

Ellis Edward Sylvester

Through Apache Land



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CHAPTER I.

MOONLIGHT ON THE RIO GILA

Along the eastern bank a small Indian canoe, containing a single individual, was stealing its way – "hugging" the shore so as to take advantage of the narrow band of shadow that followed the winding of the stream. There were no trees on either side of the river, but this portion was walled in by bluffs, rising from three or four to fully twenty feet in height. The current was sluggish and not a breath of air wrinkled the surface on this mild summer night.

It was in the wildest part of the Indian country, and Tom Hardyng, the hunter, runner and bearer of all dispatches between the frontier posts in the extreme southwest, knew very well that for three days past it had been his proverbial good fortune, or rather a special Providence, that had kept his scalp from ornamenting the lodge of some marauding Comanche or Apache. Tom was one of the bravest and most skillful of borderers in those days, and had been up in the Indian country to learn the truth of numerous rumors which had come to the

stations, reports of a general uprising among the redskins, with whom the peace commissioners had succeeded in negotiating treaties after months of diplomacy. After spending more than a week in dodging back and forth, in the disguise of an Indian he had learned enough to feel that there was good foundation for these rumors, and that the exposed stations and settlements were in imminent peril. As soon as he was assured of this fact he started on his return to Fort Havens, which still lay a good three days' travel to the southwest. It was Tom's purpose to continue his descent until the following night, when, if nothing unexpected should intervene, he hoped to reach the point where he had left his mustang, and thence it would be plain sailing for the rest of the way. He knew the country thoroughly, and was confident that it was safer to perform a part of the journey by water than by land, which explains how it was that he was still in the paint and garb of an Indian, and still stealing his way down toward the Gulf of California.

"Them Apaches are a cute set," he muttered, as he glided along through the bank of shadow; "I believe they've larned I've been up among them lookin' around. I can't tell 'zactly how they larned it. I've played Injun so often that I know I can do it purty well; but they know there's somethin' in the air, and them signs I spied yesterday showed plain 'nough that they was lookin' for me. They'd give a dozen of their best warriors, with a chief throwed in to make good weight, to keep me from reachin' Fort Havens with the news that the Apaches are makin' ready to raise Old Ned

along the border. Fact is, I do carry big news, that's sartin. Hello!"

This exclamation was caused by the appearance of a bright point of light on the edge of the bluff, several hundred yards down the river, and upon the opposite side. At first glance it resembled some star of the first magnitude, which a sudden depression of the bluff had made visible. The scout ceased paddling, and, suffering the canoe to drift slowly with the tide, fixed his keen gray eyes upon the fiery point.

"That ain't any more of a star than I am," he added, a second later. "There she goes again!"

The torch, for such it was, remained stationary for scarcely a minute, when it began revolving swiftly from right to left, the gyration being of such a nature as to prove that it was swung by the hand of some person. Three revolutions, and then it suddenly reversed and made three in the opposite direction, then two back, then two forward, then one back and forth, and then it vanished in the gloom of the night. Tom scarcely breathed while viewing this pantomime, and when it ended he still held the paddle motionless while he chuckled to himself, for he knew what it all meant. He had seen Indian telegraphy before, and had learned to comprehend a great deal of those mysterious signs and signals by which news is carried across mountain and prairie with incredible speed. He had ridden his fleet mustang to death to head off some of these telegrams, and yet in every case the Indians, by some trickery unexplained to him, had outsped him.

"Yes, I can read that," Tom growled, still drifting with the

current. "That ere redskin is signalin' to some other scamp, and it's all about *me*. It says that I'm on the river somewhere, and a lookout must be kept for me."

Such was the fact. The Indian who swayed the torch meant thereby to appraise some confederate that the scout who had dared to penetrate such a distance into their country, and to unearth their most important secrets, was seeking to make his way down the Rio Gila and out of their country again. This much said the torch in language that could not be mistaken. Although it added no more, yet the sequence was inevitable, and Tom needed no one to apprise him that the river both above and below him was closely watched, and that he was in the greatest peril of his life. Being entirely shrouded in shadow, he could not see the moon, which rode high in the sky, scarcely touched by a floating cloud.

"I wish the moon would go out of sight altogether," he said to himself, as he viewed the clear sky. "I'd like to see it as black as a wolf's mouth, and then I'd teach these scamps somethin'; but there's too much confounded moonlight layin' loose for a chap to show any scientific tricks."

The fact that a redskin had indulged in signaling suggested that there must be some one to whom he had signaled, and the hunter devoted himself to learning where the second Apache was located.

"As near as I kin calc'late, the chap must be on this side of the stream, and purty close to where I'm rockin' in the cradle of

the deep this very minute."

He now moved his paddle slightly – just enough to hold the boat motionless while he looked and listened. The stillness was profound; not even the soft sighing of the wind reaching his ears. He had peered around in the gloom only a few minutes when he discerned the reply to the signal already described, and so close that he was startled. Scarcely fifty feet below him, and on the edge of the bluff, several yards in height, a light flashed into view. A second glance showed him that it was a flaming torch held in the hand of an Indian, who began whirling it around his head with a swiftness that made it seem like a revolving wheel of fire. The rapid motion of the torch, as the reader may infer, caused an equally rapid increase of the flame upon it, so that it revealed the Indian himself; and the hunter, as he looked toward it, saw the figure of the warrior standing like some pyrotechnist in the center of his own display.

A better target could not have been asked, and Tom, quick as thought, raised his rifle and sighted it; but with his finger upon the trigger, he refrained, lowered the piece and shook his head, muttering as he did so:

"He deserves it, and I'd like to give it to him, but it won't do. They'd know what the rifle-crack meant, and I'd have a hornet's nest about my head quick as lightnin'."

Tom was not certain of the meaning of the exhibition he had just seen, but believed that it was intended as a mere reply to the other – the same as if the Apache had shouted "All right!"

in response to the notification. The Indian must have circled the torch in this manner for more than a score of times, when he threw it from his hand into the river, where it fell with a hiss, and was instantly extinguished.

The scout was in a quandary. If he continued down stream he must pass directly beneath the spot where his foe was standing, and the shadow was by no means dense enough to make it possible for him to escape observation. He was confident, however, that if he could change places with the warrior, he could discern the canoe without any closer approach. He was at a disadvantage, for the bluff was perfectly perpendicular and so high that he could not reach the ground above without retreating up the river for at least a quarter of a mile, where the bluff was depressed enough to permit him to draw himself upward upon it. Had the bank been low and wooded, it would have been the easiest matter in the world to have shoved the canoe into the shelter, or to have circumvented the Indian by lifting it bodily from the water and going around him, and striking the river again below. But Tom hesitated only a few minutes. He was anxious to get forward, for delay was dangerous and he felt annoyed at the manner in which he was dogged.

"Here goes," he exclaimed, starting the canoe forward again. "If that Apache is anxious for a scrimmage, he can have one."

CHAPTER II.

TOM HARDYNGE'S RUSE

Hardyng was too skillful a hunter to place himself directly in the way of the Apache whom he knew to be the most treacherous kind of an enemy. His purpose was to indulge in a little strategy and to seek to outwit the redskin, as he had done on many an occasion before. It required but a second for him to slide his rifle over upon his back, the stock being hastily wrapped with a leathern sheath, which he always carried for such an emergency, when he gently let himself over the stern of the canoe, taking care to make no splash or noise in doing so. He then permitted his body with the exception of his head to sink entirely beneath the surface, while he floated with the boat, lying in such a position that he made it effectually screen him from the view of any one who might be upon the bank above. It was hardly to be expected, however, that if the Indian saw the boat, he would permit it to pass unquestioned. Tom did not anticipate it, and he was prepared for that which followed. For several minutes the most perfect silence prevailed. At the end of that time, the scout knew that he was exactly beneath the spot whereon he had seen the answering signal, and scarcely stirred a muscle, keeping his head as close as possible to the boat, and so nearly submerged, that he could scarcely breathe.

