

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE MIDNIGHT ALARM



"IT'S GOLD!" YELLED TOM.
"ENOUGH TO MAKE US
RICH FOR LIFE!"

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THE MIDNIGHT ALARM OR

THE RAID ON THE PAYMASTER'S CAMP

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

THOMAS BRISTOW—The fighting young paymaster of Butterfield, Hicks and Butterfield, known as the great "Butterfield Syndicate" which owns a chain of valuable gold mines on the Yath Keyed district, in Keewatin territory, British North America. How Bristow fought for gold, lost gold, and found gold, is something worth reading.

"OLD SPLINTERS"—Better known as "Old Splint," a trapper, a miner, a hunter, and best of all a true and loyal friend. The quaint unlettered man, has a fund of common sense that sparkles through these pages, and makes him not only a friend in need to Tom Bristow, but better yet, a friend that one hates to part with when the old man says his last word in these pages.

WILSON EAST—"Old Man" of the famous gold mine, Dacotah No. 6, and whose fighting proclivities have a bull-dog touch, that makes him a character unique among the sterling men that are winning a Kingdom for civilization in the North West.

"BAD HARRY" HUTTON—Gun man, thief, leader of a gang of

bloodthirsty bandits, whose lives were passed in crime, and who "died with his boots on," which is the usual fate to overtake the bad men of the frontier.

"LONG DAN" JESSUP—The confidential man of the Hutton bandit gang. He also plays a wild part for a brief season, but ends in the clutches of a force that blots him from the world with the sweeping ease one kills a fly.

NAIL-TOOTH—A Chipewyan Indian, whose part in the Hutton gang was one more story of a bad life, and a bad death of a bad-man.

WILD-BEAR—The renegade companion of Nail-Tooth, the bandit, and who also makes up a type too prevalent on the wildest of Canada's frontiers.

"FAT" TED—A thug with a sense of humor, but who also succumbs to the hand of dread fate.

"THE SPECTRAL RIDER OF THE SPECTRAL HUNT"—Now you guess, who he was?

"THE WHITE STALLION OF THE SPECTRAL HUNT"—A brave horse who bravely played his part.

CHAPTER I.

THE LURE OF GOLD.

"Stand up there, and stack up that pole of gold coins."

"How shall I stack the ten dollar gold pieces?"

"Stack the tens in shape to rush into rolls of coin; chuck the five dollar gold pieces over here, where I can put them with the silver in the change tray."

Thomas Bristow, Paymaster for the great firm of Butterfield, Hicks and Butterfield, owners of many gold and silver mines, freighters in the far North West, employers of hundreds upon hundreds of men all over the precious metal districts of British North America, and his assistant, "Old Splinters," thus spoke while at work "making up the weekly pay roll" at the "Paymaster's Cabin," a half mile away from the yawning mouth of the great "Dacotah No. 6," the

wonderful gold mine on the shores of Yath Keyed, the beautiful lake of the chain of lakes, around Chesterfield Inlet, that empties into Hudson Bay, in Keewatin territory in the great far North.

"Hurry up, Splint," added Bristow, a second later. "We have got to have all this gold ready to pay out when the night-shift goes off work at the mine at six o'clock in the morning. What time is it?"

"Two minutes of two," replied Old Splint, who possibly may have had another name once, but even he himself could not remember it. "How much cash is there here?"

"Fifty-thousand dollars and in those bags over there is half a million more. You know the pay-roll here is fifty thousand a month, but there are a lot more mines to pay off before we get back to Marysville."

Old Splint grunted.

"Don't I know it? Haven't I been assistant paymaster over this triumph of man over gold, called the Butterfield section, for twenty-y'ars. Say, yer a young-stah, my boy, but I seen yer daddy wen he was foist de paymaster on the game here and now he's quit the route, and you've been put in his place; say I'm glad to sarve wid ye, boy, I sartain am."

Tom Bristow laughed as he dug his hand into another batch of yellow-boys.

"My, but it's fun working in these golden coins," he cried. "I just love to feel 'em."

"Don't ye get a feelin' of em too far, boy," replied Old Splint with gravity. "Thar's whar boys get ter a feelin' on those yellow coaxes, a feelin' on em, till some day they's fergits they don't own em, and den thar's a skipped paymaster and a ruined boy somewhar out among the bad men."

Tom Bristow laughed again in his free-care manner.

Six feet and a fraction tall with hair the color of the gold he was carelessly tossing about as he piled it up to meet the pay-roll the early hours would have to see paid off; young Tom Bristow, was a pleasant sight for those who liked, robust powerful young American manhood.

Bristow was an American, for much of the labor employed about the mines owned by the "Butterfield Syndicate" came from America.

Bristow further, although hardly twenty-two years old, was of powerful build. He was very strong, he himself hardly knew how strong; in perfect health, of resolute courage and with splendid nerves that flashed under his pink skin like so many active coils of electricity.

Bristow's blue eyes laughed when he spoke now but they could grow hard chilly and merciless when he was aroused to anger; he was the absolute type of a young American fighting man.

Old Splint was, himself, one of those lean, sinewy, Canadian men, born to a life of danger and who met his fate with a dashing abandon of a true English

bull dog. He was in age of an indefinite quantity. He had been a trapper, a hunter, a miner, a scout, a gun man of ability; and had wide experience behind him and therefore was, as he said, always ready to drink with a friend or fight an enemy, so what matter did it make with any one whether he was nine or ninety?

"So you knew my father when he was with the company?" added Tom Bristow as he flung about the shining gold, in his hurry to get it ready for delivery.

"Sartin," answered Old Splint. "Your father was a likely chap. I disremembers the yar he comes to the camp, but I sarves under him ever since; and boy, I hated to leave him, when he quit. Is he well?"

"Oh, very well indeed for his age," answered Tom. "He is living at Fort Churchill now, and likes it very much."

"Youah Mothaw, is dead?"

"Yes. She died five years ago."

"You like this life, boy?"

Tom gazed out over the long stretch of hill and valley to the great forest that fringed the top of Bald Mountain with its hoary eternally snowy head, that seemed to be looking back and blinking at him.

The chill air of the summer night in the Far North, where even in the hottest July day the thermometer rarely goes above 65 degrees, came to Tom's brow through the open window. He thought of the miles of forest, the splendid lakes, the wide tossing rivers about him, the big game, the beautiful free outdoor life of the great country he was in and looked back at Old Splint with a hearty wave of color over his regular features.

"You bet I like it," Tom cried. "None of your cities for me. This is the only life for real men."

His enthusiasm fired Old Splint, for he too loved the mysterious North.

"You talk right, boy," the old trapper replied, "God maybe made a better country than this but I never seed it, boy. It's God's own country, out heah."

Again Tom laughed gleefully. He nodded his head in quick acceptance of the words of Old Splint.

"Splint, you are the goods," Tom cried. "You hit me where I live when you praise this country. But now, we are ready to pay off. I've got the cash in fine shape."

"Good."

"I wish you would run over to the mine and tell the foreman that you were sent to tell him that we are ready to pay off now, if any of the boys are off shifts."

"Do yer think it best fer me to leave yer heah, boy; thar's many bad men around har, who knows 'tis pay-day at Dacotah No. 6."

Tom picked up a fine, silver-mounted great revolver,

a magazine gun with King Death peering out of its chambers in the form of conical-shaped bullets.

Bristow roared as he whirled the weapon here and there, around the tiny long-mud-plastered cabin, as if shooting at the forms of many enemies.

"Why, I could get a regiment," cried he, with his boyish smile. "Who any way, would dare an attack now on *the Paymaster's camp*? On the way up from the Inlet, there might have been danger, but I had six men as guards. Here, right within half a mile of the mine where there's six hundred men at work—oh, shucks, Splint, you make me weary."

"Maybe, boy, maybe," rejoined Old Splint. "I maybe wrong but thar's men down thar at Marysville, only two miles down that thar bull-team road, whar the company sends the ore to the stamp-mill, that ud do yer fer less gold than that thar before ye, to say nothin' of them yellow-boys back in them thar bags. Don't yer get dead sure yer safe out hyar on the frontier. There's no man safe here wot ain't ready to shoot."

"I'll shoot, all right, if I needs must," said Tom. "But there's no danger here I am convinced, no matter what there may be when we are on the road. No one would dare attack me here. If he does, it's his sudden death for look here are my guns, two of them at my belt, two here on the board, we call the 'pay-desk.'"

"Ter say nothin' to yer Bowie knife, a stickin' out o' yer belt thar, a whole lot of weepins, enough to do much business wid, if yah has got the sand"—old Splint looked into the fearless, flashing blue eyes of the young paymaster, and then finished his sentence with a smile, "and I am putty shore you've got sand, all right."

Tom's face was pink with pleasure for Old Squint was known all over the North-West as a man with "sand to burn."

"You see I am safe, my friend," said Tom, in his most winning manner, a very pleasant manner that had gained him great popularity. "There can be no danger here from any bad-man, and any way it won't take you ten minutes to deliver the message. What can be done in ten minutes with me holding on to a regular arsenal of weapons here and you knowing I've got the sand to use them?"

"What good does sand do if twenty thugs rip up this place?"

"There's more than twenty shots here—enough for every bandit."

"Yass, if them thar venomous rattlesnakes, would stand and be shot. But them critters shoot fast, and quick. Many a good man with a gun has been planted out hyar, 'cause he got der ideer dat he was quicker on de draw dan 'nother gun man. And some on em ain't found out thar mistake yit."

"But why are you afraid, just now?"

"Wen I was down to Marysville last night I seen 'Bad-Harry' Hutton and his partner, 'Long Dan' Jessup, a fillin' up on red lick on the 'Chimney Corner.'"

Tom's face grew grave in a moment.

"Whew," he whistled. "I don't like to hear that news. Hutton is a desperate man, a thug, a gun-fighter, thief, hold-up man; while Long Dan is a demon in drink, who is an outlaw of years standing—what are those two men doing here?"

"You aks me? I can tell yah," cried Splint. "I see wen I comes out o' dah gin-mill, two as bad lookin' Chipewyan Indians as I ever seed. I looks up ovah careful like fer I has a rogues' gallery in ma' think tank; but I never seed um before, but thay's a couple of de Hutton guerrilla band I sees right thar."

"But after all, the gang may try to hold us up, when we get started over the hills and mountains for the Dacotah No. 7, twenty-five miles from here, and I feel sure that they won't try to attack us here, right here under the wing of the miners at work—why man I can almost shoot a revolver bullet from there to the entrance of the camp about the mine's mouth."

"That thar gang ain't afraid of nothin'," very quickly replied Splint. "If they wanted ter do ut, they'd jumper yer here if they was twen' thousn' miners right thar only half a foot away, instead o' a matter o' a few hundred a half mile away, you bet."

Tom knew the situation was serious.

But he also knew that far away over a long trail, which had to be traversed in the quick daylight of the Far North-West summer, another great grimy crowd of hard-working miners were awaiting payment for labor, and that he must not be late or there would be grave trouble for him for he must make "pay-day" on time, if he almost killed himself in doing it.

Tom further knew that the earlier he began paying off the men at the present station he had halted at, the quicker he would be on his journey to the next station.

Tom looked his weapons over carefully.

They were in splendid shape.

He felt the corded muscles of his great right arm; and felt the blood tingle in his heart with the love of battle.

"Run along, Splint," Tom cried. "I'll fight Bad Harry, and his whole gang the way I feel now, before breakfast, and with one hand tied to my back."

Old Splint loved a man of bravery.

"You would at that?" he cried. "I'll go."

Splint turned toward the door and opened it, with a smile of eager appreciation at the attitude of the young paymaster.

The world outside was dark and mysterious, save for the faint light of the stars.

The mountains about made great sentinel-like

shapes; the cry of the coyote came clear to Tom's ear in the bushes back of the hut; a faint wail of a wild-cat, bleated from out of the gloom, and fainter from the magnificent forest two or more miles away, came the howl of the great gray wolves of the timber land.

The Night-world, of fierceness, of mystic life, was a-foot. The wild animals of the North were seeking their prey.

And while they stood there, these two men, only atoms now in the grand world of the wild, suddenly there came from out of the air, the fierce beat of running horses.

Tom stood aghast.

The fierce stampede came onward.

He could hear the neighing of many horses, as they rushed along at wonderful speed.

The fall of their hoofs, could be heard in the clear night as if they were only a few feet away.

Snorting, breathing hard, yelling men on their backs, the sound of shots, terrible oaths, wild cries for help, all coming apparently down from the sky made Tom Bristow's blood run cold in his veins.

"The bandits!" he yelled turning to Old Splint.

Old Splint's face was purple with emotion. His lean lips were drawn back from his yellowish, wolf-like teeth.

One hand grasped his huge revolver convulsively. But he made no motion to draw it.

The trampling hosts of horses seemed now to be right overhead.

"The bandits are here," again cried Tom. "Splint pull your gun."

"Stop, boy," cried the old man, in an awe-struck voice. "Stop! No bullet can stop them horses."

"Isn't that the horses of the thugs, coming to attack us?"

"No, that is the ride of the Spectral Hunt, that always comes in these parts to those who are about to die. Tom, you and I are both dead men."

Tom staggered to the door.

Over his head high up in the clear starry light again he heard the sound of the running, trampling, hard pressed band of fast hurrying horses.

With awe-struck eager eyes, Tom searched the horizon, looked keenly over the somber land which lay around him, dark and inscrutable.

"The Ride of the Spectral Hunt," he gasped. "The sound of hurrying horses that always comes out here when grave calamity threatens; the horses that run before Death, King of Terrors?"

"Yes," replied Splint.

"We are dead men, Tom, the Spectral Hunt is out hunting us to our doom."

Flash! Bang!

Splint's voice had not been lost upon the still air,

when directly from the darkness there came a wonderful burst of livid flame.

A rifle had spoken.

Poor Old Splint plunged forward, with a bullet in his body, a senseless bleeding hulk.

"The Ride of the Spectral Hunt," Splint whispered as he fell to Tom, who saw a dozen forms steal toward the hut, as the air became a great sheet of flame, and the moan of rifle bullets, stung the night air, and the flashes of the guns played like lightning flashes in a circle around the young paymaster's hut, as he darted toward his revolvers, with grim despair clutching at his heart, but dauntless in his courage, to make a great fight before he was overcome.

A man sprang at Tom's throat.

His revolver darted death at the jumping figure.

CHAPTER II.

ONE MAN AGAINST TEN.

The leader of the attacking party, Tom Bristow saw, received the shot from the young paymaster's revolver, directly in his head.

A brown patch of blood showed on the man's brow as he turned sideways and died.

He was dead before he struck the ground.

Flash! Crash! Flash! Crash!

Tom's revolver in the first ten seconds flared and spat its bullets.

Men in turn shot at him, but by one of those queer freaks of fate, not a bullet struck a fatal spot, but many of Tom's reaped a grist of dead men for him.

Of the twenty men who were shooting at Tom, hardly one but had reputations as gun-fighters, but in the hut, the enemy, had made the error of sending too many men to attack.

The size of the attacking force saved Tom's life.

He, a great lusty man, towered above the members of the gang. They were like pigmies attacking a giant.

They shot at him; and he received a dozen wounds in the first half minute.

Bullets lodged in his great chest, but did not reach his deep beating life. His head was laid open by a rifle ball; his deadly great corded knotted hands were crimson with his own blood.

On his face red bands of blood appeared.

His teeth were clenched in his desperation. They showed white like those of an angry mastiff. His yellow hair was matted and stained with mingled blood and sweat.

The hut was a terrible welter of writhing men, hur-

rying shapes, and the air was thick with the smoke from the belching weapons.

Here lay a man feebly coughing, his lips covered with bloody foam.

There lay a man dead, cold, and silent, but still clutching his great revolver.

Four men lay all together in a still feebly writhing mass of dying, blood bespattered shapes near the door.

In the first rush of the bandits making up the cream of Bad-Harry Hutton's gang, six men died or had been mortally wounded by the fighting paymaster.

Now his revolvers were empty.

There was no time to reload in this horrible pig-stye of death.

Bristow hurled his empty weapons in the faces of two men that came charging at him.

The jaw-bone of the leader was crushed by the blow, but he still came on, panting, and dimly trying to reach his antagonist.

The second man fell and lay still. His temple had been crushed by the weapon.

Tom Bristow drew his Bowie knife.

He saw a man trying to strike him over the head with his clubbed rifle.

With a murderous snarl, Tom darted under the gun, before it could be descended, and then, he plunged his knife into the heart of his enemy.

A wild shout of triumph seemed to rend the air as he struck his blow, and right there Tom Bristow, became no longer a man.

He was a wild beast of carnage.

His heart seemed to him to be twice the size of his body.

Everything about him turned red, a fiery, awful red. He was swimming in a river of blood.

