forget that you're after Firewater!"

"You don't understand, me, I'm afraid!" interrupted the captain. "Of course I want to capture the Squawman—but the chances are, according to what Maguire heard the bucks by the waterhole talking about, that he will have my little daughter with him when he comes. It is she that I want more than anything else. If harm comes to her, it will drive my poor wife insane. As you love your sweethearts, men, remember that—and think how you'd feel if you were in my position!"

"But what I wanted to tell you was this: If you see the Squawman and he has my baby in his arms, don't shoot at him! *You might hit her!* The thing for you to do—if he has her—is to wait until he has started up the trail, then fire a single shot and two of you ride for all you are worth to guard the other trail to the canyon *so the fiend can't escape!*"

"All right, captain. We'll remember," returned Quickshot. "Happy and I will cover the other trail!"

This plan agreed upon, the cowboys, accompanied by the sweethearts they had rescued from their awful fate, descended the path to the cave, leading the Indian Squaws. And in due course, they reached the plains, concealed their captives and took up their watch for the Squawman.

But though they kept close vigil, the notorious desperado outwitted them!

Chuckling to himself gleefully as he heard the bugle calls and the shrill voices shouting their commands, the fiend clutched the beautiful child tightly to his breast and sped with the fleetness of a hare to the spot where he had left his pony.

Gaining it in due course, he paused only long enough to make sure that the pursuit was in the direction his braves had taken and then headed his pony for the canyon village.

Though the animal was big and powerful, so unmer-

cifully did the Squawman force it that when he neared the Triangle home ranch, the horse was blowing hard.

"I can never make it unless I get another mount," the fiend said to himself. "I'll just go and take one of the Triangle ponies. So long as the tribe is going over into old Mex, it won't do any harm—and I've always kept away from the ranch."

No sooner was this determination formed than the terrible desperado put it into execution.

Not a soul was astir as he approached the ranch house and, being thoroughly familiar with the lay of the land, he was able to reach the horse corral without causing any alarm.

Once there, he dismounted, laid the child down on the ground, opened the corral gate, turned in his tired pony and quickly caught another.

But just as he was congratulating himself upon his success in exchanging mounts without discovery, the babe in his arms, disturbed in some manner, emitted a piercing shriek.

With an oath, the fiendish outlaw tore the scarf from his neck and jammed it into the helpless infant's mouth.

"That'll stop you from raising any more trouble!" he hissed, at the same time shaking her viciously. "If you'd done that back at the Fort, you'd sure have caused trouble for me!"

But the brutal desperado was not to get away so easily as he had thought!

The foreman of the Triangle outfit, having learned of the visit of Firewater from the cook, when he returned in the evening, was having a sleep troubled by dreams.

And it chanced to be just when he had awakened from one of them that little Catharine had cried out.

Springing from his bunk, the foreman snatched up his rifle and rushed to the door in time to see the form of the Squawman dash out onto the plains from the horse corral.

Throwing his Winchester to his shoulder with a lightning movement, the man fired.

As though guided by Providence, the bullet sped straight and true into the right arm of the terrible desperado.

Cursing frightfully as he felt the burning sting of the lead, the Squawman hissed:

"Thank my lucky stars it wasn't the arm in which I am carrying the kid. If it had been I'd have dropped her—and I might never have been able to get her again!"

Three more shots the foreman of the Triangle ranch sent after the fleeing horseman but none of them took effect.

His fury rising as the pain in his right arm increased, the terrible desperado sought to take his mind from it by telling himself that he would rear the child carefully, marry her to one of his braves and then acquaint Captain Archer and his wife with the disgrace to which he had subjected their daughter.

The thought of the woman suggested another idea to him, however.

"By the blood in my veins, if they make the hunt for me too hot, I'll go back and steal the captain's wife while they're looking for me!" he hissed.

But the punishment that always overtakes evil doers was gathering about the Squawman who had for so long terrorized innocent women and helpless children!

Little thinking that the canyon-village had been raided and its inhabitants captured under the direction of the very man he had wronged so grievously, the terrible desperado approached the trail opposite to the one by which the young officer and the cowboys had entered.

Mindful of their pledge to the captain, the cowboys were on the lookout.

"Here he comes!" suddenly exclaimed Quickshot, pointing in the direction whence the Squawman was riding.

Throwing their Winchesters to their shoulders, the other cowboys sprang to their feet, following with their gaze the finger of their companion.

Outlined against the mellowing grey of the morning they beheld the figure of the fiendish outlaw.

"My soul, but he's got something in his arms!" gasped Molly. "It must be the captain's baby! Oh boys, remember what the man did for you in rescuing us—and save his kiddie for him!"

During the long wait, the punchers had related to their sweethearts all the actions of the young officer and his bravery under the taunts of his fellows, had won their quick sympathy.

"You bet we will!" exclaimed Happy. "When I give the word, boys, let the devil have it!"

"Steady! Steady!" cautioned Quickshot. "The brute isn't within an eighth of a mile of the range. If you shoot now, you'll warn him and the captain will lose his daughter!"

This advice calmed the excited cowboys and they waited impatiently until the Squawman should come closer to them.

But when at last it was evident that he was in range, they were prevented from shooting!

The daughter of the captain was on the side toward them—and they dared not risk a shot in fear that they might hit her instead of the fiend that carried her!