"Hooh! hooh!"

The Apache had noted the empty canoe drifting below him in the shadow, and surveyed it with something of the feeling of the detective who suddenly stumbles upon a clue, the precise meaning of which is at first a mystery to him.

It is hardly to be supposed that he intended this outcry as a hail to the boat, which he must have seen contained no one. Its appearance would naturally suggest to one in his situation that the occupant had been alarmed by the signs of danger and had taken to the land. This supposition was so natural that Hardyng would probably have got safely by the dangerous point but for a totally unlooked-for mishap. The water, which up to this time had been fully six feet in depth, suddenly shallowed to less than a quarter of that, so that he struck his knees against the bottom. The shock was very slight, and scarcely caused a ripple; but it takes only the slightest noise to alarm an Indian, especially when he is on the watch. That faint plash caused by the jar of the body caught the ear of the listening, peering redskin, who instantly slid his body over the bluff, and balancing himself for an instant, dropped with such precision that he struck the canoe in the very center, and preserved its gravity so well that it tipped neither to the right nor left.

At the very moment the Apache dropped, the hunter rose to his feet, knife in hand. The water rose scarcely to his knees, and the bottom was hard, so that it was almost the same as if he stood upon dry land. The warrior had not time to recover from the slight

shock of his leap, when Tom grasped him by the throat and used his weapon with such effect that it was all over in a few seconds.

"There! I reckon you won't go into the telegraph business again very soon!" he growled, as the inanimate body disappeared down the stream, and he coolly re-entered the canoe, which had floated but a short distance away.

He had scarcely done this when a new idea struck him, and, hastening after the receding body, he carefully drew it into the boat again. Here it was the work of but a few minutes to place it in a sitting position in the stern in the most natural posture imaginable, so that any one looking upon the figure would not have suspected for an instant that it was anything but an animate being. Making sure that its pose could not be improved, the scout then turned the boat directly away from the bank, never changing its course until the very middle of the Gila was reached, when he began paddling in as leisurely a manner as if no danger threatened. It was a daring stratagem, but it is only by such means that men are enabled to escape from peril, and although fully aware of the danger he was incurring, he kept on his way with that coolness that years of experience had given him.

As he approached a point opposite that where he had seen the first signal he did not turn his head, but he looked sideways and scanned the bank with the most searching scrutiny. Sure enough, at this moment he plainly discerned the figures of fully a half-dozen Indians standing upon the bluff and apparently watching the canoe with a curiosity that was natural.

"All right," thought the hunter; "so long as you let me alone I won't hurt you."

Had there been but the single occupant of the canoe the Apaches would not have stood debating in this fashion as to what they should do, if, indeed, they should do anything at all. Unity in the question would have shown that it was the identical individual for whom they were searching, for they knew that he was alone; but the fact that there were two, and both in the guise of Indians, could be explained upon no other hypothesis than that they were really what they seemed to be.

"Hooh! Hooh!"

It was precisely the same exclamation which had been uttered by the warrior who sat so cold and inanimate in the stern of the canoe, and Tom, without the least hesitancy, ceased paddling for the instant, straightened up, and responded in the same guttural fashion, resuming the use of the oar at the same time, as if he meant that that should be the end of it. But the Apaches immediately followed up their ejaculations with some other sounds, which were doubtless intended as a summons for the craft to heave to and "show her papers." Tom did not understand the Apache tongue well enough to comprehend the precise meaning of these words, although he was pretty well convinced of what the others were driving at. He did not dare to attempt to reply, nor did he dare to move faster; so he did the only dignified thing possible under the circumstances. He continued that automatic paddling, and, assisted by the current,

was rapidly leaving his enemies in the rear when they called to him again, moving at the same time down the bank in a fashion which showed that they meant business. The hunter, not yet ready to make the desperate dash which he had reserved for the last final effort, if he should be driven to the wall, ceased work again and called out:

"Hooh!"

He said it as impatiently as he could in the hope of "cutting off further debate," and resumed paddling, knowing that a comparatively short distance down the river the banks were so depressed that he could readily make his way from the boat to the land, so that after getting fairly below the Apaches his chances of ultimate escape were greatly increased.

The Indians must have been exasperated at the refusal, for Tom had taken scarcely a dozen strokes when he saw the flash of several guns upon the bank, and the whizzing of the bullets around his head left no doubt of the target at which they aimed.

"I can do somethin' of that myself," growled the hunter, as he laid down his paddle and took up his gun.

Without the least hesitation, he fired directly into the group, and the wild cry that instantly followed told with what a fatal result also. All diplomacy was ended by this act, and without pausing to reload his piece, he dropped his gun and bent to the task. The long ashen paddle was dipped deep into the water, and the light vessel shot like an arrow down stream. It seemed, indeed, to be imbued with life, and fairly skimmed over the

surface. The unexpected and defiant response to the summons of the Apaches threw them into temporary bewilderment, and the minutes thus lost to them were golden ones gained to the fugitive, who shot the canoe as close to the opposite shore as was prudent, and wielded the paddle with the skill of a veteran.

Having now no need of the dummy that had stood him so well for the time, Tom did not hesitate to throw him overboard as a useless incumbrance, and, thus relieved of the dead weight, he sped forward with wonderful speed. In a short time after that the redskins had vanished from view, and almost any one would have supposed that the danger was passed; but Tom was well aware that it was only a temporary lull in the storm. The Apaches were like bloodhounds, who, having once taken the trail of their prey, would relax no effort so long as there was a chance of capturing him, and so he abated not a jot of his tremendous exertions.

CHAPTER III.

PURSUED BY THE APACHES

As stealthily as a phantom did the canoe bearing the scout skim along the shore of the Gila, hugging the banks as closely as possible, so as to take advantage of the ribbon of shadow which followed the winding of the stream. The moon was creeping higher up the sky, and this advantage would soon be denied the fugitive altogether, so every minute was improved to the utmost. Now and then Tom ceased paddling, and as the boat shot forward with undiminished speed, bent his head and listened. This was continued until he had passed fully a quarter of a mile, when he rested for a longer time than usual.

"I guess they'll have to give it up," he said to himself, with a peculiar chuckle. "They ketched me in a bad box, that's sartin, where I couldn't climb out on either side. But things are a little better here," he added, as he looked from side to side at the bluffs, which were so low that the tops could be easily reached from his boat. "I don't much want to tramp over-land, but if it is necessary I've got somethin' of a chance, which isn't what I had before."

He might well prefer the water to the land; for on the former, whether he went fast or slow, there was no trail left for the keenest bloodhound to follow; on the latter it was impossible to conceal his most cautious footsteps from the eyes of the redskins.

The surface of this portion of Arizona was of such a nature that everything was against the hunter. There was no wood nor tributary streams for miles. If he left the Gila, and struck across the country, it would be over an open plain, where he could be seen for miles. He would be on foot, while his enemies would all be mounted on their fleet mustangs. How, then, could he elude them by leaving his boat? His only hope was in traveling at night, but night must always be followed by day.