Into the heart of the gang rushed the now crazed young paymaster. He no more minded revolver shots, or knife thrusts, than if they were the tiny stings of mosquitoes.

Men jumped out of the open windows to get out of the way of this fighting devilish machine.

Others ran hither and thither, in wild fear, for Tom raved within the narrow cabin, killing, shooting, stabbing, clutching hardy, splendid fighting men by brawny throats and choking them in a moment into lifeless chunks of dead humanity.

Never in all the great North-West, a wonderland of gory combat, had such a fight been fought.

Tom was now long since past anything human. He had forgotten everything except that about him were enemies; that he was fighting, and must fight on, just why, he did not know. But his brain whispered to him, "fight, fight, fight," and Tom Bristow obeyed.

Somehow he sensed that he was out in the air.

He did not know how he got there.

But outside he was, and there was a man, right beside him, he knew, a man wearing a miner's garb.

"How did he come here?" thought Tom. "Who is he?"

But he had a rifle; this much Tom comprehended.

He grasped the weapon.

Over there in the early dawn, which now was just glittering the sides of the mountain, not a thousand yards away, Tom got the idea that he saw the forms of riding men.

The rifle flashed to his shoulder.

Its roar came.

Over on the mountain Tom saw a man fall swiftly from his horse.

Tom turned to give a wild yell of triumph.

What was this?

No sound came from his lips.

Things began to dance up and down. The miner seemed to be suddenly capable of turning into other miners; there were many of them about him.

Tom Bristow felt the earth rise up and strike him a terrible blow on his side.

He fell down face to the flying foe, now to be clearly seen way over on the road from the mine, that wound up the great mountain side, to wind up many other great mountain sides into the tremendous silence of the trail to Chesterfield Inlet.

The midnight alarm, had called the hardy miners to the paymaster's hut when they heard the terrible sound of the deadly battle; but *the raid on the paymaster's camp* had been successful.

In spite of his wonderful fight, the gang of Bad Harry Hutton, were flying away on horse-back with all the treasure of the paymaster, and out of twenty-two men who had attacked him but four were left alive.

Tom Bristow had literally, alone and unaided, killed sixteen of the band in a fight that lasted hardly fifteen minutes.

The paymaster had twenty wounds on his body. He was cut, shot, clubbed so that had he not had a constitution of iron, a life of out-door endeavor, a clean living record, he would not have survived ten minutes.

As it was the rescuing miners had removed him to Marysville expecting that he would be dead in a few moments; and there for months he lay, fever tossed, a wraith of a man, while near him, in another bunk tossed in fever also, just alive, and that was all, his old friend, and companion, Old Splint, the trapper.

So day after day, week after week slowly dragged along.

One morning three months later, when the early October half winter half summer days had come, Tom Bristow opened his eyes.

They rested upon the good humored face of Old Splint, whose hurt had been a bullet through the head, but who lived on, as if receiving bullets in this place was an ordinary occurrence.

"Hellow, Splint," cried Tom feebly.

"Hellow," cried Splint, all solicitude.

"Am I dead?"

Splint laughed and shook his head.

"Are you dead?"

Again Splint shook his head.

"Where am I?"

"In Marysville."

"Oh. How did I get here?"

"Big gang of miners brought you here."

"Did the bandits get the cash?"

"All but a few hundred dollars."

"Did I get any?"

"Some. They have planted 'em all. They call it, 'Tom Bristow's' private grave-yard."

A ghost of a smile came over Tom's face.

"How many did I get?"

"You killed sixteen, out of the twenty-two men that attacked you from the bandit men's gang. There was one fellow more just stunned."

"What became of him?"

"The boy's just lynched him, quick. He isn't counted on your string."

Tom smiled again, a wan, weak smile.

"I feel pretty sore," he said.

"You ought to. You've got the finest collection of scars about you ever man had. I'd go East when I got up and show them scars. Thar's lot o' men out hyar, with big reppertations that ain't got no where as many hon'ble scars as you has."

"Tell me all about it?"

Thus urged Splint told Tom all about the great fight he had made to save the money.

"'Twas the greatest fight seen in this year country, I sez," remarked Splint, "when them fellers from the comp'ny comes over to heer 'bout it. They sez nothing but they does a lot. They sez there ain't no money that we chaps is to try and save, when it comes to gitting me and you well. I hears this part when I come to. I lays for two days wid me head in the clouds, and I no more good than a baby. But when I comes out o' the trance I gits going quick. I takes th' job o' nussing you back to home and friends, and here you are, all right, except weak; hear I am, all right except tarnal mad, boy, thet I gets me lay off so early in de foight."

Tom smiled again.

"'Twasn't your fault," he cried. "There was not much look in for you, for you got it first, when someone put a rifle bullet in your head."

"I know but I hadn't otter git it fust."

"How could you help it?"

"Don't suppose I could but two hard luck, thar, anyhow."

"Did you hear the Hunt of the Spectral Horses, just before we were attacked?"

The waxen face of Old Splint, which was white and

wan owing to his long illness became, if anything a shade whiter.

"Hush," he whispered in awe-struck tones.

"Why?"

"It's known here as 'The Ride of the Spectral Hunt.' We are the first two men, who ever heard it and lived to talk of it afterward."

"What is it?"

"I don't know."

"Is it only here that one hears it?"

"Here in what is known as the Yath Keyed Lake district, the Ride is well known about, but I never hear tell of it anywhar' else. But say, it's pretty well known heer. There ain't no one to die by vil'ence thet don't a-hear ut, just before he goes."

"Don't people that die in their beds from mortal illness ever hear it?"

"They says not. It's only the gun men, them fellers like us that get theirs in some desp-rit encounter, thet ever hears it. It's for sure an eye opener ter suddint death, up here in these wilds. 'The Ride of The Spectral Hunt' means dead men harbours."

Tom questioned Old Splinters carefully and at length got from him all he knew about the ghostly horses.

As the aged trapper had said, any persons in the district in which the two men were, who were in danger of death by violence, heard over their heads the sound of a great multitude of horses, swiftly passing through the air.

There was heard the neighing of the steeds; the terrible swift rush of their flying feet; the oaths of their riders as they urged on the band with great cries of encouragement, and then there came right in the midst of the noise a dreadful silence. The Ride of the Spectral Hunt was over, and by that time the man who was to be warned, was dead, as Old Splinters shrewdly put it.

"Has anyone seen the horses that make up the Hunt?" asked Tom.

Old Splint lowered his voice.

"I heern tell," he said, "that yars ago, a feller livin' up thisaway, did see one of the Spectral Horses."

"What did he look like?"

"I heern that he was a big White Stallion, oh, bigger en any hoss ever seen in these year parts. His eyes was aflashin' fire. He runs in big leaps no mortal hoss cud ever make. He cum a flyin' down ther trail, an' he gits off 'fore anyone can flip a lasso over him—say, they sez he's fierce, that ghostly horse. I hope we uns'll never see um."

Bristow was not superstitious but he shuddered as he sank into a fitful slumber.

"The Ride of the Spectral Hunt" came in a great jumble through his dreams.

The early morning sun came the next morning and

showered a beam down upon the sleeping face of Old Splinters.

He sat bolt upright in a moment.

A feeling of loneliness came to him.

He looked over to where Tom Bristow should have been sleeping in his bunk.

There was no one there.

Old Splinters gave a yell of dismay.

"Tom," he cried, "Tom Bristow."

There was no answer.

Still weak from his wound the trapper staggered to his feet. He hurriedly searched the room; no trace of Tom could be found.

Old Splinters dashed to the door.

Under his anxious gaze the silent hills, the dark woods gave no sign of human life.

Old Splinters dashed back into the cabin. His face was white.

"Gone," he moaned. "Tom Bristow has gone."

down over desperate eyes; it was a riot of evil, a terrible company this, not a man in it but was known everywhere for his ability to hold his life at the muzzle of a gun; and who belonged to that terrible class, the bad-man of the great North-West.

Quite undismayed Bad-Harry talked in a low tone with his dearest friend, Long Dan Jessup.

Bad-Harry did not look his title.

He was a little man, not more than five feet five inches in height. His eyes were black. His hair and sweeping moustache were of the same dead color. His face was round, and unwrinkled; he looked like a boy hardly out of his school days.

But it was in his thin lips, his firm chin, the leaping deadly light that like the weary eyes of some caged tiger held in captivity, seemed to look at one, through one, and back to the wild life of the olden time, that gave one the glimpse of the seething tempest that lay behind this man.

Quick as a flash of sheet lightning was the hand of Bad Harry on his gun, when he scented danger. The undefinable something that gave him the power to draw and shoot his rifle-barreled revolver just the fraction of one trifling second ahead of an antagonist, was what gave him the supremacy over his gang.

The furtive gleam in his eyes told of the strain this knowledge brought to his nerves; he held his position as Chief of Bad Men, but only by dint of his ability to "get there first." Already many men were ready to contest his supremacy at the gun's mouth; there were forty unmarked graves that told the fate of those who in the past had aspired to the leadership.

"It was a quick jump for our guns," Bad Harry said once when asked why he had shot so many men in his short life, "and I naturally got mine goin' first. If I hadn't I wouldn't be here; other fellow would."

Long Dan Jessup, was different from his leader.

He looked like a lumberman, as he was once, in his younger days. But the fatal quickness, the natural ability to shoot straight, quick, sudden, and with deadly aim, had raised him through many a bitter battle to the second in command of the Bad Harry Hutton gang, and his great bulk, his wonderful strength kept him in the foreground.

Both men, wary of assassination, knowing that there were twenty rewards of money for their captures dead or alive in many districts through the great North-West were standing where they could see every movement in the room, yet so far back that no enemy could creep behind them to take their worthless lives.

"Cap," said Long Dan, "the gang's gettin' restless."

Hutton turned his gloomy eyes toward the speaker. "Why?"

"They say they ain't been no division of the gold

CHAPTER III.

"THE GLEN OF THE SPECTRAL HUNT."

There was warmth, light merriment in the Dirty Spoon saloon on the main street of Marysville.

The Dirty Spoon was famous all over the North-West. It was a saloon in which the horde of the bad-men, the gun-fighters of the district passed their time, drinking deeply, fighting among themselves, gambling and in the coarse pleasures of the time, and of the men who made the time memorable in the crimson history of the territory.

The gang of Bad-Harry Hutton had full possession of the saloon this night in late October.

The fitful summer of the North-West was waning; all ready the leaves were turning golden brown in the wide forest.

Bad-Harry Hutton and Long Dan Jessup, his trusted lieutenant in deeds of blood, were seated in a corner of the room, watching a game of faro, in which other members of his band were playing with various degrees of good fortune.

The dealer, a white-faced, furtive eyed man was slowly shifting the cards; the look-out was calling each one as it fell from the dealing box, and the sounds of fierce delight, or mad curses at the jade Dame Fortune, now and then broke through the room.

In the cheaply fitted alcove devoted to the bar, a string of wild eyed men were drinking. The room was filled with tobacco smoke. Every man wore great revolvers which swung handy at their belts.

Red shirts, predominated. Wide hats, were pulled

in that *raid on the paymaster's camp*," replied Long Dan.

"You tell the gang there ain't goin' to be no division just yet," sneered Bad Harry.

"Why not? I've got ter gin 'em a reason."

"Man, the gold is cached back at our camp. We don't dare to git it now fer them Royal North-West Mounted Police have been awatchin' us for the past six weeks."

"Wot der we care erabout that. They's only a few of them, and they can't do us no harm."

Bad Harry shook his head.

"We don't want no truck with them fellers," he growled. "They'd git us sooner or later if we did. Why man, those fellers are never known to gin up when onct they get started on a feller's trail. They suspects we fellers got that gold—why, you fool, there's half a million in gold we got thet trip."

"What good does that do us if we can't git to it," grumbled Long Dan.

"Look heah, Dan," cried Bad Harry. "Don't you and the gang see that we've got off wid dis trick great like? Them Mounted Police suspects us, but dey's can't prove nuttin'. We have the gold safely *cached*. If we go ter git it it'll bring down them police on us, quick, and wot show'd we stand when those fellers jump us—wot?"

Long Dan speculated a moment.

"Rats!" he at length cried. "Wot yer givin' us. Let's one o' us go out and git the stuff on the sneak like."

It was now Bad Harry's time to do some thinking. He carefully turned over the idea presented to him. There was much that appealed to him in it. He and the gang were, to use their own words, nearly "stone broke" and it was necessary to get money, and get it quickly.

It was maddening to think of half a million yellow boys in the secret hiding place of the gang, and yet so much were they all under suspicion; so carefully were they watched by the Royal North-West Mounted Police, they just dared not go to their hiding place and get the gold.

"Say, it looks ter me as if yer game was strong," at last replied Bad Harry, "yer all right, Petey. The po-lice sartin ain't on ter where we have *cached* the stuff, and if we cud sneak one o' de gang in, why we'd git the stuff out, and de coppers cud watch us till Grasshopper creek froze next July, eh?"

Long Dan, laconic at all times laughed, and nodded his head.

"Which one o' de gang is ter go arter dose yaller boys—say half a million er gold pieces is real money ter me today?"

Again Bad Harry turned this problem over in his mind.

"If yer or me goes, we'd hev a whole blanked detachment er copper arter us, in a minnit. Say, pal, you and me's marked men out here—we can't go arter de stuff."

Long Dan significantly toyed with the big revolver at his hip.

"We sartin is marked men," he said, "sure, and sartin is our gun-play, en ef I cud git one er dem po-licemen alone, I'd shoot him up pretty bloody quick."

"Say, pal," returned Bad Harry. "We'll put dis on Fat Ted."

"Fat Ted?"

A burst of uncouth laughter from Long Dan followed.

"W'y, Fat Ted ain't got no sense."

"Dat's de reason we'll send him. A man wit real sense outter not go. If he gits ketched his finish is quick—see?"

Again Bad Harry speculated as to the sending of Fat Ted.

Fat Ted came from nowhere one day to the Bad Harry gang. He was a short, fat in frame, fat in wit, young chap, with no gun ability at all; who turned pale over a scratch on his hand, and was about as helpless among the gun-fighting crowd of outlaws with which he was associated himself, as a baby in a nest of rattlesnakes.

But his helplessness had made a place for him in the crowded ranks of the robber-bandits.

He had now become the joking focus of the gang; the butt of all their rough jokes; their errand boy, and scullion; cook when in camp, waiter when out of it, but really liked for his constant good nature.

"Does he know how ter git ter stuff out; he don't no nuttin' erbout de camp," muttered Long Dan.

"Yer git him fer me, I'll talk him into our plan in a minnit," laughed Bad Harry.

Long Dan slouched into the faro-room of the Dirty Spoon, where a great crowd of uncouth men were wooing Dame Fortune.

Fat Ted, hopelessly fat, lax and lazy, a tiny roly-poly man, dressed in a red flannel shirt, black, patched trousers, sewed up in buck-skin patches; long boots, a belt with a revolver as fat and lazy as its owner, ostentatiously hanging in plain sight, was betting five cent pieces, with another bandit, as to whether a "face card or a plain card would show next, top up, on the faro dealing box."

The bandit playing with Fat Ted, was Nail-Tooth, a full blood Chipewyan Indian, who had joined Bad Harry's gang a year before, and was about as dirty and truculent specimen of his tribe as the Far West held.

"Don't bet yer high stuff, thar," cried Long Dan, as he drew near to the two men, "put over yer small change fust."

"It's been so blank long since the gang have produced anything but hot air, that I am down to my chicken-feed," cried Fat Ted, in a smooth, educated voice. "I am shy my usual millions to bet, with this red thief of a Chipewyan."

"Ter de foul fiend wit yer talkee-talk-ee," rejoined Long Dan, "de old boy wants yer."

"Which particular old boy, wants me?" rejoined Fat Ted, as he stretched himself wearily with a yawn, that showed how fat his face was, for when his mouth opened his face looked like the moon, around it, "there has been one Old Boy wanting me for years."

The fat man made a funny sketch as he spoke on the green baize table before him, with a bit of chalk he drew from his pocket.

It showed a certain Demon gentleman, with a long tail, peaked ears, moustache and goatee, with a toast-ing fork in his hand and a flaming furnace behind him.

"Is this the Old Boy, that wants me?" asked Fat Ted.

"Not yit—oh, but say, some day, boy oh?" cried Long Dan.

Fat Ted made a second quick sketch.

It was a burlesque of Bad Harry Hutton, so real, yet so grotesque, that Long Dan roared in spite of himself.

"Dat de old boy wot wants yer," Long Dan cried, "but rub thet year thing out. Bad Harry don't like ter be made fun of."