Cursing their impotency, the cowpunchers watched the Squawman come nearer and nearer to the trail and finally saw him disappear as he mounted the path to the canyon.

"What did the captain say about firing a shot?" suddenly exclaimed Sally.

"By thunder! I'd forgotten it entirely! Good for you, girl!" rejoined Handsome Dan. "He said we should fire one shot as soon as the devil entered the trail. I'll fire it," he added, hastily, "Sally thought of it, so I'm entitled to."

"Then be quick about it!" retorted Happy. "You want to give the Cap and Maguire a chance to prepare themselves. Quickshot, you and I'll ride down to the path

Firewater took. You two see that he doesn't get by you on this end!"

So overcome for an instant that he could not move, Handsome Dan finally recovered control of himself and pulled the trigger of his gun.

And as the report rang out, Happy and Quickshot vaulted onto the backs of their ponies and leaped them forward that they might cut off the flight of the desperado, should he try to double on his tracks.

To the young officer and the veteran Scout in the canyon the wait had seemed interminable. But when at last the signal shot rang out, they leaped to their feet.

"Get inside one of the teepees!" exclaimed the sergeant. "From this middle one, here, we can get a view of both entrances!"

Quickly the captain obeyed, and, cutting holes in the skins, the two men watched the trails, the young officer looking in the direction whence the Squawman was coming, the sergeant toward the one by which they had entered.

The trail leading to the entrance guarded by the captain was even shorter than the other and scarcely had he placed himself so that he could scan it fully than he beheld the head of a horse appear.

"He's here! On my end!" he gasped. Then followed moments that were of terrible suspense to the distracted officer but which were improved by the veteran Scout in changing his position so that he could pour the bullets from his weapons into the Squawman.

Of a sudden the young officer staggered.

"My baby! He's got my baby!" he moaned. "Shoot, Maguire! Shoot, if you have any manhood—I—I can't!"

Brushing his superior roughly aside, the veteran Scout placed his eyes at the peephole, then pressed his finger against the trigger of his six shooter.

But so unnerved was he by the thought that he might hit the child instead of the fiendish desperado that at the last instant he lowered the muzzle of his six shooter and aimed at the horse.

The report, however, restored the young officer to his senses.

"Did you get him?" he demanded, eagerly.

"No—but I got his horse! We've got a better chance at him now, he's on foot! Come on, Captain. We'll have your baby in a few minutes!"

With the despair that only a parent can know, when he sees his child in the greatest danger, the young officer threw aside the flap of the teepee and leaped toward the Squawman, closely followed by the sergeant.

Realizing as his horse went down under him that he had fallen into a trap, the terrible desperado kicked his feet free of the stirrups, and still frantically clasping the innocent child to his breast, started back down the trail.

But not many feet had he gone before he saw Happy and Quickshot riding about on the plains below and at

the same instant there rang in his ears the frenzied cry of the father he had sought to wrong so grievously.

"Give me my baby and I'll spare your life, Firewater!" shouted the captain.

Turning to see who it was who had uttered the cry, the Squawman started as he beheld the young officer, then a diabolical smile suffused his evil face.

"Revenge is mine!" he hissed, at the same time making a supreme effort and drawing the knife from his belt with the hand of his wounded arm. "You may have tracked me to my lair, Captain Archer—but your rashness has cost you your child!"

In horror, the cowboys on the plain below saw the Squawman raise his arm in the air, the sunlight glistening on the knife blade.

"We can't shoot, Happy," groaned Quickshot. "The kiddie's on the wrong side!"

And, unwilling to witness the expected stabbing of the innocent babe, the two cowboys turned their heads.

But as they waited for the shriek that would announce the deathblow, they were amazed to hear a pistol shot ring out and then nine more in surprising rapidity of succession!

Roused from his nervous fear, as the young officer had heard the awful words of the Squawman, he had raised his automatic Colt.

At such an angle was Firewater that it seemed but one chance in a thousand that the Captain could put a bullet into him without striking his daughter.

But with the frenzy of despair, the father took the chance—and the fiendish desperado pitched forward, foiled in his revenge!

With incredible quickness, the young officer emptied the magazine of his automatic into the prostrate form, then ran to where it lay, the sergeant at his heels.

Faces ashen white and hands trembling so that they could hardly raise the body of the Squawman from the ground, the two men finally drew it to one side.

And as the weight was lifted, the baby sat up, stared at her rescuers, then held out her hands, crying, "Daddy!"

The reaction was too much for the young officer, however, and he fainted.

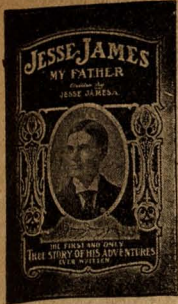
Hurriedly calling to the cowboys below, the sergeant placed his brandy flask at the lips of the captain and finally revived him.

And as they carried brave Captain Archer down to the plains, Col. Halford and his men from the Fort dashed up, bringing the Piutes who had rushed the army post with them, prisoners.

"Have you a signal officer?" anxiously inquired the young officer as he greeted his superior.

"Yes."

"Good! Have him send word to my wife that Catharine is safe!"



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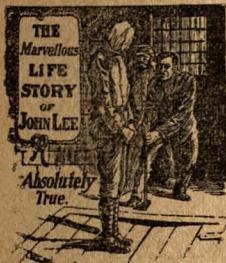
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