"I wonder what ideas will creep into their skulls," he muttered, reflecting upon the view the Apaches had gained of him a short time before from the bank. "A dead Injun is a good deal better than a live one, as that 'ere critter proved to me. If I hadn't fired back agin, they might have thought I was one of their own warriors – mebbe they'll think so now. Great Scott!"

The scout was paddling along in his leisurely manner, when his eyes, by the merest accident, happened to rest upon the other shore, at a point a short distance below him. While thus looking, he saw distinctly a point of light appear and vanish three times! It performed no such gyration as those which he had first seen, but simply came forward and receded until it was gone altogether, leaving the same misty darkness as before. More by instinct than from any other cause, Tom turned his eyes to the point opposite where he had seen this exhibition. He had scarcely done so when precisely the same thing was seen!

"Jest what I expected," he said as he checked the downward progress of his boat. "The varmints have 'spicioned that one of

the chaps in that 'ere canoe which passed before 'em is myself, and they're goin' for me like lightnin'. They've mounted their horses, and kept it up till they knowed they'd struck a p'int below me, and there they've signaled to each other that I'm still above 'em on the river, and still to be ketched."

The scout was certain that his theory was correct, and that, distasteful and dangerous as it might be, the time had come for him to leave the river. To continue further would be to precipitate a collision in which there was no possibility of the good fortune that had followed him in the first place. Besides this the night was so far advanced and the moon so high up in the sky, that the shadow had narrowed to a band which was practically useless.

"No use makin' faces when you've got a dose of medicine to take," he added, as he ran the canoe close to the shore.

There he found that by standing upon his feet he could easily reach the edge of the bluff above and thus draw himself up when he chose. This he proceeded to do, but he was too skillful a hunter to leave behind him such tell-tale evidence as the canoe itself would have proven. Were he to leave that as it was, it would be sure to catch the eye of the Apaches within a quarter of an hour and tell them precisely what had been done. And so, as the hunter hung thus by his hands, with his long rifle secured at his back, he caught the toe of his moccasin in the craft in such a way that it dipped and took water. He held it thus until it could contain no more; but its composition was such that even then it would not sink. There were loose boulders in the bank, and the hunter

proceeded to drop these carefully into the boat below. It required several for ballast, when it quietly went to the bottom, where it was certain to stay. This done he addressed himself to the task before him.

As he straightened up and looked off in the moonlight, a very discouraging, although familiar sight, met his eye. The moonlight was quite strong, and he was enabled to see objects indistinctly for a considerable distance. It was everywhere the same. A level, treeless prairie, where for miles there was not a drop of water to be obtained, and over which, as has been already shown, in case he attempted to make his way, he would be placed at the greatest disadvantage possible, especially as his own mustang was still a good hundred miles to the southwest, if he had succeeded in avoiding capture up to that time. But the life of a frontiersman, besides being perilous at all times, is hardly ever anything but disagreeable, despite the curious fascination which it holds for those who follow it. Tom did not hesitate a moment longer than was necessary, now that a disagreeable expedient was forced upon him.

His first precaution was to make sure that none of the Apaches were in sight. The point at which he had seen the answering signal was so far below that he was certain it would be beyond his vision, and, this much determined, gave him just the "leverage" needed to work upon. It needed but a few seconds to assure himself upon this point, and then he struck off to the southwest. This course, while it took him away from the Gila, would eventually bring

him back to it, the winding of the stream being such as to make this junction certain, if continued. The great thing now required was haste; for a great deal depended upon the ground that could be passed over during these favoring hours of darkness. He had taken scarcely a dozen steps when he struck into a long, loping trot, not particularly rapid in itself, but of such a character that it could be kept for hours at a stretch. It was the genuine Indian dog trot, which is so effective in long distances. As the runner went along in this fashion, his thoughts were busy, and all his senses on the alert. He concluded that it was nearly midnight, and that he had, consequently, a number of hours at his command; so he aimed to get as far below the intercepting Apaches as possible, with the intention of returning to the river, before daylight, where he was hopeful of discovering some canoe, or at least of hitting upon some feasible method of hiding his trail from his lynx-eyed pursuers.

This loping trot was kept up for fully two hours, at the end of which time Tom was certain that he was approaching the river again. He still pressed forward for another hour, when he came to a halt. Although he had continued this great exertion for so long a time, yet so good was his wind that when he paused there was no perceptible quickening of the respiration. Years of training had made him capable of standing far more trying tests of his strength than this. The scout carefully turned his head from side to side, looking and listening. All was still, and his ear caught no ominous sound. Then he moistened his finger and held it over

his head. Yes, there was the least possible breath of air stirring, as was told him by the fact that one side of the moistened finger was slightly chilled. Everywhere, right, left, in front or rear, so far as the bright moonlight permitted his vision to extend, was the same dead level of treeless plain. Kneeling down he applied his ear to the ground. Could it be? There *was* a sound thus carried to his ears – the very sound which above all others he dreaded to hear. It was a faint, almost inaudible, tapping upon the earth. Far away it was, but drawing nearer every minute.

The scout knew what it meant. It was the sound of horse's hoofs!

CHAPTER IV. OUTWITTED

"I'll match them Apaches agin the world for shrewd deviltry," exclaimed Hardyng, unable to suppress his admiration even in the moment which told him of his own increased personal danger. "By some hook or crook, the Old Boy only knows what, they've found out my game, and are after me. Ah! if I only had my mustang, Thundergust, with me!"

Tom now changed his direction more to the north, his intention being to strike the river much sooner than was his original purpose. It was the only thing he could do to escape the redskins, who showed such a wonderful skill in following him up.

As near as he could judge, something like ten miles still intervened between him and the friendly stream – a distance which he was confident of passing before daylight, if he did not find his pursuers in his path. The greatest care was necessary to keep out of the way of these creatures, and the fugitive had run but a short distance when he paused and applied his ear to the ground again. Only for an instant, however, when he bounded up and was off like a shot. The alarming sounds came to his ear with such distinctness as to prove that the Apaches were close at hand. Guided by some strange fatality, they were bearing directly down upon him at full speed. More than all, those pattering

footfalls were such as to indicate that the swarthy horsemen were not approaching in a compact group. They had separated so as to cover a wide area of ground, and were advancing in such an array that the difficulty of escape was increased tenfold. Everything conspired against poor Tom. The bright moonlight, the broad level stretch of plain, the fact that he was on foot, and his pursuers, besides being well mounted, were among the most skillful riders of the Southwest, made his situation about as desperate as it is possible to imagine.

A few minutes later the fugitive paused again, but this time it was not necessary that he should apply his ear to the ground. The sounds of the mustangs' hoofs came to him very plainly through the midnight air, and as he looked around he half expected to see the shadowy figures of the horsemen plunging forward in the gloom toward him! Nothing was to be seen, however, of them, and, feeling that the situation was becoming desperate, he changed his course again, his purpose being simply to get by the approaching marauders without caring in what direction he went. Had he been five minutes earlier he might have succeeded, but he was just that much too late.

He was stealing forward in his cautious manner, with the sound of the horses' hoofs growing more distinct every second, when, sure enough, the figure of an Indian horseman suddenly came in sight, bearing down upon him as straight as an arrow. The very instant Tom saw it he sank down upon his face, scarcely daring to hope that his pursuer would pass him, and prepared for

whatever he chose to do.