"Oh, my, our Dictator grows proud with his power," yawned Ted, "for a man who gets his men into a fierce fight with that paymaster, and in which we lose a heap of our best men, gets away with a fortune in gold, which he as yet has not distributed with his fellow thieves, seems to me that we are up against a Dictator who only Dictates, as to our com-ings and goings but produces not—nay not even one groat to sustain us while he dictates."

"Shet up. Some of de boys mount hear yer, and tell Bad Harry. Yer see yer finish den," answered Long Dan.

"Better a quick finish with a Bad Harry gun than slow starvation while I await his production of coin."

"S-h-e-e," hissed Long Dan. "It's about de gold dat he wants ter see yer."

"Why didn't you say so first off," replied Ted, as he jumped up, took his little pile of five cent pieces from the table, nodded to Nail-Tooth and hurried after Long Dan, who quickly escorted him to Bad Harry.

The bandit quickly told Fat Ted of his wishes.

"You want me to go and get the gold?" Ted questioned as Long Dan strolled away.

"Sure."

"Do yer know de place up in de top o' Bald Mountain, whar der's woods, snow, woods, snow, and nut-tin' else even now in dis yar summer?"

Ted opened his eyes wide. His face was a shade paler.

"You mean the glen, called the home of The Riders of the Spectral Hunt?" he gasped.

Bad Harry nodded.

"You mean the place where people say those awful ghostly horses start when they ride through the air to tell a doomed man that his death is near? You mean me to go to the home of the Spectral Hunt?"

As he spoke the fat man's face was ashen with dread.

Bad Harry looked at him with a fierce gleam in his eyes.

"Sure," the bandit said.

Fat Ted took a long breath.

"That's a dangerous mission, it seems to me."

Bad Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"The last man to go there was found dead in the glen, two days later, by a searching party with an awful look of horror on his face."

Again Bad Harry shrugged his shoulders.

Ted thought the matter over; sure death would follow his refusal to go, he knew, for Bad Harry was carelessly toying with one of his revolvers.

Ted feared that sure death would come in case he went, for those who tried to penetrate the mystery of the home of the Riders in the Spectral Hunt, never returned from their investigations.

A dread, mystery hung over the terrible spot high up on the face of a mountain clad with eternal snows.

"How am I to know where the gold is?" gasped Ted.

"Yer'l find a fur tree in dat glen o' de Spectral Hunt," growled Bad Harry in reply. "It's a tree dat's bin hit by lightnin' and blasted. Say, it's de only tree in de middle o' de glen, at de end o' a trail, see, dat we blazed wit a rough outline of a skeleton hand, see?"

"I see," faintly answered Ted, with a white, startled face.

"Yer foller de skeleton hand, till yer git ter de tree. On top o' de tree yer'l see a human skull."

"What?"

Almost fainting at the horror of the scene he was to witness Ted hung on to the wall for support.

"Sure," continued Bad Harry, "dat skull is 'Shootin' Jakes.' He disobeyed one o' me orders and we hung him to dat tree. Den we puts de skull of de traitor der so as a warnin' might git to odder of you fellers wot don't obey me orders. See?"

A leaping, dangerous light in the eyes of Bad Harry warned Ted that he must make no further comment.

"At de foot o' dat tree, whar de skull is," thundered Bad Harry, "yer'l find de gold cached. Yer take a hoss ternight. Yer go to de den of de Spectral Hunt, and yer gits all de gold yer can carry. Yer brings it here fer me on de sneak. Yer goes back tomorrow

night and git more, and yer keeps a goin' till yer gits all de coin? See?"

Ted in his mind's eye saw the grinning skeleton, the Spectral Hunt, with champing horses, in that dreaded, lonely spot, awaiting his coming, with silent ghostly glee.

Here stood Harry, bad-man, gun-fighter, murderer—and between the two evils Fat Ted made his choice.

"I will go," he whispered.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WARNING.

The swift gallop of a horse came to a stop in the outer darkness in front of the Dirty Spoon saloon, just as Bad Harry Hutton had given his commands to Fat Ted, to go and get the bandits' loot, from the dreaded home of the Spectral Hunt.

The horse came to a sudden stop with a noise that made all the robbers in the room glance at each other with dread.

It seemed to every man in the room that there was the noise of many horses in the air, as if a great party of horsemen, made up the companions of the single horse, which the men who had crowded to the door saw was pawing the earth.

"It's a great white stallion?" cried one of the gang to another.

"I never saw such a big horse."

"Nor such a fine one."

Other members of the watching gang, thus spoke.

"What's that light about the horse?" cried the Indian, Nail-Tooth.

All gazed in wonderment.

The horse seemed to be surrounded by a wraith-like, ghastly, *nebulous light, that shifted and played about his beautiful form, and made a dancing blue flame about the weird shape that bestrode him.*

Bad Harry Hutton staggered back.

Even his iron nerve was shaken.

"Who are, you?" he demanded in a skulking, furtive manner, while his voice shook.

The figure made no answer.

Instead it swung down from the saddle, pulling the reins over the head of the magnificent white stallion, which pawed and champed at its bit but did not move, as the bridle rein trailed loose on the ground.

The figure walked toward Bad Harry.

It seemed hardly to touch the ground; just moved forward without any visible means of locomotion.

It darted to the side of Harry.

"It's a ghost," cried the bad-man as he shrunk back upon the gaping ranks of his followers.

Every man in the party was shaking with dread; every face was strained and fearful of the apparition.

Bad Harry tried to burrow a way to the rear behind the bandit gang, but he could not. For the first time in his wicked life, he was frightened to his innermost heart.

The figure approached.

The figure was dressed in a long cloak of spotless white.

The same shifting, blue, nebulous flame that was to be seen about the splendid white stallion, played about the head of the approaching figure, every guerilla saw.

The figure also appeared to be wrapped in the dancing, blue, ghostly fire.

"Look," whispered Nail-Tooth, who was in the foreground of the gaping crowd.

Fierce faces that never before knew fear; that had faced equally fierce ones in the terrible battle of the revolver in many a gun-fight, were now pale with dread.

The form drew nearer.

It walked or rather drifted directly to Bad Harry Hutton's side.

The figure was so closely sheeted in white that no one could see its face, save for two hollow glistening eyes, that seemed to look through and beyond every man in the party of bravo's with a glare of menace.

The form extended its arm toward Bad Harry.

Something fluttered from the dead-white fingers of the wraith-like shape.

It fell directly at the feet of the bandit chief.

Then the figure turned toward the white stallion; it made a swift step toward the animal, jumped upon its wide white back; there was a tremendous trampling of iron shod hoofs; and the horse and rider darted into the gloom of the night, leaving a long trail of vivid fire behind it.

Before the last spark had disappeared there came to the awe-struck ears of the wondering thugs, the sound of many horses trampling, galloping along, apparently with the specter that had just left them.

"The Ride of The Spectral Hunt!" cried a bandit in anguished tones.

"That was one of the ghostly riders of the hunt," cried another outlaw.

"He was straight from hell; smell him?" cried a third agonized desperado.

On the air was the tinge of sulphur, pungent and bitter in its insistent odor.

But every eye was now turned upon their leader, Bad Harry Hutton.

He had somewhat recovered from his fright at the strange figure that had recently faced him, and with shaking hand he was reading the missive that had been dropped at his feet.

The wondering crowd of men, rough, crime stained,

and demons in human form crowded around their leader.

"What is in dat?" asked Nail-Tooth, the Chipewyan Indian.

Nail-Tooth, for years had been known as a brawler, with suspicion that he had often treacherously lurked in the rear of a foe to assassinate him, and no man in the renegade band was more feared than he, or more noted for his brave indifference to any physical foe.

But the ghostly visitor had frightened him to the semblance of a timorous old woman.

His face was white and his eyes wide open with dread.

Bad Harry, with shaking hand answered that he did not know.

Long Dan, the picture of fright managed to put in a word next.

"W'y don't yer open de letter," he stuttered. "Den we'll know de woist."

Bad Harry at length opened the missive.

He shook with fear when his eyes confronted a grinning skull, roughly drawn in red ink, on the top of a page of white paper, which had been scrawled over, he saw, with writing.

"Beware!

"This is a warning!

"Get out of the town of Marysville, in twenty-four hours, or I will return and get you, and your Gang, one by one.

"THE SPECTRAL RIDER."

That was the writing that Bad Harry Hutton read; it was the warning that came sooner or later to every member of the bad-men gangs of all the frontier; the warning to "get."

And always behind this warning was standing grim and terrible death.

Bad Harry knew this; his bandit gang knew it; but it was the first time that they or any of their ilk, had been warned by what they believed to be a visitant from the lower world, to "get."

"Wot does dat mean?" growled Long Dan. "I sure don't git it tru me nut."

"It means death ter dis gang, see?"

Bad Harry Hutton snapped these words forth from his fang-like teeth, as if in sheer desperation.

The men behind him crowded around.

"What shall we do?" asked one.

"I am afraid of me life," cried another. "I'll fight anything but a Spectral Rider. I'm dead leery o' dat chap."

"Ef he goes arter us, we will be got, sure pop," cried a third red-bearded ruffianly fellow, but who had all the fight-out of him now.

"Let's take de warning," cried Nail-Tooth.

"Sure, let's skip," cried another outlaw.

Bad Harry saw the gang was near to panic, and that behind the panic crept mutiny.

He beckoned one of the robbers nearer to him.

The man was known as Salt Bill, because in his younger days he had been a seaman, and was tattooed all over his body with strange shapes.

"Wot's de matter Bill," cried Bad Harry. "Yer look locoed?"

"I plum am," replied Salt Bill.

"W'y?"

"I've gotta de warnin' from dat spook. I'm goin' to whack me bull-team out o' dis joint."

"W'y? Nonsense."

"Nonsense, nuttin!" cried Salt Bill. "Dis hyar game's over. We've lost de best o' our men in dat great fool raid on de paymaster's camp, and now we gits locoed by dat spook. And we ain' got no gold, ner nuttin offen you, Bad Harry."

A grumble ran around the ranks of the watching robbers.

Harry knew that a mutiny was dangerously near.

His first inclination was to kill Salt Bill at once.

But he remembered that he was short of men; would need every man he had to cope with the unknown danger that stalked now so near all the bandit band in the guise of a marvellous apparition.

So he determined to try and mollify the men without recourse to his deadly revolver.

"Youse right," Bad Harry replied. "Dis game's low down as it stands, an slow fer us all; but I want yer to know dat we'll hev a division o' dat gelt here in a few nights. See?"

A burst of great applause interrupted Bad Harry.

"Dat's de stuff," cried Salt Bill. "Yer in it, old chap, every time, an we is wid yer, you bet. Day ain't notin' dat I won't face, dead or alive, wid me pocket full er gold pieces."

The sentiment was again wildly applauded.

"Den, youse all git, and don't talk o' jumpin' dis yar claim till we gits de gold together. Den youse can skip if youse wants to do it, all of youse."

"Git us dat gelt and we'll stick by ye fer ages," cried Salt Bill, and Bad Harry saw that without a blow being struck the mutiny was over, and his men once more in his control.

He hustled things after that so that no one would have a chance to think.

"Youse git outen hyar," he cried, "and come back, say, tomorrer night 'bout dis time. See?"

The bandits started to separate about the hamlet of Marysville, when Bad Harry halted them.

"One ting more," he cried, "let Long Dan, Old Salt Bill, and Nail-Tooth, stay wid me here. I needs a guard, since dat spook broke into dis game."

"Like have Wild-Bear, too," cried Nail-Tooth, the latter Indian being the close friend of the speaker, and

if anything was meaner, dirtier, more blood-thirsty and treacherous, than even Nail-Tooth.

The selected men drew near, and began talking among themselves while the remainder of the gang hurried away.

It had now grown to be broad day.

The sun was rising in the east, and the life of the great North-West was just awakening all about them.

"Time we broke up," cried Bad Harry, "youse meet me here tonight at ten o'clock. Deres inside work fer ye all."

But the words had not left his mouth when there was a terrible cry echoing down the lonely trail that led toward Bald Mountain, which, as if asleep, towered high in the air over the quiet town.

"What's dat?" growled Bad Harry.

"Murder! Murder! Dead! Murder!"

A man frantically spurring his horse along the trail, yelled these words.

CHAPTER V.

OLD SPLINTERS AT WORK.

"Whar did thet thar, infarnal young paymaster, Tom Bristow, go to," was what Old Splinters asked himself time and again, after the discovery that his chief, and companion was missing.

Old Splint, as he was usually called, was in a quandary.

He could not understand how Tom had left the hut, where he was being nursed back to life, in his weakened state; or could he understand further why he had wandered away, unless in high delirium—and did not know what he was doing.

But it never entered the head of Old Splint to do anything but make a careful search of the surrounding country, and although he tried every possible point of the compass from the hut, not a sign of Tom Bristow could be found.

"Had the willies, shore," thought Old Splint. "Fever willies, they's calls 'em here. Why thet thar chap was cut almost ter ribbons. His shot wounds alone otter kill an ord'nary feller, and yit he gits out and gits, and dat's de end o' him, right afore my darned old eyes."

But Splint did not take into effect the fact that Tom Bristow was an extremely strong man, with a splendid constitution; that he had lain for weeks in the gloriously clear air of the North-West, and there was everything to help him to recovery; even to the absence of some of the modern exponents of the art of surgery and of nursing.

Splint did not let anyone know of the disappearance of Tom Bristow.

He had a delicacy in letting the world know of the fact that Tom, whose splendid fight had made him a hero in the hearts of the many hard fighters that made up the complex life of Marysville, was missing.

"Caynt go fer to let 'em all in on dis," Splint would say, when musing over the queer mystery, to his friend and companion, Black Sarah, his cat, whose yel-

lowish green eyes seemed quite to understand the quandary his master was in. "Too many evil tongues about ter git bizzzy wit Tom's strange vanishing man act—no, I'll keep her all to meself."

So when anyone asked him how his patient was, far up in the lonely cabin on the hillside, half way between Marysville and the Dacotah No. 6, Splint would reply, "he's a gittin' on fast; he'll-er be out in er few days."

Days thus passed.

Every nook within twenty miles in a large circle had now been searched by Splint.

He began to feel sure that in the craze of fever from his wounds that Tom Bristow had wandered away into the woods and had laid down in some sheltered nook and died, alone, unseen; and probably his body would never be found.

"In them mountains," thought Splint, "I could bury a rigiment of redcoated soldier boys, and no one ever would see any of 'em in a year of Sundays"—which was a pretty long time, as a year of Sundays are rather scarce in the calendar of the years.

On one of his searching excursions Splint ran across Wilson East, the resident manager for the corporation of Butterfield, Hicks and Butterfield; and who, also, was known all over Dacotah No. 6, as "Old Man" East.

East was a tall raw-boned miner, who knew all about gold mines, and a lot about human nature, having employed labor about mines for a great many years.

"What's up?" he briefly asked Old Splint when he got within hailing distance of the old miner.

"How did you know was anythin' up?" surlily asked Splint.

"Must be something up, or why are you out here instead of nursing Tom Bristow?"

"Tom Bristow don't need no nussin'."

"Why not?"

"He's gone."

"Gone—not dead?"

"Naw."

"Then if he isn't dead, where has he gone?"

"I dunno."

"You don't know?"

"Naw."

"Why don't you know? Isn't it your business to look after Tom?"

"Shore. But taint my bizziness to look after no man wot is wid ye one minute, and gets losted from your sight when ye turns round to fill yer pipe with baccy."

"Is that what has happened to Tom Bristow?"

"Shore as yer born."

"Tom is, then, really missing?"

"Surest thing yer know."

"How long has he been missing?"

"'Bout ten days."

"Now begin at the beginning and tell me all about it?"

Old Splinters had been half dead for want of some one to unbosom his troubles upon and now that East asked him to tell his strange tale, he spoke fast enough to keep the superintendent busy following his trapper-like mode of expressing himself.

When he had finished the superintendent asked a few words in his usual quick way.

"Have you searched after Tom Bristow?" he began.

"Shore."

"How far has the search been made?"

Old Splint described the great arc of the circle which he had swung around in his vain search.

"Then, unless Tom is dead, he has skipped."

Old Splint shuddered.

This was just the construction he knew the world would put on the absence of Tom, even in spite of his gallant fight to preserve the half million dollars in gold.

"I'm sorry Tom has skipped," simply added East. "If he has skipped when out of his head, he ain't to blame. But if he has skipped with his knowledge box working, the town of Marysville will say it was a put-up job, that loss of the gold, which he had in charge as paymaster for the three mines on Yath Keyed lake."

Old Splinters nodded with a grave face.

"That's w'y I've kept me tongue still," he cried, "but you and I know Tom Bristow's on the level, and there ain't nuttin' to make us see it any other way."

"Of course, we know it but the world out here—the world of Marysville of all the mines and mining camps in fifty miles—they won't believe that Tom isn't crooked now that he has disappeared."

"I know that too."

Both men shook their heads at each other. They each deeply regretted the absence of Tom Bristow, just then.

"Well, now we know he is gone, we must find him, dead or alive," at length cried East.

"No question o' dat," replied Splint.

The two men then held an extended conversation as to ways and means of finding the missing man.

"You seem to have searched a lot of space, but Tom might have wandered further than we think."

"He was putty weak, and couldn't go fur," replied Splint.

"True but men in fever throes do wonderful things and Tom is a husky lad. I think if I were you I'd make tracks for Bald Mountain top. There you might get on to Tom's tracks. There hasn't been rain or snow in these parts for two months. Any tracks he may have made will be quite plain and easy to follow."

"I'd know his tracks in a hundred and cud foller 'em to the end o' th' world," cried Splint.

"Good! But in this case you won't have to go so far. Now, Splint, keep all this under your hat. Come to see me when you have any news, and above all find Tom. He is a likely boy and I don't want him to get away from us with his reputation ruined for life when he has shown us what one man can do in a hand-to-hand fight with a bandit gang; for between us, I think Bad Harry Hutton's gang did that trick of stealing the half million dollars' worth of gold."

"I'm wid ye," cried Splint. "Dey figured in *the raid on the paymaster's camp*, all right. And I ain't so sure dey ain't behin' this absence o' Tom, eh?"

"I've been thinking of that also—well, it's all up to you. I can't do much but give you advice and cash to keep you goin' till you get to the bottom o' this mystery-like disappearance of Tom. But if Bad Harry and his gang are at the bottom of this thing we will clean 'em out o' this camp in a few minutes, Splint; and you mustn't forget that besides finding Tom, you must try and see if Bad Harry's fine gang of thugs are to blame."

"So long," cried Splint, thoroughly elated now that his side of the case had been taken by no less an authority than Wilson East, for the "super" was a very great man in those parts, where he had the power in his hands of robbing any man in the mines of his job in a moment.

Splint shouldered "Old Kill-em," his long hunting rifle, as he spoke and soon his long, steady steps, slow but sure had put much ground between him and East.

In making a turn of the trail which now had begun to wind up the steep rocky face of Bald Mountain, zig-zagging upward, like a long twisting snake of yellow in the alkali-like soil, Splint saw two men ahead of him toiling up the mountain side.

With the speed of the frightened rabbit, the trapper and miner, jumped into a large field of sage-brush, which like miniature trees, grew in wonderful profusion on every hand.

"Indians," said the old man to himself, and Chipewyans, sure pop. Thieving Chipewyan's, sure pop." The entire performance was a master bit of plains-craft.

In one second, before the Indians could move two steps, Splint had seen them, his keen eye and quick brain, had known they were Indians and he had jumped into the sage-brush and out of sight in a breathless dash of wonderful agility for a man of his years.

"Indians," repeated the trapper.

He looked carefully at his long rifle.

"'Kill-em' is all ready," he softly said.

He also looked at his revolvers poised them in each hand, lovingly fondled each shining barrel.

"Beauties, ain't dey?" he further ejaculated.

Then with his head bent, his body almost in the shape of a curve, he hurried across the sage-brush; keeping so low that no one on the trail could possibly see him, and further not making even a sound and hardly stirring the ground on which he stepped with his moccasined feet.

"This'll give me a chanest to git near to them red-devils," remarked Splint. "I kin then see who dey are."

This was obvious, because he was crossing in a straight line to the point where the trail zig-zagged across a gulch-like depression.

In ten minutes, Splint was safely ensconced in a position of vantage behind a rock.

The two Indians came along a second later.

"By Gosh!" cried Splint, "It's them two thieving Chipewyan's, Nail-Tooth and Wild-Bear."

He spoke truly. The evil faces of the Indians were seen as they walked along engaged in a deep conversation.

Suddenly one of the red men stopped. His rifle bounded to his shoulder.

"What for you do dat?" cried his companion.

There was a dull roar as the piece of the Indian discharged its cargo.

The bullet went hurling away through the clear air to the rock behind which the old trapper and miner lay hidden.

The sharp eye of Wild-Bear had seen the hiding form of Old Splint.

He had aimed at the prostrate man, with deadly intention of murder in his red heart.

Old Splinters saw the action. He heard the dis-

charge, and wondered if the aim would prove true. Would a bullet, quickly tear into his vitals?

The old man rolled over on his side, a second later, his rifle, Kill-'em, clutched in his quivering hand.

With his war-cry ringing over the lonely mountain, Wild-Bear jumped toward the rock to scalp his ancient enemy, Old Splinters.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT THE MURDER MESSENGER TOLD.

With a face convulsed with wrath, Bad Harry Hut-ton jumped forward to receive the messenger who was so lustily crying "murder" as he dashed down the narrow highway that led through Marysville from the Bald mountain trail, which crossed the road a half mile below the village and further down over Grass-hopper creek.

The man came flying along on a pinto mustang, at the utmost speed of the animal.

His face was white as a corpse. His eyes were starting from his head.

Bad Harry saw that he was Billy-the-Kid, a young chap just out of his school days who had been with the gang a few months but who would undoubtedly develop into a trained gun-fighter and bad man in time.

"Murder," again cried the hurrying youth, as he lashed his horse with his quirt and drove his silver-roweled spurs deep into the animal's side.

"What's the matter?" cried Bad Harry.

"Is any one killed?" cried Long Dan, while the others in the party crowded around with fear strained eyes.

The young rider brought his horse to a stop in three jumps that ploughed the ground.

"Matter?" Billy-the-Kid was a picture of astonishment when he said these words. But he continued—"Matter? There's murder, that's all the matter."

"Murder?"

Bad Harry's gun leaped from the holster strapped by a belt about his waist.

The desperado's face was crimson with anger.

He snapped the ugly word, murder, at the youth on horseback in a questioning tone.

"Yes, murder," replied the rider.

"Who is murdered?" asked Bad Harry.

The rider leaned far forward and whispered a word in Bad Harry's ear.

Bad Harry staggered back a pace.

"Are you sure?" he questioned.

"I am," replied Billy-the-Kid.

Bad Harry's face was like a demon as he turned to his companions.

"That's terruble news," he moaned.

"What is?" cried Long Dan, all sympathy, but not knowing just what to sympathize about.

"Fat Ted is dead," replied Bad Harry.

"Dead?" cried Long Dan.

"Yes."

Bad Harry hardly could conceal his tears; a bandit

doesn't usually weep and the rough men about Bad Harry knew that this meant that he would take a dreadful vengeance for the death of his trusted fellow guerrilla.

"How did it happen—gun?" cried Long Dan.

Billy-the-Kid shook his head in the negative.

"Knife?" asked Long Dan.

Again Billy-the-Kid shook his head.

Long Dan was stumped.

There were two ways for a man in the far North to die, with his "boots on," as the vernacular termed, a death by violence, the death that nearly every bad man suffered sooner or later; or naturally in his bed.

Many a desperate man, about to "cash in," would have a fellow desperado remove his boots, so as not to "die with his boots on," this death being a last brand to show that the dead man had been a gun-fighter and a thug.

"If he didn't git shot, by gum and didn't git stabbed, how did he croak?" finally weakly asked Long Dan.

"We don't know," replied Billy-the-Kid, sadly.

"You don't know?" yelled Bad Harry.

"No."

"Why not?" howled Long Dan.

"Listen," cried Billy-the-Kid.

All drew near.

The young rider looked Bad Harry directly in the eye as if hypnotized by the baleful light of death he saw there. He seemed then to forget the fact that Long Dan and other desperadoes were present and to confine his conversation to Bad Harry. The other men kept silent and these two principals threshed out the facts of the death of Fat Ted between them, while all the others hung on their words.

"I was comin' down the big trail from Long hill, that mounts along side of Bald Mountain, you know," began Billy-the-Kid.

"I know—where the Long hill juts up into the mountain like?" put in Bad Harry.

"Yes."

"Go on."

"I seen something a lyin' in the trail as I was a-lopin' along."

"Yes."

"It looked like a big dog."

"Well?"

"I sez to myself, 'there's a big dog that some feller has shot.'"

"Very good."

"Then I sez, 'no, that ain't no dog, that's a man.'"

"Precisely."

"Then I hurries along, like fun, thinkin' it was some feller that had tumbled off his horse."

"I see."

The gang crowded closer not to lose a word, now, of what the two main actors in the frontier tragedy were saying.

"The man was lyin' on his face," slowly continued Billy-the-Kid.

"Yes."

"I jumped off my horse."

"Of course."

"Are you hurt, I sez, quiet like."

"What happened."

"There was no answer to me words."

"Oh! What did you do then?"

"I spoke to the figure again."

"What did you say?"

"Hello, pardner, I sez, are you hurted?"

"Was there any answer?"

"There was none."

"Did you look for blood stains about the body?"

"That was the first thing I thought of."

"Were there any blood-stains?"

"Not a stain. The man was asleep natural-like, it seemed to me. He looked calm and peaceful."

"Did you take any further steps?"

"Yes."

"What were they?"

"I walked all about the fellow and then——"

"You turned him over?"

"I did."

"You found him to be——"

"Fat Ted, one of our band."

A long low whistling sound came from the lips of the listening, awe-struck men.

"How did you think Ted had died, when you first recognized him?"

"I don't know. I knew it was Fat Ted. I knew he was dead but I was plumb locoed and at foist dint know whether I was on me mustang, or a-foot."

Bad Harry nodded. He appreciated his follower's condition.

"Well, tell us the rest of your story?" he cried.

"Then I looked all over Ted's body to see if anywhere I could find what killed him."

"Could you?"

"I looked for a bullet wound first off."

Again Bad Harry nodded.

"Did you find one?" he asked.

"Long Dan, say, you—he asked me that afore?" said Billy-the-Kid.

"I know he did; but I am saying the same question to be sure I remember your answer, just as you gave it?" rejoined Bad Harry.

"There was no bullet wound anywhere on Fat Ted's body."

"Did you examine his body carefully?"

"I did."

"There was no stab wound, I think you told Long Dan, didn't you?"

"Not a scratch on Ted anywhere."

"Are you sure?"

"On his body, I mean."

"There was a scratch elsewhere?"

"Yes, there was a mark about as broad as my finger, under his chin."

"Did you notice the mark carefully?"

"I did."

"What did it remind you of?"

"I don't like to say."

"You don't like to say?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"Nonsense; just explain yourself."

"I hate to."

"Go ahead."

The members of the band with white startled faces drew about the figure of Billy-the-Kid.

They knew that he was about to make some startling announcement.

"W-e-l-l!" began Billy-the-Kid, "It was this a-way. I thought that the mark on Fat Ted's throat, looked to me to be seared like, as if it was made by a red-hot iron."

"The wound looked as if it had been burned in with a red-hot iron?" repeated Bad Harry.

Billy-the-Kid looked around fearfully.

"Yes."

He hardly whispered the words.

"You think the mark on Ted's face was not made by any human hand?"

Bad Harry said these words after glancing carefully at the pallid faces about. "I do. Mark my words, it was a bloody spook that killed Ted."

Bad Harry sneered.

"That's good er'nough ter tell to old wimmen," he cried, "but it's no good story fer us real men, here."

Bad Harry's face was the picture of disgust as he spoke these words to his young employee and then the great bandit chief burst into a roar.

His laughter was a long pealing sneer.

"Don't laugh," cried Billy-the-Kid. "Wait. It's serious. I'm not through my story yet."

Bad Harry grew grave in a second.

"I thought you had quit er talkin'," the bandit chief said, "arter yer had filled us up on moon-shine. Well, spiel er out."

Thus commanded Billy-the-Kid continued.

"There was a note pinned on the breast of Ted."

"A what?"

"A note."

"What did the note say?"

"Here it is—you read it yourself."

Bad Harry read the note. It was written in red ink, as if in blood and it was hardly to be understood for the handwriting was sprawling and un-educated.

"Bad Harry and gang. Youse nit take worning. So, I gits one of yer band who wose a tryin' to git to my home. This feller is Number One."

"I gits me No. 2, soon, if youse don't jump fer the Far Nort."

"THE SPECTRAL RIDER."

The air suddenly seemed charged with a terrible sound it seemed to all the members of the truculent band.

There came the noise of a hurrying host of horses, rustling, bustling, champing steeds; great shouting of riders apparently and then Long Dan leaped up to his full height.

"Look there," his indicating hand pointed to the trail which from where the bandits stood, could be seen plainly winding along the top of a distant hill.

A great white stallion was seen rushing with the speed of the wind along the dizzy height.

His rider was a tall man in pure white. The ghostly horse and rider for a moment was seen dashing along; then it disappeared as if a cloud had encompassed it.

"The Ride of the Spectral Hunt!" gasped Bad Harry. "Ted has been killed by one of the Spectral Riders."

The renegades fell back upon each other in wild confusion.

"Who will be Number Two?" wailed Long Dan.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD SPLINTER'S DISCOVERY.

Old Splinters had not been fighting the blood-thirsty Indians of the Far North for years not to know what

to do when he saw Wild-Bear leaping toward him to scalp him.

The wily old trapper was far from dead.

When he saw Wild-Bear aim at him, he had practiced an old ruse. He clutched his faithful rifle Kill-em in his hand, and rolled to one side, so, just as the enemy fired, Old Splint was not at that particular spot.

So when Wild-Bear leaped over the rock expecting to meet a fallen foe, he came face to face with the steely eyes of the angry trapper.

Wild-Bear was transfixed with surprise.

He had dropped his rifle when he ran to the spot and was only carrying his knife in his hand.

"What good is a knife when a wily white-man has a gun?" thought the Chipewyan Indian, when he caught sight of the old miner.

His speculations were checked, however, to a whisper, when he heard the voice of Old Splint saying in a deadly tone that argued no denial, that he had better drop his knife.

"Drop that knife and get down on your knees," hissed the trapper.

The Indian gave one wild glance behind him.

He had hoped that Nail-Tooth would see his predicament and would shoot the trapper whose steady aim at Wild-Bear was about all the contract he could fulfill. It would have been easy for Nail-Tooth to have shot the trapper then.

But Nail-Tooth was making long tracks for safety.

His flying feet could be seen hurrying away on the horizon; at the rate he was traveling he would reach Marysville in ten minutes, which would be the record for the distance.

So Wild-Bear gave up without further struggle.

He dropped his knife and sank to his knees.

With Kill-em at full cock Old Splint kept his weather eye on the treacherous Indian until he has possessed himself of his knife; then he motioned the red man to a seat.

"We will have a little confab," Splint cried. "You red son of a gun, you hold yer hands high or I'll shoot yer full er holes."

The Indian obeyed.

"What's yer pisin name?" asked Splint.

"Wild-Bear."

"Tame-Bear, just now."

The Indian vouchsafed no reply.

"Treat me woids wid scorn, eh?" laughed Splint.

"Who was the other red devil that is legging it there on the horizon?"

"Nail-Tooth."

"I'd nailed him if he had gotter in shootin' line o' Kill-em, here," cried Splint. "Now ye two plug-uglies are members o' Bad Harry Hutton's band, eh?"

The Indian again made no reply.

"Silence gin's consent," allowed Splint at this point.

"Now where were ye goin'?"

The Indian remained passive.

Slowly Kill-em came into line with the red brow of the half savage and there was something in the un-winking stare of Splint that told the red man it was time to stop his present line of conduct.

"You jist answer me and do it blankety quick," cried Splint to the mute interrogation of the Indian's eyes.

"I no savez."

Thus the red man told Splint in Indian fashion that he did not understand his last question.

"Yes, you savez, you mutt," cried Splint. "Answer my question."

"We goin' top Bald Mountain," said the Indian.

"Going top Bald Mountain," mimicked Splint. "Why?"

"Go Spectral. Hunt place."

"What?"

"Go Spectral. Hunt place."

Splint took a long breath. It was wonderful to him that an Indian whose superstitious fears were, in his mind, pretty certain to keep him away from the dense forest-like spot in the tip-top of Bald Mountain, where there was so much of mystery in existence, should plead guilty to attempting a trip up to the fatal spot.

Splint thought a moment.

The tales of Bad Harry's gang of outlaws came quick to his mind; now what had the band to do with the glen called the Home of the Riders of the Spectral Hunt and if the band had some inner knowledge of events at the haunt of ghostly riders, why, and where did this Indian learn the facts?"

Splint determined to further question the Indian.

"Why did ye want to go to the glen of the Spectral Hunt?" continued the trapper.

"Ugh. Much gold."

"What?"

"Heap, much gold."

"You mean there is much gold there?"

"Yep."

"How do you know?"

"I know."

"How?"

"I hear."

"Oh, you heard?"