The scout turned his head so that he could watch every movement and guard against it, his hand being extended beneath his body in the most natural position possible, but grasping his loaded revolver.

It may have been that the Apache would have gone by but for the action of his mustang. These intelligent animals seem to know, in many cases, far more than their masters, and the one in question was yet some yards distant from the prostrate form, when he halted with a snort. This opened the ball, and the scout anxiously awaited the fight which seemed inevitable.

Fortunately, the Indian party had separated to such an extent that no others were in sight of the fugitive, who thus had but a single man to contend against, although there was no question but what any number of others could be summoned to the spot in a twinkling. The foeman understood the situation at a glance; that is, he knew that the man for whom he was seeking was prostrate upon the ground before him, but he had no means of judging whether he was dead, asleep, or feigning. Under these circumstances he advanced very cautiously, his mustang betraying considerable reluctance at walking up to a man stretched out at full length.

This was precisely what Hardyngé desired, as every minute that matters remained in *statu quo* placed the friends of his adversary further away and simplified the encounter, which he considered as certain to take place.

Something like ten minutes were occupied in this stealthy advance of the horse, at the end of which time he stood so that his head was directly over the shoulders of the prostrate man, who still lay as motionless as a statue.

"Hooh!" exclaimed the rider, holding himself ready for any demonstration upon the part of the suspected white man. But the latter never stirred, although he shivered a little at the fear that the mustang might place his hoof upon him.

Tom's peculiar peril will be understood when it is stated that the Apache was master of the situation from the instant they came in sight of each other. Had the fugitive fired at him the moment he caught sight of his horse, he might have tumbled him to the ground, but it would have brought the rest of the party around him in an instant. As matters now stood, the Apache would have fired at the first movement he made, no matter how dexterous, to draw his hand from beneath his body, and so Tom bided his time.

"Hooh!"

This was repeated several times, when the warrior tried to force his mustang to step upon him; but the animal was too timid to be forced into doing such a repugnant thing, and, when angrily urged thereto, leaped clear of the body with a sniff of terror, and galloped several rods before he could be brought round and compelled to face the unknown again. This seemed to convince the Apache that the man was dead, and without any further hesitation he slid down from the back of his horse, and advanced

to the figure for the purpose of scalping him.

He had just stooped down, knife in hand, when the form turned like a flash. There came a blinding flash, then a report and a cry, almost together, and Tom Hardyng seemed to leap up from the ground as if a bomb had exploded beneath him, and, dashing toward the mustang, seized his rein and vaulted upon his back before the animal really knew what had taken place.

It was a daring deed, but it succeeded to perfection. The scout had not only extinguished his foe, but had captured his horse as well. The sound of the pistol might reach the ears of other Apaches, but he cared nothing for that. He was as well mounted as they, and, with the start which he had gained, they were welcome to do all they could. In view of this, it was impossible for him to restrain his exultation, and the moment he realized that he was fairly astride of the mustang he let out a shout that might have been heard a mile away. The steed which bore him was an excellent one, and he had no fear of being overtaken by any of them. He knew in what direction to take his flight, and away he sped with his horse upon a dead run. He scarcely drew rein until daylight broke over the prairie, when he found himself pursuing a direction parallel with the river, and making good headway toward the point where he hoped his own matchless Thundergust was awaiting him.

Hardyng scarcely halted during the greater portion of the next day, except when his mustang required it, and shortly after the sun crossed the meridian he was gratified at catching sight

of the rolling prairie and wooded hills where he had turned his horse loose nearly a week before. While at a distance he gave utterance to several sharp whistles, which produced the response he desired, the beautiful glossy mustang galloping forth to meet him with every appearance of delight. The creature had taken good care of himself during his absence, having feasted upon the rich, succulent grass, and was in the best possible condition.

Turning the Indian horse loose Tom bestowed no further attention upon him, but leaped upon his favorite animal and galloped away to the rocks where he had carefully concealed his saddle and riding gear and where they had lain untouched while he was gone.

Just as he dismounted, his eye rested upon a piece of dried buffalo-skin which was pinned against a tree, the inner side turned outward. The first glance told him there was something unusual, and his curiosity led him to approach and scan it closely. There was some writing scrawled upon it, which he read with little difficulty. The words were startling enough, and as the hunter finished them he exclaimed, in a frightened undertone:

"Thunderation! can it be possible?"

CHAPTER V.

AN ALARMING MESSAGE

As the scout rode his mustang up to the tree whereon the buffalo skin was fastened, he read the following words:

"To Tom Hardyng: – The stage which left Santa Fe on the 10th inst., is due at Fort Havens between the 20th and 25th, *but it will never reach there*. It has an escort of a dozen mounted soldiers, but they can't save it. The Apaches have arranged to attack it near Devil's Pass, which you know is about a hundred miles northeast from this point, among the mountains. You can't do anything to help it; but Ned Chadmund is with it, and his father, the colonel, offers you and me a thousand dollars apiece to save *him*. I leave to day – Thursday – for the pass, and you must follow the minute your eyes see this. I will be on the lookout for you. Remember there isn't an hour to spare.

"Dick Morris."

Colonel Chadmund was the commandant at Fort Havens, whither he was hastening with his news from the Indian country. His family dwelt in Santa Fe, and his only child, a bright boy, about a dozen years of age, had been permitted to start to join his father in accordance with a promise made him a long time before. The escort with which he had been provided would have been ample under ordinary circumstances, and in fact, was larger

than was generally customary; but it was not sufficient.

Dick Morris held a position then known as "hunter to the fort" at the post under the command of Colonel Chadmund. It was similar to that which the renowned Kit Carson filled for a number of years in the old days at Bent's Fort. The man was selected on account of his skill in the use of the rifle, and his knowledge of the habits of the game, his duty being simply to supply the command with all the fresh food possible – a position which, it will at once be understood, was no sinecure, involving constant activity and many long, rapid journeys.

Dick was as skillful and shrewd a man as could be found in the whole Southwest. Tom Hardyng, his friend and companion in many a perilous adventure, understood what it all meant the instant he had finished reading the writing upon the buffalo skin. By some means – probably through the Indian runners encountered while hunting his game – he had learned the particulars of the expedition that had been arranged to attack and massacre the escort. Very probably these swarthy wretches were mainly incited to the deed by the knowledge that the son of Colonel Chadmund was to be with the party. It was under the direction of this vigilant officer that the marauding Indians of the border had received such a number of severe blows. They were excited to the highest point of exasperation, and would seize upon any means of revenge at their command.

Alarmed by the danger which threatened his beloved child, the colonel had sent Dick Morris to the rescue at once. He would

have sent a hundred men from his fort, had he believed it possible that they could do any good, but it was clearly out of the question for them to reach Devil's Pass until nearly twenty-four hours after the stage was due there. It was one of those cases wherein all depended upon shrewdness and strategy, and where nothing was to be gained by mere force of arms. The expectation was that the Apaches would hold the boy at an enormous ransom, or probably as a hostage for the safety of such of their blood-stained chiefs as were in the hands of the Americans. This will explain the haste of the hunter, and his anxiety to have the companionship of Tom, who had tramped so many hundred miles through the Indian country.

Ten minutes after reading the dispatch Tom had fastened on the accoutrements of his mustang and was galloping away to the northeast on the trail of his friend. He did not pause even to hunt a little game, after having been so long without food. He was accustomed to privation and hardship, and, if it were required, was good for twenty-four hours longer without permitting a particle of food to pass his lips.