"Yep."

"Where did you hear of gold being in the glen of the Spectral Hunt?"

"Me hear, Harry, talkee, to Fat Ted."

"You heard Bad Harry Hutton, tell Fat Ted, another member of the bandit gang I know blamed well, that there was 'heap' gold up there in the glen of the Spectral Hunt?"

"Yep."

"Do you know how much gold is there?"

The Indian shook his head.

"Do you know how the gold came to be put there?"

"Bandit gang, heap put gold there."

"When?"

"Dunno."

"But I must insist on your tellin' me all you know."

"Dunno much. Heard Bad Harry tell Fat Ted, to go glen, get gold, heap much and bring to him."

"Do you mean me to understand that the chief of the pirate gang, Bad Harry Hutton, has sent Fat Ted, one of his band, up to the glen of the Spectral Hunt, to get some gold belongin' to the gang, which is there, and that the gold is 'heap much'?"

The Indian nodded in the affirmative.

"When did you hear this?"

"Some sleeps ago—dunno how long; but me heare."

"So after you got the knowledge by eaves-droppin' you then enlisted Nail-Tooth, and got him to help you go up to the haunted glen to try and get the cash for yourselves?"

"Heap cash, make Indian rich, he great white man then. Ugh!"

Wild-Bear's face was a study in delight for the good things of this world that riches bring, when he spoke.

Old Splinters was happy at the news he had heard but he could not understand what it all meant until he had turned the entire matter over in his mind from time to time.

He went over all the facts he knew and welded them to some of his suspicions and the result was a shrewd understanding of all that had happened in the ranks of the bandits, so far as the gold was concerned.

"That gold is the loot of the paymaster's camp," muttered Splint to himself. "It is the result of the *mid-night alarm*. The bandit gang under the lead of Bad Harry Hutton got away with the half million in gold coin but there has not been time to divide the coin among the gang's members. I wonder now, where they buried the treasure?"

The more Old Splinters thought of the problem the more convinced he became that he was right.

"By George," he at length cried. "The robbers have buried that loot and this Indian knows where. I am going to try and get the truth out of him—if any one can get the truth out of an Indian."

As he cogitated Splinters began asking questions of Wild-Bear again.

"Do you know where the loot is buried?"

"Nope."

"Haven't you any idea?"

"Nope."

Old Kill-em began to grow restive in the brown hands of the trapper.

Sensitive to impressions Wild-Bear saw that it was again time to put up his safety umbrella; this white man was quick to make his meaning clear with his long, hard-shooting rifle; and Wild-Bear knew that Old Splinters knew how to shoot with unfortunate accuracy.

"I tell!" he cried, giving in quickly under the conditions facing him.

"All right, tell."

"I know cash he buried—*cached* under tree where dead man's head he laugh, ha, ha, like."

"You know the treasure is buried underneath a tree on which there is a grinning skull."

"Yep."

Old Splinters wiped the growing moisture from his brow; grinning skulls of dead men in the glen where the dreaded Home of the Riders of the Spectral Hunt was situated, was enough to make even his nerves of steel quiver.

"How do you know all this?"

The Indian grinned but only by a facial contortion that showed one tooth, white, ugly like that of a panther.

"You need not grin at me like the skull up in the glen," cried Old Splint.

"I no grin but tell truth. Bad Harry he say all dat."

Old Splint was betrayed into talking pretty good American-Canadian to the Indian in his excitement, for he harked back to his school days years before in old Vermont, as he spoke; but as soon as he was sure of his ground he relapsed into his usual trapper-mine style of talking and laughed with much pleasure as he thought of the success of his questioning.

"By Gosh," he thought. "I'm going to get back that cash or lose a darned fin in the attempt. Gosh, but I'm in the pie for fair, say, but ef only Tom Bristow would show up, we'd pull dis trick down, hans' runnin'."

The continued absence of the young paymaster was a mystery.

In spite of Old Man East's money; in spite of all that it could buy to aid in the search; in spite of its free expenditure, in spite of the unaided effort of Splint himself, not a single trace of Tom Bristow could be found.

Whether he was alive and wandering in the forest in a half crazy state, subsisting on nuts and roots; whether he was dead in some far off gulch to which he had wandered, was unknown to all his friends still.

He was out at sea; he had not yet reached any port of missing men.

But here was something worth the winning, Old Splinters thought.

The million dollar loot of the bandits taken from Tom Bristow after the wonderful fight for it made by its guardian Tom Bristow, was now practically in the hands of Old Splint. It was secreted where he could lay his hands upon it.

"Ghostly skull can grin forever," thought Splint, "but I will get that cash back and will find Tom Bristow if he is alive and will hand it over to him; if I can't find him back it goes to the company that owns it. When Tom gets it back it goes, of course and quick as he puts his hands on it."

Old Splint had carelessly stepped aside as he ruminated.

When he looked up he found that Wild-Bear had disappeared.

Old Splint rubbed his eyes.

He saw the Indian was running away from him and had with leaps and bounds made straight across the gulch, and was now on the top of the adjacent hill, had leaped upon the trail that wound around it, and was making for the sides of a steep canyon that ran along the side of the hill at this point.

The canyon was one of the steepest in that part of the country.

Its rocky sides plunged down for thousands of feet; in the bottom of the awful declivity ran a swift mountain stream.

"The dog will get down that canyon side by leaps and bounds. An Indian can run where a white man would dare hardly to creep. It's a long shot but I guess Kill-em can carry there."

As Old Splint cried these words his long barreled rifle settled into position.

But before his agile finger could press the trigger, from out of the air, apparently, sprang a wonderfully powerful white stallion.

On its back it bore a tall, white clad figure.

Old Splint's gun wavered in his hand. He fell back against the rock behind which he had so recently sheltered himself from the weapon of the Indian renegade.

"Good Lordy," cried Splint, "the Spectral Rider!"

The Indian saw the awful apparition at the same time.

A terrible shriek escaped his lips.

The white stallion bore down upon the Indian at a thundering lope.

The Indian gave one panic stricken yell.

He launched himself over the beetling walls of the canyon.

His foot slipped.

With a blood curdling cry, the unfortunate Indian missed his footing, and even where he stood Old

Splint could hear the body of the red man go whirling down the awful precipice to his death.

The Spectral Rider plunged forward to the very edge of the cliff.

Was he also going to jump into the terrible depths? No.

On the margin of the gulf the stallion was seen to stop in his mad race.

His fore-feet were almost over the cliff; he stopped, stood like a statue for one terrible second; then turned and darted up the trail at his same mad speed.

A voice that seemed to Old Splint to come from the sky trailed behind through the clear air.

"Two!" cried the mournful voice of the Spectral Rider.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD MAN EAST TAKES A HAND.

"You certainly have made a great discovery, a grand one."

Old Man East, superintendent of the Dacotah No. 6 mine, spoke these words to Old Splinters, who had hurried back from the terrible scene he had witnessed, after looking down into the depth of the dreadful canyon where he could see, lying by the stream that meandered through it, the still, bloody, lifeless form of the Indian, Wild-Bear.

Old Splint's first thought had been to hurry back to the mine and tell East of his discovery.

He found East at the bottom of a thousand foot shaft in the mine.

A gang of men were shoveling reddish ore into a huge bucket that when filled was hurried up by a chain windlass to the top of the ground, where, as he looked up, Splint could see a little round circle of shifting pale light.

Other men with lanterns on their hats were to be seen clambering up and down wet, sticky, dirty ladders along the sides of the shaft, their presence being noted by tiny candles that glowed in the pitchy darkness.

"We must get up to that spook glen as soon as we can," added East. "The gang have buried their treasure there at the foot of the tree underneath the grinning skull of which the Indian told you. They won't wait long to try and get the gold. It's the first man there that will get the loot."

"Hadh't we ought to take a posse from the miners?" asked Splint.

This idea seemed such a good one that for quite a time East hesitated.

"It would be better to do it, I think," he said, "but after all I hate to do it. The gold is a fearful temptation to any man and the boys while they are all honest, might get locoed by the yellow stuff—well, do you think we can pull this thing off ourselves, alone?"

"Shore."

"Why?"

"You have a repertition fer being some fighter," cried Splint.

"W-c-l-l, yes, I suppose so," replied East.

He smiled as he spoke, for dealing with the crowd of rough men at Marysville the superintendent had figured in many a swift gun-fight and had always got "to his gun fust" as the miners expressed it when telling of his deeds of prowess.

"I have fit some too," added Splint.

East winked at Kill-em, the trapper's trusty rifle which he carried clear down to the depths of the vast mine with him.

Splint laughed.

"Shore," he said, "I've done some fitin' wid dis old gal—yes, 'super,' you en me can take care of dat gang, like, I think."

The two men shook hands cordially and then East led the way up the long stretch of twenty-foot ladders to the cool summer air at the top of the shaft.

"A gold mine is a good thing ter own, ef she's a producer," remarked Splint when he got to the top of the shaft and drank in the clear, pure air, "but she ain't no great shakes to work in as an im-plo-y-ee."

East nodded.

"It's queer," he said, "but somehow I don't feel that all this ore here we are a getting out means riches. To me it's nothing but dirty rock."

"What did yer last run assay?"

"The last time we cleaned up at the mill," replied East, "we took half a million in gold bullion over the hills to Fort Churchill."

"That's going some."

"Isn't it? This mine is a producer, all right."

"Ain't there nothin' but ore out here in dis con-founded country," asked Splint, who was an old miner and had his "gold-nose" still with him.

"Splint, I don't know," the superintendent replied. "I've often had the idea that we ought to find pocket-gold in this country, where there is so much ore, but no one has ever found any."

Old Splint's eyes glistened. Pocket-gold he knew meant sudden riches to the lucky man.

He thought of old Bill Bennett, over in Montana, who found a pocket of gold one morning and in two hours had taken great nuggets worth fifty thousand dollars out of the pocket.

He thought of Tom Sennette, another celebrated seeker after gold who found a pocket of gold that brought him in more than a million of dollars in less than a week.

"This yar country is like enough a pocket country," Splint said after the golden dream he had, vanished. "I'd like to clean up a few pockets."

The superintendent laughed grimly.

"So would we all," he rejoined, "but there's no one hereabouts that has ever found a pocket, so I guess all the gold in these parts is in quartz which we have to dig out by great shafts, crush, in great mills, run through our long process to get the gold—"

"And ye gits lots," cried Splint, "but fer me git me to th' pocket right quick for results."

"Yes," answered East. "You get results quick in the pocket. In ten minutes to one you usually clean up thousands of almost pure gold."

The two men looked at each other and after awhile laughed.

"The lure of gold, eh?" lightly remarked East.

Splint nodded.

"There's plenty some o' the camp'a's gilt up thar

in them haunted spots—let's git and see ef we can't clean up that thar pocket, eh?"

"You lead the way," answered East.

In a few minutes the two men were out from the mine, steadily climbing the hills that rose, and rose higher and higher, until they at length ended in the greater Bald Mountain.

East and Splint, armed to the teeth, hurried along the trail until just at dusk they began the final steep ascent to the Home of the Riders of the Spectral Hunt.

"Pretty steep," cried East.

"You bet," answered Splint.

"The road looks to be choked up with snow," East added as he looked ahead.

"It's allers snowin' up hyar," replied Splint. "Old Baldy ain't lettin' us fellers ever have an easy trip up hyar."

The men toiled onward.

The trail, now, was no wider than a tiny cow-path.

The snow was many feet deep, both men could see.

It was hard work ploughing along through it and the two men sank up to their arm pits in their endeavor to progress.

"Ahead here I see a big rock, and it's almost across the trail," cried East. "Let's hurry to it and rest."

"We kin look downward on the glen whar the Spectral Riders gather," whispered Splint, in the uncouth language of the trapper.

"Hope there isn't any of the riders there," whispered East.

It was now quite dark.

The snow made patches of strange shapes, like unquiet ghosts on every hand.

The men looked at each other with paler cheeks than either had worn in many years; each would have faced any human enemy undaunted but this fight with the inner fear blanched each cheek.

"Say, I don' like dis game, up hyar," whispered Splint, who dropped behind East and trailed along with lagging steps.

"Neither do I," returned East, who hated to go ahead and equally hated to have Splint see that he was afraid.

"Try fer that there rock."

Splint indicated the great bolder which could be seen sticking out of a big heap of snow as he spoke.

The men hurried to this vantage place.

They climbed up to the top of the boulder.

When they reached the top, as if their arrival had made a signal for the event, there came on the night air a low rumble like distant thunder.

"Great Scot," cried East, "What's that?"

He grasped Splint's arm as he spoke.

"Thunder," cried Splint, whose face was ashen.

"Thunder up here in this land of eternal snow, nonsense," replied East.

"But et was thunder."

"By George, it sure was."

"Thar it is again."

Old Splint spoke truly.

Again there came a long, low muttering, dead, deep roll of a thunder clap.

The two men grasped each other's arms.

A vivid flash of lightning seemed to encircle the en-

tire glen and die in great purple, orange and green circles on the far horizon.

The two men looked down into the glen which the vivid light threw out in wonderful distinctness.

They saw a tangle of short fir trees, a waste of under thicket of spruce, stunted and gnarled trees; and in the very center of the glen, in the midst of the wild tangle, they saw a blasted tree.

"Thet's th' blasted tree I was er tellin' yer about," softly said Splint through his fear-chattering teeth.

East nodded.

Another vivid burst of lightning came, and the two men saw distinctly before them, on the top of the tree a grinning human skull.

Great fear drops massed themselves on East's face.

"That's the grinning skull you told me about," he cried. "we are here near the Home of the Riders of the Spectral Hunt."

"Sure, and look, oh look thar!"

Old Splint pointed to a moving form that seemed to be hurrying through the haunted glen.

"What is it?" asked East in a suffocated tone.

"Looks like a big bar—no 'tain't a bar."

"It's too big for a bear."

"What is it then, er moose?"

"Not big enough for a moose."

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know, but look—"

East pointed his finger at the place where the great bulk could be seen moving back and forth.

The shape quickly whirled hither and thither.

"It's a horse," whispered East, in consternation.

"A big white stallion, eh?"

"Yes."

"I thought as much. It's ther stallion wot's been hurrin' after Bad Harry's gang; it's the steed of that thar Spectral Rider."

"Yes, and there is the rider."

The two men looked with fear troubled eyes.

They saw a figure in white striding backward and forward.

The figure was that of a man.

He strode about his restless horse; he seemed to float in the air, as the hoofs of the impatient beast struck the earth.

There came another vivid flash of lightning.

"Good God, look at that!" cried East.

The ghostly figure was standing directly beneath the human skull and was mocking it.

The living men could see the white wraith shaking its fists at the dead grinning skull.

The snorts of the white horse could be heard where they stood.

Flashes of lightning seemed to play about the glen; the long low rumble of distant thunder sounded. There came a horrible crash.

Before its dread concussion had ended, East and Splint, two panic stricken fear-speeded men were tearing back down the trail.

For they had seen the mammoth stallion, and the Spectral Rider, hurrying toward them on the speed of the wind.

"Run, he'll git us," cried Splint.

"He is right behind us, I can run no faster," yelled East, but at the same time dashing madly onward in his wild attempt at escape.

CHAPTER IX.

"NUMBER THREE."

A solitary figure, sinister, huge, and truculent was meanwhile nearing the fateful glen.

But it was approaching with stealthy tread, like a wolf in search of its prey, or like the sneaking coyote of the Far North, each step being carefully planned so that there would be no rolling of earth backward down the steep hill.

When nearly to the top of the hill that led to Bald Mountain the solitary figure paused.

It could be seen to be carefully examining its weapons.

Every now and then, in the gloom of the early night it peered about as if in search of something.

While the waiting figure stood silent, and narrowly looking hither and thither, a second solitary figure was wending its way up the mountain, but at an angle removed from where the first figure was toiling, and quite away from the trail down which East and Old Splint were dashing for dear life's sake pursued by the Spectral Rider.

At length the first figure continued on its way but at an angle that by the time it reached Bald Mountain's top, would carry its path into that being made by the second lonely figure.

Just within a few hundred feet of the haunted glen, the two figures met.

Two hands grasped two revolvers.

The men were looking into the gloom with staring eyes trying to make each other out.

"Thet you, Harry?" cried the taller, and the figure first to arrive at the fateful spot.

"Yes."

"It's me."

"Long Dan?"

"Yes."

"Come nearer, Dan."

Dan softly plowed through the deep snow, to where the other man stood, and then Bad Harry Hutton, and Long Dan Jessup, the chief leaders of the Hutton bandits' gang, dropped their hands from their respective weapons, and stood at ease, and began talking to each other in the short sentences these men of blood affected.

"Hev any trouble gittin' hyar?" asked Bad Harry.

"Naw. Did yah?"

"Naw."

"How far are we from the gold?"

"'Bout half a mile."

"Whar's the spot?"

"Whar yer see that thar blasted tree a stickin' up its head?"

"That feller wots a towerin' above the other trees?"

"Sure."

"Infernal spooky place."

"Sure. Ain't scared are ye?"

Long Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"By thunder," he cried, "I don't know yit whether I'm scart er not."

"I know how I feel," whispered Bad Harry.

"How?"

"Plumb scart."

"Are ye?"

"Shore. This a huntin' gelt wid a lot er spooks a guardin' it, ain't wot it's cracked up ter be."

"But pard, we've got ter get the stuff. De gang's gettin' whar dey wont stand no more foolin'."

Bad Harry nodded.

"Sure," he muttered.

"Ef we don't come over wit some stuff termorrer, you en me'll hev to do some shootin' ter keep the gang from shootin' us?"

"Yer bet."

"It's a case o' git that thar gold up hyar, spooks er no spooks, er to git shot by our own men."

"Sure."

"Now I'm plumb scart myself, but I ain't scart er them thar spooks up hyar as much as I am of the gang down thar."

The speaker made a sweeping gesture as he spoke toward the far off lights of Marysville which could be seen twinkling way down in the valley over which towered the great mountain upon which they were standing.

"Sure."

"Now the only way ter git to thet gold ye burried up thar is ter git to it?"

Bad Harry nodded.

"Now I've got er plan."

"Spit it out."

"Yer stand hyar and watch thet no one comes."

"Sure."

"Ef they do come—anyone I mean from thar down Marysville way, I want yer to not try to warn me, but ter turn loose yer gun; let 'em hev it hard. W'en I hyar them shots o' yourn, I'll pike fer the town, cross-lots, see?"

"Yes."

"En I'll meet yer at the Dirty Spoon in Marysville."

"Yes."

"En we kin fight it out wit de gang, eh?"

Bad Harry nodded.

"Wot yer goin' ter do if no one comes?" he asked.

"I'll git the lay o' the land up thar."

"Yes."

"Then I'll jump back hyar, and put yer wise."

"Oh."

"En then we'll go up tergether and dig up the gold, and carry it back between us."

"Cayant carry it all ternight."

"We'll come up termorrow night agin."

"Ah."

"We kin carry it all in erbout two nights?"

"Guess we kinder kin."

"Er we kin git it ouden th' glen, and cache it somewhere else ternight and git back arter it termorrow."

"Sure. We kin git it ouden that ther' spook glen."

The two bandits then took great swigs of whiskey from a giant's flask that Long Dan produced.

"Now look ter yer weepins," he at length cautioned, "Yer may need 'em any minnit."

Bad Harry did so, but as he stood watching the same performance on the part of Long Dan, he suddenly spoke.

"Why are yer goin' alone up thar?" he asked as he waved his hand toward the hunted glen.

"Cause ef I gits mine thar, ye kin git back ter the gang and fix things better than ef you were left up thar?"

"Say, Dan yer all right," muttered Bad Harry. "But yer better be keeful."

"Shore I'll be just as keeful ez I kin, but poddner, yer knows the feller thet got Fat Ted, sez 'No. 1,' jest as he gits Ted."

"Yes."

Bad Harry's teeth were chattering with fear and cold.

"An then," he added, "w'en that thar feller gits the Indian, I'll bet he yells 'No. 2.'"

"Thet's wot I heern tell he did yell. Nail-Tooth, was a hidin' w'en Wild-Bear goes over inter that horrible canyon, right whar he hearn everythin'."

"Wot did he hyear?"

"He sez he hearn th' ghost wot was a chasin' Wild-Bear, yell 'No. 2,' w'en the Indian sails down over inter de canyon ter his death."

"Gosh!"

"Sure as yer born."

The two men crept nearer to each other when the grewsome tale was told.

They wanted to feel that another human being was near in all the awful desolation about them, and with the terrible glen of the Spectral Riders so near at hand.

"Well, we can't er fool hyear much," at length cried Bad Harry, "So long."

"So long," cried Long Dan cocking his revolver as he pulled it from his belt and creeping up over the snow toward the gold looted in the raid on the paymaster's camp.

Bad Harry dug his feet deeper into the snow, and in turn cocked the magazine rifle he had slung over his shoulder when he left Marysville.

The arsenal he stood now ready to turn against human being or spook, for with familiarity in the grewsome scene about him, he had begun to regain his courage, and was in a trice no longer panic stricken with fear, but had become the deadly dangerous leader of the renegade band, in which he had fought himself upward with a red tide of blood about his ever advancing step.

The minutes crept along.

Still no sound came from the vicinity of the haunted glen, where Long Dan by this time must be at work.

"He must have reached the glen—I ought to hear the sound of the spade which I told him was secreted in the bushes right near the buried treasure. Listen, and I will hear the muffled strokes of his spade."

Thus thought Bad Harry.

But no noise reached his ear although he strained every nerve in his anxiety to hear the welcome sound.

The far cry of a timber wolf calling to its mate sounded on the ears of the baffled bandit; that was all.

Above him a solitary shooting star made a brief pathway in the sky of whirling fire.

It vanished.

The silver darkness of a moonless Far North-West night settled back about him as he still awaited a sound from Long Dan.

Ten minutes; twenty minutes, half an hour thus passed.

No welcome sound of the return of the wanderer reached Bad Harry's ears.

His blood began to freeze in his veins. His face was pale. His stiffened hand could hardly hold his revolver.

Still he awaited the signal; but no signal came.

"Something has happened to Long Dan," mused the bandit. "Or, maybe, I am too far away and he is so

carefully at his work of digging up the treasure that I can't hear him."

With stealthy steps Bad Harry began moving toward the fated glen.

He could see it lying dark, mysterious, grim, with deadly import in its sullen blackness right before him.

But where was Long Dan?

Not a sound betrayed the presence of the missing renegade.

Softly Bad Harry crept nearer and nearer to the glen.

Still there was no sign of the missing man.

"What was that?"

The words came hissing through the set teeth of the frightened man.

A long, low peal of thunder crept down from the glen.

Bad Harry's face was as white as the snow about him.

"My God!" the bandit cried in agony, "look there! What is that horrible shape swinging there? Is it—no, it can't be Long Dan?"

Now no longer fearing man or ghost, the bandit dashed forward toward the dread shape, firing his mighty revolver as he did so; the loud explosion of each cartridge as it sounded, came high and clear above a sullen peal of thunder; but the horrible figure right ahead gave no answering shots.

For, hanging by the neck, dead and cold, swinging in helplessness, Bad Harry Hutton saw the dead form of his friend and bandit companion, Long Dan Jessup, whose distorted face told of the horrible agony in which he had ended his career of crime.

On the dead bandit's breast, rudely shaped in white chalk, Bad Harry saw this—

"NUMBER THREE."

CHAPTER X.

EAST AND OLD SPLINT COMPARE NOTES.

"Are you alive?"

"I don't know—yet."

These two sentences escaped from the lips of Old Man East, and Old Splinters, the trapper, and superintendent of the famous mine, Dacotah No. 6, respectively as they sat up in a snow bank, at the foot of Bald Mountain, just where the trail began to dip downward out of the snow line.

"Whar's thet feller?" continued Old Splint.

"What fellow?"

"The Spectral Rider."

"I don't know, and I don't want to know where he went—do you think I am in love with ghosts so that I can't live without 'em?"

Old Splint roared.

"My," he went on, "thet ghost rid a mighty fine hoss; but did ye ever see such a whopper of a hoss?"

"I was running so hard I didn't stop to look at the horse; what kind of an animal was he?"

"Er big white stallion. I never in all me life seen such a big white hoss."

"Oh."

"He was a snortin' foam an' fire, thet was yards long."

"What?"

"Yes, sir, why, hope I may die, but 'e wos."

"Was he a going fast?"

"Never seen a hoss skin so in all my life."

"But why didn't he catch up with us if he was going so fast?"

"He did."

"What?"

"Yes, he did."

"The horse caught up with us?"

"Sure."

"If he did catch up with us how is it we are alive?"

"I'll tell yer. Ye know w'en we started ter run, you wor ahead, agoin' some and I was behind a goin' some, but not a goin' as strong as ye wos, 'cause yer some years younger nor me—see?"

With a smile East nodded.

"So I seen yer a goin' some and I sez ter meself, 'ef East a keeps up thet gait he'll hit Marysville in erbout ten seconds more."

"Sweet Marysville being just at that moment about three miles away, which would be some record to make; three miles in ten seconds."

"I didn't say yer wos a goin' ter git thet record, but I sez thet at the gait yer first hit up yer would er made the distance easy in thet time."

"Oh. Then I didn't keep my stride."

"Yer did not, fer just as the Spectral Rider was right on top o' ye, yer foot slipped and yer comes down on th' back o' yer neck, and ye slides down this year trail like as ef yer was some kinder human sled."

"I stumbled and fell, did I?"

"Yer stumbled—some, and yer fell moren some."

"Then I slid down the trail."

"Sure thing."

"Then what happened?"

"The big hoss he was right a-top o' ye then. I seen it all fer I'd fallen inter a big hole o' snow, and I was a watchin' him git ye."

"Nice of you, to watch me get killed; why didn't you shoot?"

"Shoot? Shoot what? A ghost? Yer makes me sick."

"You think it was a ghost?"

"Surest thing yer know."

"What makes you think it was a ghost?"

"Cause as he swept by me, he held his head on the pommel of his saddle right ahead o' him?"

"What?"

"Jes wot I said."

"You mean to tell me the Spectral Rider was a headless horseman, when he rode by you in pursuit of me?"

"Yes."

"You're crazy."

"Not much, East. I tell yer I seen thet sight proper outten me two lamps. Thet feller was a riding arter you with his head in his hands right afore him on the saddle o' his hoss."

"Before him; his head, on the saddle of the white stallion? Man, you're dippy."

"Nope."

The old trapper and miner was so plainly angry at having his statement doubted that East decided to humor him by asking him further questions.

"What else happened?" he queried.

"Ther want no else ter happen. Thet rider, he gits right close ter ye; he leans over, looks right inter yer face, and then, widout a woid, he swings back ter where I was. I gin meself up fer lorst."

"Ye did, eh? Go on, you're getting interesting."

"But the ghost jest jumps over where I was a hidin' easy like and then he swings right straight up er trail, right back to dat glen, whar he vanishes like ther morning mist."

East's face was a study of amazement.

"I can't see if the Spectral Rider chased me why he didn't do me up when he got to me," East ventured.

"F know."

"Why?"

"You know he looked over at yer face, w'en he gits near t' ye."

"Yes."

"Wall, he jest sees then that the 'old boy' has ye marked already, so he sez ter himself, sez he, 'we'll git thet feller anyhow, wots the use o' my botherin' wid him.'"

East made a pass with his fist at Splint, but the trapper managed to avoid it.

"Why didn't the Rider get you, when he had the chance instead of jumping over you?"

"That's an easy one."

"Easy or not answer the question."

Splint drew down his eyelid so that the white plainly showed.

"Come here," he cried.

East obeyed. He peered intently into the old trapper's eye.

"Do you see anything there?"

Old Splint asked this question.

After some study East replied.

"I do not," he asserted.

"Nothing of any color I mean?"

"What color?"

"Green."

Old Splint exploded into a gust of merriment.

East stood staring blankly after him.

"Now, Splint," continued East, "I'm going to tell you why you were not attacked by the Spectral Rider."

"Why?"

"Because the 'old boy' you talk about has no place in his hot weather town for foolish people like you."

It was East's turn to laugh.

But both men were sobered in a moment by a loud cry that hurled itself far up the mountain side.

They looked at each other in alarm.

"Did you hear that fearful shriek?" whispered East.

"Yes," replied Splint.

The two men listened again.

The dreadful cry again assailed their ears.

"Someone is in mortal peril," cried East. "Follow me, Splint! We must see what is the matter."

A tremendous sheet of flame burst from the sky, just as he spoke.

It blinded the two running men.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MARK OF DEATH.

"Long Dan, he dead?"

"Yes."

"Wild-Bear, he dead?"

"Yes."

"Fat Ted, he dead?"

"Yes."

"Who goes next?"

"I don't know—some other member of our gang."

Nail-Tooth, the Indian, and Bad Harry Hutton, were alone in the Dirty Spoon saloon in Marysville, when the foregoing conversation took place.

Bad Harry was a broken man. No longer did he carry himself like a chief of a great renegade band; no longer was he full of battle and ready to meet his foes.

Instead he was hardly able to contain himself for a deadly fear of the future constantly oppressed him.

"I ain't myself, Nail-Tooth," Bad Harry added in a low voice. "I don't know whar to turn."

"Brace up," said the red man. "This is all we can do, now."

"We must do something before long."

"Sure."

"But I don't know what to do."

"Neither do I—'cept get the gold."

"Dat sounds easy, but Long Dan tried; yer sees his finish?"

"If we get gold, we break gang; git, same as warnin', savey?"

"Bet yer life. If I git's me first on me share o' dat gelt, it's me fer the quick sneak."

"Better git, while alive; than stay, dead."

"Sure. But I ain't got no means o' goin'. I ain't got no hoss. I ain't got no grub. I must git the gold to git a grub-stake with."

The desperate plight of the two men was shown in their anxious looks. They were anxious to obey the dreaded warning of the Spectral Rider, but they had no way of escaping.

Without money, without credit, they could not launch themselves out in the dreary waste of the vast North-West country, for thus death was surely their portion.

And to remain meant, equally, sure death.

No wonder the fight was well out of Bad Harry.

"Why not make one more try for gelt?" asked Nail-Tooth.

"By thunder, but I'd like ter, but 'tain't no use. The Spectral Riders are a-lookin' arter the gold. We can't git it ever."

The thought of Long Dan Jessup swinging at the end of a rope, dead, above the buried treasure made Bad Harry shudder as he spoke.

"What we do den?" queried Nail-Tooth.

"I dunno."

"Wot gang say?"

"I dunno."

"What you say to gang?"

"I dunno."

"Can't make plan?"

"No plan to make."

"Naw."

"Gang skin you 'live."

"I don't care."

Nail-Tooth shrugged his shoulders with the red man's acceptance of the decrees of fate without protest, and rose and strolled away, yawning.

Bad Harry, his mind in a chaos, sat with bowed head.

"No hope of getting to the gold," he thought. "The ghostly guardians of the treasure will await us there and kill us one by one as we make a futile grasp at the money; was there ever such a terrible position to be in. Gold enough for us all there under the grinning skeleton of the traitor to our band; and yet so guarded that one's life is forfeit if one dares go near the haunted spot. Curse the luck!"

Soon, the members of the bandit gang began to draw near to their cowed leader.

An aged thief mustered up courage to draw nearer to talk over the situation with Bad Harry.

He expected a flare of temper; but to his surprise Bad Harry was as mild as a dove.

"I'm speakin' fer de gang," cried the cross-examiner, "and we chaps would like to know what we are ter do?"

"Do the best yer can," snapped Harry.

"Wot?"

"Do the best yer can," snapped the bandit chief again, "don't yer know English enough ter make out what I sez?"

As Bad Harry made no effort to shoot, the bandit continued, at length, his cross-questioning.

"Whar's the gold?" he asked.

"Bald Mountain way."

"In that thar haunted glen?"

"Sure."

"How are you going to get the money out o' thet cache?"

Bad Harry's stock of patience ended right here.

"You liver colored son of a pirate," he yelled, "I won't stand for no more o' yer truck. Git, er I'll blow your wits into the middle o' next week."

The order was so like the old Bad Harry Hutton, that the cross-examination brigand, rushed back toward the cluster of other members of the gang, with a white face.

"Who the blank said thet Bad Harry was down an' out?" the bandit whispered. "He's ez full er fight as ever."

This solacing word was passed about the gang quickly.

"When Harry is a fitin'," one man spoke up, "thar ain't no call fer us to do nawthin'. He'll pull the gang over to a good-thing. See?"

This was the general sentiment of all the other members of the bandit crowd.

But while Bad Harry heard the words plainly where he stood, at the same time his heart sank within him.

"My band was fifty strong, ten days ago," he thought. "I can only muster ten men now. Death and desertion is fast dwindling my ranks. Soon, there will be nothing but a memory in the great North-West of Bad Harry Hutton's gang of good gun-men—and I suppose I'll get planted soon; that thar Spectral Rider will git me next."

Nail-Tooth, the Chipewyan Indian, however, had not been idle while Bad Harry was trying to screw up his courage enough to continue the fight to regain the needed gold.

He had seen to it that a committee of three members of the renegade band drew near at this juncture to once more hold a conversation as to ways and means with Bad Harry.

A big, sandy-bearded desperado led the gang of men, who now ventured to draw near.