He was leaving the treacherous Gila far to the south. It may be said that his course along this stream, on his return from the Apache country, was like the base of a triangle, while he was now following the hypotenuse. This latter route was preferable in every sense to that which he had been using for the last few days. The country itself was more varied, better watered and abounded with vegetation, its only drawback being the ever-present danger

from the marauding redskins. Another advantage that belonged to the traveler over this path was that it was really a path – so clearly defined that a stranger could follow it without trouble. It was, in fact, the trail between Fort Havens and Santa Fe, over which, at certain intervals, messengers were regularly dispatched back and forth.

The money with which the soldiers at Fort Havens and several other posts were paid came down by express from Santa Fe over this road, in charge of a proper escort, and the coach which started from that city with little Ned Chadmund carried also one hundred thousand dollars in crisp, crackling greenbacks stowed away in the bottom of the vehicle. Consequently it will be seen that the Apaches, who understood very well the value of these printed slips, had every inciting cause to organize an overwhelming expedition against the coach and its escort.

The day is waning, but his steed was fresh and fleet, and had enjoyed such a long rest, that it would be a mercy to him to put him through his best paces. Tom did not hesitate to do it. The glossy black animal gave a neigh of delight as he felt the familiar hand of his master upon the bridle, and he stretched away like one of the Arabian coursers of the desert, fleet as the wind and capable of keeping up the tremendous rate of speed for hours at a time.

The greater portion of this journey led through the wildest mountain scenery, and the afternoon was scarcely half gone when a striking change in the surface was observable. Instead

of that long, dreary expanse of endless prairie, the hunter was forced to make long detours to escape the obstructions constantly interposing in the way. Now it was around some pile of rocks, then winding among a mass of hills, then over a level plain for some distance, but with the scenery steadily increasing in ruggedness at every mile traversed. Far ahead could be discerned the chain of mountains, their peaks looking blue and misty in the distance. It was among these that the trail wound its way – one portion, in the very heart of the mountains, being known as Devil's Pass, from its wild and dangerous character; and, as the scout strained his eye in the direction and contemplated the blue waving line against the sky, he almost fancied he could see the smoke from the rifles of the vengeful Apaches.

"Shouldn't wonder if they are at it this very minute," he muttered, as he glanced down at the ground in front of him.

All the afternoon, as he sped along, he saw constantly in front of him the footprints of another mustang, such as are made by an animal when under full speed. So they were, as he knew very well. Dick Morris had been over the same trail a few hours before, at scarcely less speed than his own.

Every time Tom came in sight of an elevation he looked hastily at it in the hope of catching sight of some signal from his friend. In such a desperate enterprise as this he felt the need of companionship, especially of such a tried and daring man as Dick Morris. But the sun gradually went down in the western sky without bringing him the coveted sight, and he began to

believe that he would not be overtaken before reaching Devil's Pass, which he hoped to reach on the morrow. Then, as the sun disappeared and darkness crept over mountain and prairie, Tom turned the head of his animal in the direction of a clump of trees where he knew there was an abundance of grass and water, and where, in all probability, something in the way of food could be had for himself. The mustang needed rest and refreshment, and the rider required them scarcely less.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO SCOUTS

The hunter was within a hundred yards or so of the clump of trees, when he suddenly checked his mustang, or rather the mustang checked himself, at the light of a camp fire, which all at once flashed out from among them.

"That's either Dick or a lot of varmints," he muttered. "I think it's varmints, for I don't b'lieve he meant to wait there."

However, it was a question easily settled. He slid from his horse, and, rifle in hand, stole forward in the direction of the grove, moving as silently and stealthily as a shadow, while his beast stood as if he were an equestrian statue awaiting the placing of some metallic hero upon his back. A phantom itself could not have glided forward with less noise than did he, and yet he was fully twenty yards away from his destination, with his eyes fixed upon the point of light, when he was discovered by some horse that belonged to the stranger, or strangers, which gave out a loud neigh, as a signal to his friends of the approach of danger. At that moment, Tom dropped flat upon his face, as he had done before at the approach of the Apaches, and the luxuriant grass gathered about his form in such a way that he could not be seen by anyone at a moderate distance. But close upon the heels of the neigh came a low, tremulous whistle, scarcely uttered when Tom

replied in a precisely similar way, leaped to his feet and trotted toward the grove.

"That's Dick!" he exclaimed to himself, the signals which they had used being the same that they had adopted years before, when approaching each other in a dangerous neighborhood.

The next minute the two met and shook hands. There were many points of resemblance and difference between the two comrades. Each was in middle life, embrowned, hardened, and toughened by years of exposure and the wild life of the border; but Tom Hardyng was taller, more sinewy and active than Dick Morris, who was below the medium stature, with a stunted appearance; but he was a powerful man, wonderfully skillful in the use of the rifle, and the two friends together made the strongest possible kind of a team.

"Ah! that's the talk," exclaimed Tom, as he snuffed the odor of the cooking meat by the camp fire. "I'm hungry enough to chew up my moccasins. What have you there – buffalo, mule or grizzly bar?"

"Neither one," replied the other. "I fetched down an antelope a couple of hours ago, and as I was expectin' you, I cooked enough of it for both."

"You had to cook his hoofs and all to do that; but why don't you spread the dining table?"

Little ceremony was indulged in at such a time. The toasting meat, brown, crisp and juicy, was served in two equal portions, each of immense size, and then, with no culinary articles but their

keen hunting knives, and their incisors, almost as keen, they went at the business with the gusto of famishing wolves. Meanwhile the two mustangs were feasting upon the rich grass which grew abundantly about them, and so all members of the party were enjoying themselves to the fullest extent.

The two hunters scarcely spoke while this piece of mastication was going on. They understood each other so well that there was no necessity of any hurry in the way of inquiry or conversation. When at last they had filled themselves to repletion, they drew their fingers through their bushy hair, using the latter by way of napkins, and then, after a good long draught from the brook running near at hand, lit their pipes and leaned back in the very acme of bliss.

"How soon shall we start?" asked Tom.

"In a couple of hours," was the reply.

"Think the Apaches are through by this time?"

"No doubt of it."

If the hunters seemed to exhibit indifference in referring to the terrible occurrence, it was not because they felt thus; but the lives which they led had accustomed them to such frightful experiences.

"S'pose they've spared the younger?"

"Guess they have."

The conclusion to which both came was that the Apaches were incited to this attack more by the desire to get possession of the lad than by anything else, in view of the intense hatred

with which Colonel Chadmund was viewed by the hostile Indians of the Southwest. He had been stationed over two years at Fort Havens, during which his administration had been marked by extreme vigor, and he had retaliated upon the Apaches especially in the severest way for many outrages committed by them.

"Yas, they've gone for that little younker," added Dick Morris, after the discussion had been continued for some time. "Of course they haven't killed him; for that would have sp'iled their game. The colonel, finding what they'd done, would come down on 'em harder than ever, and you kin make up your mind they'd get the worst of the bargain before he was through with 'em; but as long as they hold the boy, you see, they've got the hands of the old fellow tied, for he thinks a heap of his boy, and he'll do anything to save him."

"And that's why he sends us arter him," said Tom.

"He knows that if he let a lot of the men go, they might get all chewed up, and it wouldn't help the boy any, so he thinks we kin get him out of their hands by some hocus pocus or other."

"And what do *you* think, Tom?" asked his companion, in a confidential voice. "Is there much show for ever saving the skulp of little Ned?"