"Well, Whiskey Blye, what do you and yer side-pardners want?" snarled Bad Harry as the trio approached.

Whiskey Blye stammered a bit, but managed to blurt out that he, and his companions wanted gold.

"Well, so do I," sneered Bad Harry, "but perhaps yer kin tell me how the blankety-blank I kin git to it?"

"Whar is de stuff; we fellers in de gang don't know. It's only ye men, higher up, thet seems ter know where the stuff is hid."

Bad Harry quickly blurted out the hiding place of the money.

Fear perched on every face.

"Wot was ye thinkin' of ter cache the cash in the haunted glen?" Whiskey Blye finally managed to articulate.

"Wasn't thet the safest place fer it?" yelled Bad Harry. "Me en Long Dan cached the money within two hours after the *raid on the paymaster's camp*. It wos whar not a single feller cud find it—perfectly safe in case them Mounted Police got to us on suspicion; but I didn't think this hear demon o' a Spectral Rider wos goin' to git to guardin' the stuff, er I'd not dug no hole in that thar glen."

The bandits then held a meeting at which all of the gang remaining were present, to talk over matters.

After much debate it was decided that Nail-Tooth, was the best man left among the renegades to make a trial for the money.

His wood-craft, knowledge of the country, and his undoubted ability to travel almost unseen, seemed to pick him out from his fellows as the most available member of the band to make a new attempt upon the treasure.

Nail-Tooth made no comment when he was told of the perilous job he had been selected to accomplish.

He looked over his weapons carefully as an Indian warrior should, while the remainder of the desperadoes crowded about him, and gave him much good advice.

"Thar's one thing ter remember, Nail-Tooth," said Whiskey Blye, "Ef yer don't git to the gold yer gang is a dead gang. This is a last cast fer us. We er all broke, and near ter starvation. The raid was er loss fer us in men, in every ting—say, I wisht we hadn't er touched on to it."

Every man present heartily agreed with the speaker.

"Wot's de use o' a kickin' et fate," cried another bandit. "We jest didn't win out on this game—see? Better luck's a-comin'."

Nail-Tooth by this time was ready.

He straightened up, threw his rifle over his shoulder, gave his belt a hitch, and then as he walked softly away on his moccasined feet, the bandits crowded out in front of the Dirty Spoon to watch him as he walked with stealthy steps down the trail toward Bald Mountain, and the glen of mystery.

At the turn of the trail, down upon the Indian was seen to come speeding, the tremendous white stallion.

His ghostly rider was upon his back, seated as grim, as relentless fate itself.

"Look out, Nail-Tooth," roared Whiskey Blye. "The demon rider is behind you."

All saw the Indian stop, look back, whirl about, and try to raise his rifle to his shoulder to sight for a shot, at the horrible figure that came charging upon them.

"Look!" cried Bad Harry, "The Spectral Rider has got Nail-Tooth."

Bad Harry spoke correctly.

The clustered band, with drawn faces, in which terrible fear and dreadful curiosity were mingled saw the Spectral Rider swing to the side of the unfortunate Indian.

The Rider's hand grasped Nail-Tooth's rifle.

It wrenched it from the Indian's grasp.

The ghostly figure was seen to check its horse in its stride, and then there was a flash, a sharp report, and Nail-Tooth wildly threw his hands in the air, and sank to the ground, dead.

"FOUR."

The startled, amazed gang of bandits heard this single word, come floating back to them, before even the report of the weapon which had killed the Indian seemed to have died away and even before the tiny spray of smoke from the rifle had disappeared into the air.

"Who next?" yelled Bad Harry, with a laugh like that of a maniac. "Who next? Who next?"

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE REALM OF DEATH.

"I can not see."

"Neither kin I."

"It seems as if a hot iron had seared my eyes."

"Mine are a burnin' like balls o' fire."

Such exclamations burst from the lips of Wilson East and Old Splint, when they came to themselves, after being literally knocked down by a blinding sheet of flame that sprang from the mound underneath which was buried the treasure in the dread glen of mystery.

"My! that was awful," added East. "I can hardly see now."

"My eyes are getting accustom' ter de light, but Gee whiz, dey aches," replied Old Splint.

"Was there not a tremendous explosion when the flames struck us?"

"You bet. The airth rocked."

"But did the flame strike us?"

"Dunno."

"I don't think it did."

"Why?"

"Because if it had it would have burned us alive. It was a white flame you know, and it was tipped with red."

"I can't soy wot it was tipped wit, but it tipped me over, all right."

"No it didn't."

"Why not?"

"There's one lying there beside the treasure mound."

"What?"

"Sutten, as you say."

"I don't twig."

"Hasn't there been several attempts lately to get the treasure?"

"Yes."

"Two men got as far as the grave?"

"No, only one man gits thet fur."

"You're right—it was only one man who got there."

"One man got ter the mound underneath which is buried the treasure, all right."

"Yes. It was Long Dan Jessup."

"And he's thar yit."

"Hanging by his neck. And quite dead, you see."

"Beautiful'y dead, an' I wisht his gang was along side er him."

"All right for that. But you know as well as I do, that Long Dan didn't go into that home of the Riders of the Spectral Hunt without knowing what he was after, do you?"

"Sure thing. He was arter the gold."

"How was he going to get the gold?"

"Dig fer it."

"What with?"

"Oh, sure, he'd need a spade. He'd take a spade up ter th' glen, an' your play is, thet seein' Long Dan is detained thar, so as to speak, he'll hev left his spade behind—"

"And we will use it seeing as he hasn't much use for it—"

"'Cept to bury his self, witch I ain't sure at this writin' he kin do."

"Then all we have to do is to start and go right ahead until we get to that treasure."

"Come on."

"Then it's a foot race to the spot."

The two men darted forward.

Soon they had reached the glen of death and mystery.

The form of tall, huge Long Dan Jessup, was seen swinging in the air, a bloated festering corpse, whose black face, staring eyes, face distorted in the death agony, mutely told of his horrible death.

"Gosh!"

Old Splint muttered these words as his hand swept to his eyes to keep out the dreadful sight.

"He died hard," whispered East, as he drew near to Splint, for the wind was making strange noises in the darkening depths of the glen.

"Thar's the grinnin' skull, behind Long Dan," ejaculated Splint as he pointed a trembling finger at the object, which seemed to be covered now by a pale, shifting light.

"And see, just as I said, right under the skull is the mound beneath which the bandits have cached the loot stolen from Bristow."

"By Gosh, yer right. We didn't need to bring no spade."

In three steps East grasped the spade.

This broke the spell.

"Arter all," cried Splint, "a dead bandit ain't half ter be feared of. Ef either o' these fellers was alive en had a gun in ther' fists, then 'ud be the time ter git

scart. But say, they's on'y dead men, and I ain scart o' no stiff, not yit."

With stalwart arms that worked like piston rods, East soon had quite a hole dug through the center of the mound.

When he was weary Splint took the spade and after ten or fifteen minutes of hard shoveling, Splint gave a cry of delight.

"Me spade's hit sumpin'," he cried.

"What?"

"I dunno."

"Feel about and see what you have hit."

Splint followed the advice.

"It's a big box."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Splint dug hard for a few moments.

Sure enough. There could be seen an end of the box sticking out.

East jumped into the hole.

His eyes were blazing with excitement.

He grasped the end of the box and gave a long pull.

Splint dropped his spade and took hold of the box also.

Both men with heads close together tugged and wrenched with all the power each muscular frame held.

Then upon each head a terrible force descended.

Whack! Crash!

Splint and East curled up like two dry bits of forest leaves and without a murmur of pain, the two men plunged forward upon the gold they had so dearly gained, insensible clods of flesh and blood.

A dark form jumped into the trench upon them, with a horrible yell of angry glee.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE BANDITS.

Splint was the first to recover his wits.

"Where am I?" he thought.

The scene before he was stricken then came back to his mind. He tried to move. But he could not. He saw that he was firmly bound in a manner that made it almost impossible for him to move.

Splint managed to turn his head. He saw that East also was bound hand and foot.

East groaned and opened his eyes.

"What happened?" whispered East in an unsteady voice.

"I don't know rightly. Some how et seemed ter me dat th' sky fell."

"If it did it hit me. How my head aches."

"But I never hearn tell thet the sky cud tie up a feller like this away," added Splint.

He looked down at his bound hands and feet as he spoke.

"I'm tied up pretty well myself," answered East. "Who did it?"

"I did it."

The speaker who had been listening to the two men then whirled into view.

"By hokey," groaned Splint. "Bad Harry Hutton."

"The same," said Bad Harry, as he sat down on the edge of the mound.

"We are prisoners!" cried East.

"You are, very good prisoners ter me, see?" replied the bandit, with a villainous smile.

Splint and East knew that they were now facing death. They were in the hands of the bandits.

"Tried ter git me gold, eh?" cried Bad Harry, as his face flushed with anger. "Tryin' ter do me dirt."

"It's not your gold," answered East.

"Whose the blank is it if it ain't mine?" shouted Bad Harry.

"You stole it."

East turned his head as he spoke and shot a glance of hatred at the bandit leader.

"Wot o' dat? Ef I stole it, it's mine, now ain't it?"

"No more than any plunder belongs to the thief that took it from its rightful owner."

"Aw, shet up. Wot's 'rightful owners' got ter do wit life out here, whar ownership goes wid de man, who drawed the quickest gun," howled Bad Harry.

"It's got a lot of right, even out here," calmly rejoined East. "You're going in wrong, Bad Harry, and I warn you to loosen our bonds and skip quick, for if you don't you will be arrested for the crime of robbing Tom Bristow, the young paymaster."

"Arrest me fer—oh say, yer makes me see red. Ef yer says thet agin' I'll hang ye along side o' Long Dan Jessup, up thar, above our heads. Yer ain't got me in jail yet." There was a blaze of anger in the eyes of Bad Harry. East saw it and shuddered.

"Bad Harry, you are a fool."

"Wot?"

The bandit's eyes were now ablaze with anger.

"I say you're a fool," continued East.

"Why?"

Bad Harry's hand began playing with his revolver.

"Oh, stop bluffing," cried East. "You know what I mean. Of course you can kill me or Old Splint here if you want to. I suppose you hit us over the head, didn't you?"

The renegade laughed grimly.

"Say you fellers was blumb funny," he said. "Ye was so dead in airnest in tryin' to rob me of me gold, thet yer didn't watch out a bit fer yerselves. I creeps up behind yer. Yer were both close together a pulling like a Chinaman at that thar box. I jist clubs me rifle and gin it to ye together, right on yer heads. Say, I tought sure I'd split yer dirty skulls, ye varmits."

"Even if you had, don't you see where you would land?" quietly interjected East.

"Naw."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Ef yer wants to."

"In jail."

"Wot?"

"In jail."

At this point Splint began to warble a little war time song, which ran something like this: "In the prison cell I sit."

The bandit was now almost frothing at the mouth with rage.

But East paid no attention to his anger.

He continued talking along as if he had not noticed the tempest of rage in the renegade's heart.

"You can figure out what I am going to say yourself," went on East. "I know you can kill us both if you wish, but don't you see that I am pretty well known in the North West?"

"Wots thet got ter do with me?"

"Only this—if I am murdered there's millions of money behind the men who own Dacotah No. 6, and they are the kind of men that will spend it all if necessary to avenge me."

"Oh," cried Bad Harry.

"There's something over fifty thousand dollars in that chest there—now what is fifty thousand when it is opposed to millions?"

"I don't understand yer."

Bad Harry was plainly puzzled.

"I'll explain," continued East. "How long will your share of the loot last you in running away from the men my side can hire with their millions?"

Bad Harry's face was somber and meditative.

"You may get away for a month, for a year, for five years but you can't get away forever, and you can't get away at all when your cash is gone; and your cash will go like a dream, while our side have cash enough to go on forever."

"Wot'll happen then?" asked Bad Harry who like most bandits was utterly without a sense of perspective. He had no faculty of looking forward to the consequences of any of his crimes.

"I see wot yer means. Yer means ter hint ter me thet if I kills yer thet yer people will git me ef it takes years ter do it?" Bad Harry finally remarked.

"That's just what I mean."

"And thar's some pretty handy gents wid guns, will stand out ter git ye in memory o' me," said Old Splint.

"Well, gents, I'm goin' ter take a chanst," cried Bad Harry. "I'm going ter hang yer, pretty blank sudden ter the limb thar, where me pardner, Long Dan, is a swinging."

There was no question that Bad Harry meant what he said.

Old Splint turned his head toward East.

"It's us fer the cold, cold grave," he said in a loud, whispering tone.

"Looks that way to me," cried East. "Well, a man can die but once after all."

"A man can live but oncet," added Splint, "which doesn't mean, sport, thet I'm a hankering after this mortal coil to be wound up."

"It's hard to die. There is much that I ought to do before going."

"Thet's wot they all say," put in Bad Harry. "Well, yer a goin' ter die with yer boots on at dat."

Old Splint was seen to be laughing merrily.

"Wot yer laughin' at?" growled Bad Harry, suspiciously.

In answer Splint held up his two stockinged feet; he had covertly removed his boots.

"Hang away, ye blanked bandit," howled Old Splint. "Yer ain't got no bad man ter kill wit his boot on. Yer killing a real gent wit his boots off."

Bad Harry made no reply.

Instead he whistled shrilly.

Several men of his gang jumped down into the hole the two gold-seekers had made.

"Hang them fellers," Bad Harry cried without further remarks.

With joyful shouts the renegades pounced upon East and Splint.

"The hour is about to strike for us," cried East.

"We are both dead men," muttered Splint, as he felt a rope encircle his neck where it was placed by one of the bandits.

"Come on," shouted Bad Harry. "I will soon have my revenge for the hanging of Long Dan thar, when I have seen you two hoboos a dancin' on a rope along side o' my pardner that was."

Three of the bandits threw the rope end over the tree and pulled it so that East was soon standing with a taut rope about his neck directly under the sadly swaying corpse of Long Dan.

Others of the bandits had performed the same duty for poor Splint, who was now placed underneath the skull of the dead traitor bravo, which seemed to grin at him in mocking delight.

East closed his eyes. He expected to be swung the next moment into eternity.

Splint closed his eyes also. He muttered an unaccustomed prayer.

"Jerk em into hell," roared Bad Harry to his followers.

Then East came to himself.

"Dynamite!" he screamed.

"Some one has blown up the entire bandit gang!" howled Splint, not knowing how he had escaped and filled with wonder over the escape of East.

It was indeed true. The bandits had been blown almost to atoms by some one, whom, neither East or Splint could imagine.

Bad Harry Hutton, in some miraculous manner had escaped almost uninjured.

But he was still the gun-fighter, even with his followers lying dead in heaps about him.

He stood half way up the excavation with his revolver in his hand, which he was firing at the figure in white that towered above him.

"The Spectral Rider!" cried Splint, "look, he and Harry are fighting a duel."

East gazed in shuddering wonder.

But in his anxiety, in the terrible fear that beat upon his heart, Bad Harry's aim was wild.

He only had time for two shots, then there came a sharp report from the Spectre; Bad Harry clutched wildly at the air. He fell backward dead.

"FIVE—AND THE GANG TOGETHER."

These were the words that fell upon the ears of East and Splint from the lips of the dread figure in white.

The two frightened men could see right behind the Spectre, the beautiful white stallion.

"Let's run," cried Splint.

"Let's," breathed East.

With tottering steps the two men started to get away from the dreaded shape.

But a well known voice hailed them.

"Here you chaps, what's your hurry?"

The jaws of East and Splint fell as they heard the words, uttered by the supposed wraith.

The figure had thrown back its deadly white cowl.

"It's Tom Bristow, the Paymaster!" said Splint. "East, ain't ye got a hooker in your kit? I'm going to faint."

"Faint and be—well, you know, but let me get my flippers on that chap Bristow. I'll shake his hand off, so help me Don Bob," answered East, who hurried forward, hardly in his right mind.

Yes, it was Tom Bristow, in the flesh, hardy as of yore, grinning with pride at his dreadful work. He wrung the arms of East first, and then those of Splint. He grasped their hands with a hand seemingly made of steel cords, and laughed and almost cried at his success.

The white stallion stood near seemingly to be as happy as the three reunited friends.

"By all that's wonderful tell us about it all," at length cried East.

"There's not much to tell," replied Bristow, "as you see I'm the Spectral Rider."

"You look the part of a bloomin' ghost, all right," cried Splint.

"I've been playing it for some time, eh?" answered Bristow. "When I disappeared from our hut, Splint, it was with no clear idea as to what I was going to do. I knew that there would be many people that would feel that I had, maybe, plotted the robbery with Bad Harry's gang and that stung me to get away alone to think it all over."

CHAPTER XIV.

A RACE WITH DEATH.

The roaring words of Bad Harry Hutton had not died away, and just as the bandit gang were swinging East and Splint into eternity, there came from the sky, apparently, another dreadful roar.

With the sound East and Splint were thrown violently to the ground.

Around them they heard dimly groans, shrieks of agony; a hurly-burly of pain.

As in a dream East saw men's bodies darting through the air, to come down in dismembered heaps.

Three bandits lay still near him, with gaping wounds in their heads. One man ran around whimpering in agony grasping one of his arms, which had been cut off, just how East could not imagine.

He only knew that he felt as if he was gazing on some terrible picture of war.

Other men were trying to crawl feebly away, and ah, what was that?

A tall, white figure loomed over all at the very mouth of the infernal crater.

Something in his hand was spitting fire, with a terrible roaring sound.

With each explosion a bandit seemed to die.

"Sure, you felt about it all just the way I did," rejoined East.

"I went away," went on Bristow, "to try and plan out a campaign to get back the gold and to get Bad Harry and his gang."

"Wall, ye got em," put in Splint. "Looks like a good start yar abouts fer a fust class grave yard."

The dead seemed to grin in appreciation of this grewsome ghostly joke.

"Well, I flatter myself I have succeeded," added Bristow.

"Where did you get that white stallion?" asked East.

"I hoofed it over the mountains to a camp of Indians, whom I happened to know had as its prized possession this fine animal. I bought the horse, paying for it out of gold I had saved from my salary, which I carried about my person in a secret pocket. Then I thought out this idea of taking part in that fearsome old tradition about the Spectral Riders."

"But the sound of galloping horses?" asked Splint.

"Look here," rejoined Bristow as he ran to his horse and took a a queer looking machine from its back. "Listen!"

He whirled the strange thing about his head.

From it issued an exact imitation of hurrying horses whose beating hoofs seemed to be flying through the air above the heads of the wondering friends of Bristow.

"Isn't that a perfect imitation of the Spectral Rider's terrible progress?" asked Bristow.

"Did you make that?" questioned East.

"No. It's an ingenious contrivance of a set of reeds, a bellows and when I added a few of my choice assortments of oaths, yelled a bit in my deepest voice, it has all the sound of the Spectral Hunt when out in the air, as the tradition makes people think is so," answered Bristow.

"Whar did ye git that infarnal machine?" queried Splint.

"It was made by an Indian who owned the white stallion or rather had an interest in it. He fixed up this machine as he said to 'heap scare white man, damp-hools.' I bought it of him, then I got some other dope, such as this white sheet."

"But the thunder?" asked East. "How did you make that dreadful noise when any one came up here in this glen?"

"Oh, that was nothing but a large sheet of sheet-iron, and two thundering big drum sticks. You wait here."

Bristow disappeared in the glen.

Soon there came the terrible roar of thunder. Then flashes of flickering light began to shoot up from the dark spaces in the glen.

"How did ye git them flashes?" cried Splint.

"That's lycopodium; it's the club-moss that grows right in this glen. I dried a lot of it, ground it to a feathery substance, mixed it with common gun-powder and all I had to do was to touch a match to it, and there was your lightning."

"Say, you ought to be a theater stage manager," growled East, "You had us all locoed by your game."

Bristow laughed.

"But thet thar spectral lights thet ye scart Bad Harry's gang wit—how did ye work that game, see?"

"Oh, that was phosphorous. A bit of it mixed with salt, gave the Spectral effect I was after."

"You got the effect all right," put in East, with a wry smile.

"But how about them shootin' stars, them long trails of fire dat ye showed off wen ye visited Bad Harry's gang?"

"That was simply a fuse of gun-powder wet and mixed with salt-peter which I just touched off with a bit of punk I carried in my hand all lighted. So when I dashed away on the white stallion, with all my spooky regalia on, I guess I did have quite a ghostly appearance."

"Yer a wonder," remarked Splint with conviction. "You are de best ghost I ever seen."

"Do you see many ghosts?" asked East.

"I seen this one and he had me scart, sure pop," replied Splint. "Yet how did them marks git on the throat of dat bandit, Fat Ted?"

"Those came from my lasso. I roped him as he passed. He was dead in a second."

When Bristow stopped speaking Splint solemnly held out his hand to him.

"Shake!" he said.

Tom Bristow shook.

"Yer too cute fer these diggins'" went on Splint. "Ef ye wanted ter do it, I tink ye cud turn them gold coins inter red-hot frankfurters, right from old Coney Island. Yer too sharp fer them bandits, and I fear yer too sharp fer poor old Splint."

"Any way," mildly remarked East, "you have broken up this gang of bad-men, something fierce. Did any escape?"

"Three or four I fancy," briskly answered Bristow. "I knew that sooner or later the bandits would make a desperate rally for the gold and I shaped my steps accordingly."

"Es how?" asked Splint.

"Right under the shadow of Long Dan, whom I neatly lassoed and hanged before he knew what had happened to him, I buried a dozen sticks of dynamite and attached a neat little set of wires to the dynamite, which run to an electric battery."

"I see," answered East.

"There was never a moment after I reached the glen and had marked out my plan of campaign that I had not full possession of the gold. I could have dug up the gold unaided and carried it away, any time, but that did not appeal to me. I wanted more than the gold; I wanted the gang and the gold also."

"Yer got yer wisht," growled Splint.

"You bet he did," ventured East.

"I had suffered too much from that gang of murderous thugs to be squeemish as to the way I got my revenge," continued Bristow. "They had tried to murder and rob me. They all but murdered me and they did rob me. So I figured that the only way to fight such a bandit gang was to fight them with their own weapons and pick them off one by one until the time came to get them all at once."

"You got your wish, eh?" slyly remarked East.

"Why not? There was nothing unmanly in killing

that gang the way I did. It was the way they would have murdered me if I hadn't got to it first. But for the purpose of giving them all fair play, I just made up my mind I'd warn them to quit the country."

"That was why you sent the bandits notice to mosey out of the North West?" remarked East.

"Yes."

"T'was a case o' git or git planted, eh?" said Splint.

"It was."

"And when the bandits wouldn't or couldn't leave," added East.

"I took em one by one, as dramatically, and in keeping with my plan to make them think their fellows were dying from ghostly hands, in hopes that this would scare them off."

"Oh, ye can't scare them bandits, 'cept by a killin' of em. They ain afeared o' warnins' to leave the country as long as they kin draw a gun," said Splint.

"So, I found out," answered Bristow. "Well, my tale is now told. The bandit gang of Bad Harry Hutton is no more."

"And there is the gold they stole from you and you can not be suspected in any way of having been in league with the robber gang," triumphantly said East.

"Wot is we to do with the gold?" Splint questioned.

"Oh, that is all provided for," gaily answered Bristow. "I have a tent back in the glen, where I have been camping out. I got it from my Indian friends. The white stallion and I have been pretty lonely up here but we have been very comfortable, thank you, and we have won back the stolen gold, and so I will run to the tent and get some sacks I have had ready for a long time in which to put the gold. The horse can carry a lot and I guess we men can tote the remainder."

East and Splint followed Bristow back into the depths of the glen, where they found a fine army tent rearing its white expanse.

East gave a cry when he saw the tent.

"Who are your Indian friends, Tom Bristow?" East howled. "Quick! Tell me where I can find them."

"Why?"

"Why, that tent there was stolen from me about three months ago."

Even Splint found it hard work to stop laughing; as for Bristow he was weak with mirth for a week after.

But East would not laugh. He said that he appreciated why Bristow refused all along to name his Indian friends.

"I'd fill some red devil full of lead if I knew who pinched my tent," East cried.

The three men soon had the gold packed and then all three straightened up and looked at each other.

"What next?" asked East.

Old Splint meanwhile was poking about in the hole

from which the box that had contained the stolen gold was taken.

"What are you doing?" asked East. "Are you trying to find who owned that box in which the stolen gold was carried? I can tell you. Bad Harry Hutton's name is on the box."

"Thet isn't wot I'm after," sententiously said Splint.

"What are you after?" said Bristow.

"I'm an old gold miner, boys," went on Splint. "This yar land hyar is summut like them places over Montana way, and about them Peace River placer gold mines."

"Oh, what of it?" asked East impatient to be gone.

"Nawthin! On'y, my boy, them placers some times gin' up a heap o' pocket gold. I heern tell o' fortunes being taken off a pocket in a few hours. Now ye wait here. I seen a gold pan down thar' in thet gulch, about two hundred foot away. I'll git it and we'll wash out a painful right in thet thar stream. We mount strike pay-dirt."

Old Splint hurried off down into the gulch bottom where an old gold pan had been thrown carelessly aside by some long vanished prospector. But the eagle eye of the old miner had seen it in his journey toward the hidden and stolen treasure.

While awaiting his return, Tom Bristow began idly turning over the dirt in the hole where the stolen gold had been buried.

His foot dug up a magnificent nugget of pure virgin pocket-gold, which East pounced upon in a breath.

"My God!" yelled East, "That nugget is worth \$10,000 if it's worth a cent."

"Look there!" shouted Tom, "look underneath where the nugget came from. Look at the great pile of other nuggets. It's gold enough to make us rich for life."

Tom fell on his knees and grasped a double handful of shining gold.

East did the same.

Old Splint rushed back to his friends.

"We've struck a pocket of gold," he cried, "and ef them bandits had dug one foot more wen they buried that thar stolen gold they would hev struck this yar pocket which would hev made em richer then the gold they stole."

"Come on, boys," cried East, "I'm in on this pot, eh? There's enough gold for all. Let's hurry away. I'll send some of the boys to bury the bandits; but boys, before we go be sure and get all the pocket gold. That's ours. The stolen gold goes back to the Butterfield syndicate."

"Ez ef I'd leave one grain o' our gold, or theirs either," said Old Splint with fine scorn.

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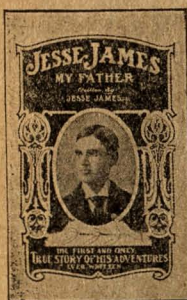
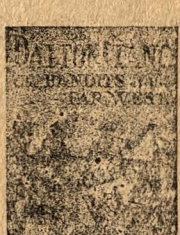
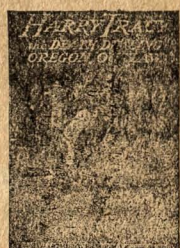
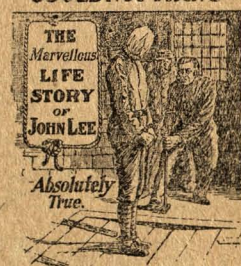
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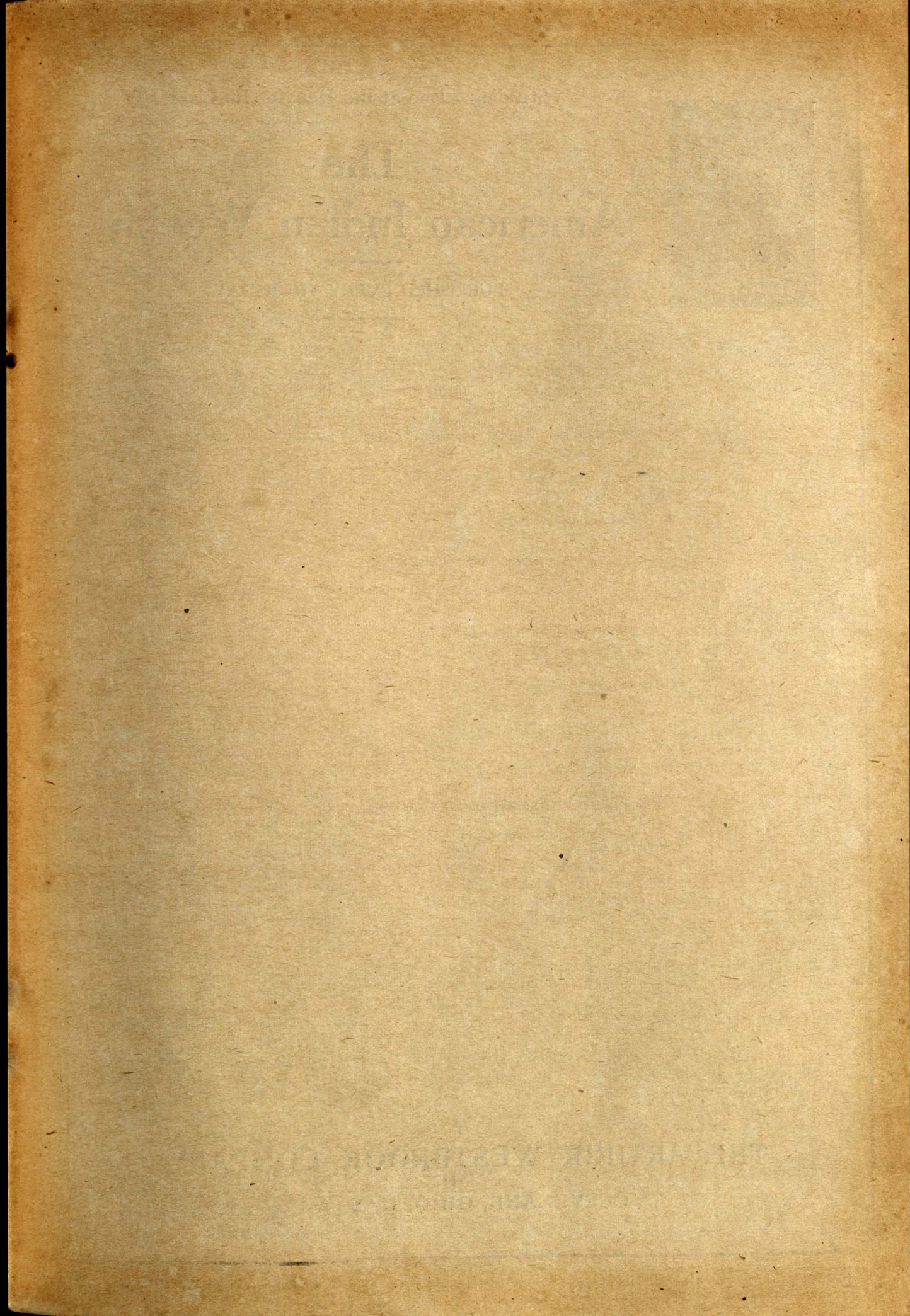
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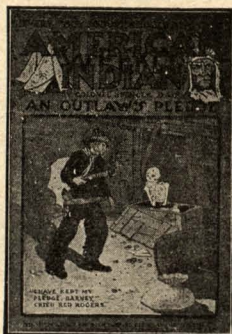
- Feb. 3—136. Foiled by Fate; being the sequel to The House of Fear.
Feb. 10—137. A Dash for Millions; or Old Ironsides Trail of Mystery.
Feb. 17—138. The Trail of Three; or The Motor Pirates' Last Stand.
Feb. 24—139. A Dead Man's Hand; or Caught by his Own Victim.

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| No. 1. | THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGE | or The Raid on the Old Stockade |
| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR | or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
| No. 3. | THE BLACK DEATH | or The Curse of the Navajo Witch |
| No. 4. | THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGE | or Kidnapped by the Piutes |
| No. 5. | TRAPPED BY THE CREES | or Tricked by a Renegade Scout |
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| No. 7. | FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STAND | or The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon |
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| No. 9. | THE DECOY MESSAGE | or The Ruse of the Border Jumpers |
| No. 10. | THE MIDNIGHT ALARM | or The Raid on the Paymaster's Camp |
| No. 11. | THE MASKED RIDERS | or The Mystery of Grizzly Gulch |
| No. 12. | LURED BY OUTLAWS..... | or The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride |

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| February 23—No. 13. | STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE..... | or The Bandits of Great Bear Lake |
| March 2—No. 14. | THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH..... | or The Ghost of Horn Mountains |
| March 9—No. 15. | THE TREASURES OF MACKENZIE ISLES..... | or The Outlaw's Drag-Net |
| March 16—No. 16. | HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN..... | or The Renegade's Death-Vote |
| March 23—No. 17. | THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH..... | or The Desperado of Poker Flat |
| March 30—No. 18. | THE RED MASSACRE..... | or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands |
| April 6—No. 19. | THE MYSTERY OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE..... | or The Robbers' Round-Up |
| April 13—No. 20. | HOUNDED BY RED MEN..... | or The Road Agents of Porcupine River |
| April 20—No. 21. | THE FUR TRADER'S DISCOVERY..... | or The Brotherhood of Thieves |
| April 27—No. 22. | THE SMUGGLERS OF LITTLE SLAVE LAKE..... | or The Trapper's Vengeance |
| May 4—No. 23. | NIGHT RIDERS OF THE NORTHWEST..... | or The Vigilantes' Revenge |
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