His brother hunter looked into the fire for several minutes, with a very serious expression upon his countenance. He was thinking intently upon the situation, and trying to extract some comfort from the prospect.

"Wal, Dick, you know as well as me that it's mighty hard to

tell in such a case. We've both got the best of hosses, that kin hold thar own agin anythin' the reds can scare up; but if they go to such pains to get the chap into thar hands, they'll take the same pains to keep him thar."

"Exactly; but they won't be expectin' any such move as we're at so early in the day, don't you see? and there's where we gain the advantage by hurryin' on, afore they kin get off in the mountains with him."

There seemed to be reason in this conclusion, and both agreed upon it.

At the end of a couple of hours their horses had rested sufficiently, and they were mounted again. They had trusted to the mustangs to act as sentinels while they spent their time in eating and talking, and, no alarm having been given, they were satisfied that there was no one in the vicinity, and they rode off toward the northeast, without any concern of present danger threatening them. By this time the moon was in the sky; but a few clouds were occasionally scudding before his face, so that the prairie was not illuminated with as much clearness as upon the preceding night. The two hunters galloped along at a swinging gallop, a rate of speed which their mustangs were capable of continuing for hours and which it was the purpose of the riders to keep up until their destination was reached. Now and then, through the stillness of the night, the cries of wild animals came to their ears, and once or twice these sounded very much like signals from parties of Indians.

Tom and Dick never once relaxed their vigilance, but, as far as the gloom would permit, scanned the country about them in every direction. Besides, they occasionally caught the glimmer of camp fires, but they were all at such a distance that they paid no attention to them, but continued on the even tenor of their way.

Just as day was breaking, they found themselves fairly among the mountains. The wildest crags and peaks were all about them, and they were compelled to keep close to the pass they were following. This wound in and out among the fastnesses, not more than a hundred feet in width in some places, while in others it was fully a quarter of a mile broad. Here they were in constant apprehension of meeting with their old enemies; but there was an air of solitude and desertion about them that was impressive in the extreme. They halted but a short time to let their animals "blow," while they themselves made an observation. Still nothing new or alarming was discovered, and they hurried forward as before.

Just as the sun reached meridian, the two hunters came upon that place known as Devil's Pass, which they were certain had witnessed a fearful tragedy during the previous twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAVALRY ESCORT

The stage which left Santa Fe on that beautiful spring morning, bound for Fort Havens on the journey heretofore referred to, carried two passengers. One was Corporal Hugg, a soldier who had been engaged a dozen years upon the plains – a rough, good-natured, chivalrous fellow, who, having lost a leg in the service of his country, enjoyed a pension, and had become a sort of family servant in the employ of Colonel Chadmund. He was devotedly attached to little Ned and his greatest delight was in watching or joining him at play, exercising a surveillance over him something like that which a great, shaggy Newfoundland holds over a pet child. The corporal was able to stump about upon his cork leg, and when the time came for the lad to make the journey through the mountains to Fort Havens – a journey which he had been looking impatiently forward to for fully a year – it followed as a natural sequence that the corporal should bear him company.

Ned bade his mother an affectionate good-bye, and she pressed him to her breast again and again, the tears filling her eyes, and a sad misgiving chilling her heart. The reports at the time were that the Indians to the southwest were unusually quiet, no word having yet reached the capital of New Mexico

of the formidable raids that were being organized in the Apache country. Besides this, the stage, which was properly an ambulance, drawn by a single powerful horse, was escorted by twelve Indian fighters armed to the teeth, every one of whom had performed similar duty before, and so, according to all human probabilities, there seemed to be less cause than usual for fear. Yet the mother felt a woeful sinking of the heart, natural, perhaps, under the circumstances; but she could not break the promise of herself and husband to the boy, who was overflowing with joy at the prospect of that long journey through the mountains, and a several months' sojourn at the fort in the far Southwest.

Finally, the cavalcade lost sight of Santa Fe, and the first night they encamped a good distance away from that historic, then primitive, town. The lieutenant who had charge of the escort was more concerned about the treasure in their possession than he was about the Indians. So far as possible, the fact that he was carrying a large sum of money to one of the frontier posts had been kept a secret from the general public; but he was apprehensive that they might be followed by some of the desperate characters which infested Santa Fe at that time. But nothing of danger or lawlessness was seen during their first day and night, and when they resumed their journey on the morrow, they began to dismiss all thoughts of danger from that direction.

As they progressed toward Arizona, the country gradually grew wilder and more rugged, but the trail was followed without

trouble, and when they encamped the second night, they had the satisfaction of reflecting that they had progressed much further than they had counted upon at first.

Those were days of delight and happiness to young Ned Chadmund. The weather was not oppressively warm, and the ever-changing scenery was like the most entrancing panorama passing before his eyes. Sometimes he rode upon one of the horses with the lieutenant or one of the soldiers. Then again he ran along-side the ambulance until he was tired, when he climbed within, and seated himself beside Corporal Hugg, and listened to his tales of battle and adventures.

On the second day the Indians began to show themselves. A party of horsemen would be seen upon the top of some hill or bluff, apparently contemplating the little cavalcade, or they would circle around at a distance upon the prairie, whooping and indulging in all sorts of tantalizing gestures, in the hope of drawing out a portion of the party in pursuit. Their hearts' delight would have been to get them into some exposed position, where they could be cut off to a man – and had the cavalry been unaccustomed to border life, the artifice would have succeeded; but they were not to be seduced to their ruin by any such transparent stratagem.

Now and then these redskins, a number of Comanches, sent in a rifle ball or two by way of reminding the cavalry that they were accustomed to that business. The lieutenant commanding permitted his men to reply occasionally, but no thought of pursuit

was entertained. None of the soldiers were injured by these shots, although a number passed uncomfortably close, and the ambulance was pierced several times.

At one time Corporal Hugg checked his horse, and pointing his gun out of the stage, took deliberate aim at the nearest redskin, who was displaying his horsemanship by shooting from beneath the neck and belly of his mustang, and then, as the latter wheeled, flopping upon the other side of the animal, and firing as before. The corporal held his fire until he attempted one of these turn-overs, when he pulled the trigger and "took him on the wing." The result was a whoop, a beating of the air with a pair of moccasined feet, and the mustang galloped away without a rider.

This skillful shot was a good thing for the party, as it taught the Comanches the very lesson they needed. They instantly retreated to a further point upon the prairie, and finally vanished from view altogether.

The company had been on the road for nearly a week. Six of them, including the lieutenant, were riding at the head, and the remainder were in the rear of the ambulance. Corporal Hugg was holding the reins of his horse, who was stepping along with his heavy, ponderous tread, while the driver was drowsy and indolent from the long, monotonous ride in which he had been engaged for so many days, and for so many hours during this last day. It was near the middle of the afternoon, and Ned Chadmund was the only one of the company that seemed to be full of life and spirits. He had run along by the side of the vehicle, until he

was pretty well jaded; he had crawled in again, and was chatting away to the corporal in a fashion that left no room for his giving way to drowsiness. The men sat like statues upon their horses, indifferent and silent, and wishing, in a general way, that the day were over and the time had come for going into camp, where they might stretch out their legs and smoke their pipes to their hearts' content.

"Yes, that 'ere is the place they call Devil's Pass," said the corporal in reply to a question from the boy. "You see that it was so wide back there at the beginning that you couldn't see how wide it was, and it keeps geting narrower and narrower till it reminds me of the canyon of the upper Yellowstone."

"How is that?" was the question that came when he paused to take breath.

"So narrow that you could toss a ball from one side to the other, and a thousand feet from the top to bottom, clean and square, and there are some places where it is all of a half mile."

"But this don't seem as narrow as that."

"I don't s'pose it is; but don't you notice ahead, yonder, that it ain't more than a hundred yards broad? Well, it keeps it up for all of two miles just like that."

"Why do they call it Devil's Pass, corporal?"

"I suppose because, if the Old Boy wanted to gobble up a lot of folks, that is just the place. The walls on each side are straight up and down, and several hundred feet high, so that a man can't dodge to the right or left, unless he has a pair of wings to help

him. The only thing he can do is to go forward and backward, and if he happens to have Injuns in front and rear, you can understand what a purty muss he would be in. That, I s'pose, is the reason why it's called the Devil's Pass."

"Do you think they will attack *us*?" asked Ned, in a scared voice.

"I can't say," replied the corporal, striving to banish the expression of alarm from his face. "If they've got any idea of disturbing us, just here is where they'll do it. It's the worst place on the route, and if we can get through to the other side all right, I'll feel as safe as if we was inside the stockades of your father's fort."

"Have you ever been through here before?"

"Yes; all of half a dozen times."

"Did you ever get into trouble?"

"I never traveled through in all my life without having a scrimmage with some of the redskins. If you'll take a look round as we drive along, you'll see the bones of men scattered all along. Some belong to white, and some to redskins; but they all fell fighting."

"How far ahead is the worst part of the route?"

"We're close upon it now, and I may as well tell you, Ned, that I think we're going to have a fight."

CHAPTER VIII. IN DEVIL'S PASS

By this time Ned Chadmund was pretty well frightened. Corporal Hugg had said enough to convince him that they were in the greatest danger of the whole journey. The lieutenant drew his men close together, and two of the most experienced scouts rode a short distance in advance of the others, glancing from side to side, and on the watch for the first signs of the approach of Indians.

The sides of the pass as already shown, were high and precipitous, so that there was no possibility of escape except by going backward or forward. Furthermore, the canyon, as it must have been at some distant day, wound in and out in such a fashion that there were many places where it was impossible to see more than a hundred yards in front or rear. There was no conversation between the soldiers, and even the corporal spoke in a lower tone to his young friend.

"If anything *does* happen," he said, looking down in the handsome upturned face, "I want you to behave yourself, Ned."

"Don't I always do it?"

"I should say not!" was the emphatic response. "Haven't I ordered you to stay in the wagon, and then looked round to see you slipping out while I was talking to you? But things are

different now. If you see anything unusual, or hear rifle balls whizzing about you, don't go to poking your head out to see what the matter is."

"What shall I do, then?" asked the boy, who was really desirous of following the directions of his friend.

"Just lie down in the bottom of the ambulance and wait till I tell you to get up again. The sides are bullet-proof, and there ain't any danger of your getting hurt there."

The afternoon was drawing to a close, and the high walls, rising up on each side, so shut out the rays of the sun, that a somber twilight gloom filled Devil's Pass; a deep, oppressive heaviness was in the atmosphere, that seemed in keeping with the place which had been the scene of so many tragedies, which was now entered with more or less misgiving upon the part of the entire company.

"I'd make a journey of two hundred miles extra if there was any way of gitting around this infernal place," said the lieutenant; "but as there isn't, all we can do is to push ahead."

It was about half an hour after the warning words of the corporal to the lad, and the eyes of the entire company were fixed upon the lieutenant and his comrade, who were riding a short distance in advance. All at once they were seen to rein up their horses simultaneously, as if something in front had caught their attention. As by a common impulse, the others did the same, and breathlessly awaited the next signal. It came in a dozen seconds. While the hunter and his mustang remained motionless,

the lieutenant wheeled his horse about, and rode back and the others noticed that his face was pale and expressive of great alarm.

"I knew we shouldn't get through here without a fight. There's a whole pack of Indians ahead of us. Jake, take a turn back a short distance and see whether they have fixed it so as to shut us in."

The man addressed turned to do as ordered, while the others anxiously awaited his report. He was another Indian fighter, who knew precisely what to do, and he was gone but a short time when he came thundering back, calling out the instant he came in view around a curve in the pass:

"We're in for the biggest scrimmage of our lives! There's five hundred Apaches coming up the pass, and they'll be here inside of ten minutes."

The man who made this terrifying announcement was not one given to exaggeration, and, although he might have overestimated the number in this case, every one of his hearers knew that an overwhelming force was in their rear, and, whatever they did to save themselves, the last thing to be thought of was to turn back.

Scarcely had the news been announced when the scout from the other direction galloped back.

"Well, what is it?" asked the lieutenant.

"Some of the redskins are ahead of us, that's certain."

"What tribe?"

"The Jicarilla Apaches, I think; the worst set of scamps this side of the Llano Estacado."

"How many?"

"I can't make out more than a dozen, and there may be less."

A hasty consultation was held, and all agreed that the appearance of these few Indians in front was for the purpose of turning the party back upon the main force in the rear. Consequently, the proper course was to charge ahead, fighting their way, if necessary, through those before them, and keeping all the distance possible between themselves and the war party coming down from the opposite direction. Only a few seconds were necessary to form this decision, and the cavalry started at a gallop down the pass, Corporal Hugg lashing his powerful steed into a much more rapid pace than he was accustomed to, or was agreeable to him.

"Now, Ned, keep your head down," said the wooden-legged soldier to the boy. "The bullets will soon be buzzing all around us."

As he spoke he stretched out on the flat bottom of the ambulance, allowing his head to be elevated just enough to permit him to peer over the foreboard and guide the horse, which was now forced into a furious gallop. Earnest in his desire to obey, Ned Chadmund did the same, awaiting the result of this desperate attempt to escape from a most perilous position.

The bottom of the pass was quite level and hard, but the ambulance bounded and leaped from side to side in a way that threatened to overturn it, and made anything like connected conversation impossible. The speed of the party was about the

same, the horsemen retaining their position a short distance in advance of the vehicle and all nerved to the fiery charge they believed to be inevitable. The lad, still lying flat on his face in the bottom of the ambulance, raised his head just enough to peer over the shoulder of the corporal at the galloping horse and the figures of the cavalry beyond.

Suddenly the reports of a score of rifles sounded in the pass, and the horrified lad saw fully one half of the soldiers topple out of their saddles, riddled by the balls that had been fired from a skillfully arranged ambush. At the same time several horses reared, plunged and fell, fatally wounded by others of the missiles.

"Down!" shouted the corporal to Ned, who, in the excitement of the moment, had placed his hands upon the shoulders of his friend and risen to his knees. "Down, I say! Don't you see that they are firing at us?"

The rattling sound of the returning fire of the cavalry was heard, each man being armed with a rifle, and the corporal rose to his knees and lashed the galloping horse to a still greater speed.

Instead of a dozen Apaches, fully a hundred came swarming toward the little band of soldiers, the painted warriors seeming to spring, like the dragon's teeth of old, from the very ground. Hemmed in on every hand, the cavalry, throwing away their rifles, which were useless in such an emergency, and drawing their revolvers, charged straight through the yelling horde closing in around them. Fascinated by the terrible scene and scarcely

conscious of what he was doing, Ned crawled forward again and stared out from the front of the ambulance, while the corporal added his voice to the terrible din by shouting to his horse, which was plunging forward at a rate that threatened to overturn completely the bounding vehicle.

The horsemen that were left were comparatively few and they fought like Spartans; but Ned saw them drop one by one from their animals, until there was only the lieutenant left, and he, poor fellow, was lying upon his steed, both badly wounded, as they strove with the madness of desperation to escape. But it was useless. The Apaches were all around them, pouring in their shots with such precision that a moment later the dying horse sank heavily to the ground and the wretches that dashed forward to slay his rider found that he was already dead.

Corporal Hugg saw all this as a huge warrior dashed forward and seized the rein of his own horse; but the next instant he dropped to the earth, was trampled upon by the iron hoofs and run over in a twinkling. Still the Indians swarmed in around and ahead of the team, against which all the avenues of escape seemed hopelessly closed.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE APACHES

Having run down one Apache warrior, Corporal Hugg, unmindful of his own personal danger, leaned forward out of the ambulance and shouted and lashed the furious horse, which was already on a dead run.

"Go it, good fellow," he yelled, his voice rising above the horrid din of cracking fire arms and whooping assailants. "Keep it up a little longer, and we shall be clear of the whole crew."

They were the last words the brave soldier uttered. Ned Chadmund, who had again crouched back in the swaying vehicle, was horrified to see his friend pitch forward upon the foreboard, and then, as the carriage gave one unusually violent plunge, he went out head foremost, and vanished from sight. He had been pierced by a dozen balls, and was dead before he reached the ground.

The horse, like his human assailants, was frantic, and abated not a jot of his tremendous speed, though the reins fell slack and dangled around his feet, and the familiar voice was heard no more. He, too, was wounded by more than one cruel rifle ball, but he seemed capable of undergoing far more than his comrades that had fallen at the first fire.

The situation of the lad was fearful, and he was in imminent

danger from more than one form of death. He was cowering in the bottom of the ambulance, too much terrified to speak or to attempt to help himself in any way. Bruised and stunned by the terrific bounds of the vehicle, he was dazed, bewildered and only dimly conscious of the awful pandemonium reigning around him. Suddenly he felt himself lifted in the air; then there was a crushing and grinding, as if he was being ground to atoms between two millstones, then another terrible crash and his senses forsook him.

The ambulance had overturned and smashed. It was dragged a short distance, when the infuriated steed broke loose, tore a short distance further down the pass and fell dead.

When the boy recovered his senses, his eyes opened upon a very different scene. The sounds of strife had ceased, and the struggle was ended, for the reason that there were no men left to resist the victorious Apaches. It was night, and a company of something like fifty were encamped in a gorge in the mountains. The attacking party, which, including those who had followed the escort into the pass, but were not in time to participate in the engagement, numbered several hundred, and had, after the contest was over, separated and vanished, leaving the chief, Mountain Wolf, with half a hundred of his best warriors gathered about him. After securing the treasure in the ambulance, and taking three horses of the company, which had escaped harm during the massacre, the Apaches moved on in a westerly direction through the pass for half a mile, and turned to the left

in a sort of ravine or gorge. Several hundred yards up this the gorge widened into a valley, wherein were a number of trees and a small stream of water. There they went into camp. An immense fire was kindled, and as it roared and crackled in the night, it threw out a glare that made it like midday for many feet away.

Ned Chadmund had been picked up, limp and apparently lifeless, by the chief, Mountain Wolf, and carried to this spot with as much care and tenderness as if he were a pet child of his own. The boy still showed a certain stupor upon reaching the camp, but after he had lain a short time upon a buffalo robe he revived, and, with wondering eyes, looked around upon the strange and weird scene. The Indians were passing to and fro, as if making preparations for some sort of festivity. There was little noise, but a great amount of activity. Close by the fire were a half dozen warriors, engaged in cooking several carcasses, and had the persons concerned been civilized instead of savage, the scene would have suggested an old-fashioned barbecue.

When the lad arose to a sitting position upon the buffalo hide, he became sensible of a sharp, stinging sensation in the head, and a sore, bruised feeling along his side, both caused by the shock received at the overturning of the ambulance. His action was observed by a number of the Apaches, but none approached, nor did they pay the least attention to him; so he had every opportunity for a careful observation of what was going on around him.

After recovering from the first sensation of terror and

amazement, his thoughts naturally reverted to the tragedy that had been enacted a short time before in Devil's Pass. It was a fearful scene for a lad like him to look upon, and he was sure it must remain vividly impressed upon his memory so long as he lived.

"I'm the only one alive," he repeated to himself, with a shudder. "Poor Corporal Hugg was the last man left, and I saw him killed. I wonder why they spared me?"

He had no suspicion of the intention of the Apaches in preserving his life, and which has already been hinted at in another place; so it was very natural that he should feel puzzled to understand why it was that he had been selected from such a party to escape the hatred which these wild Jicarillo Apaches had shown toward the whites ever since the latter encroached upon their domains.

"I guess they're going to make an Indian of me," was his conclusion. "I wonder what father will think when he hears of it? Poor mother! I know how she was worried when she bid me good-bye. I hope she won't hear anything till I carry her the news myself."

Fortunately for his peace of mind it never occurred to Ned that he might have been spared for the purpose of torture and indignity. There was no fear of present danger, as he sat upon the buffalo skin, viewing the strange scene about him. Something like fifteen minutes had passed while thus engaged, when the figure of a tall, athletic Indian strode slowly toward

him, apparently attracted by the interest which the boy showed in the proceedings. This warrior was fully six feet in height, magnificently formed, with long horse-hair like shreds hanging from his crown, which, like his face, was daubed with startling colors, giving him the appearance of a variegated zebra of the hues of the rainbow.

It was Lone Wolf, one of the most famous leaders of the Jicarilla Apaches.

But the most noticeable feature about this warrior was his dress. He was enveloped from head to foot in a sort of cloak, of a greenish tinge, which rattled and crackled as he walked, as if made of paper. And so it was; for, as he approached, Ned saw that his outer garment was composed entirely of greenbacks, carefully stitched together in such a way that they made a blanket of half a dozen feet square. No redskin probably ever paraded so costly a blanket as this, which included several hundred new and crisp bank notes, varying in value from twenty to a hundred dollars each.

They had been united in such a careful manner that he was able to handle it with as much ease and facility as if composed of a single sheet of paper of the tough texture of which our national issues are made. He seemed quite proud of his novel garment, so unique of its kind, and strode forward with the pompous tread of an Indian chief until he was within a few feet of where Ned sat, when he paused a few moments to give the latter full opportunity to admire his envelope.

"That must have taken a good deal of the money that belonged to the soldiers," was his reflection, "but the country can lose it better than it can the soldiers themselves."

Lone Wolf was one of the most dreaded, because he was one of the most skillful and treacherous, of the Apache chiefs. He went to Washington twice during his life with a delegation from his tribe, visited the principal cities in the North, was treated in the most hospitable manner, and professed the most unbounded love for his white brothers. He announced his deliberate intention of making all haste back to his tribe, and henceforth devoting his life to peace. He would summon his brother chiefs about him, he said then, and make known to them the goodness and love of the whites for the red men. He would explain to them their invincible power, and make very clear the folly of attempting to resist their wishes in any way. Furthermore he agreed to show the numerous gifts that had been showered upon him, and he would explain that if they conducted themselves aright a similar future was before them as well. All this Lone Wolf promised; but he had no sooner got among his own people again than he chose to forget his promises and went upon the warpath.

CHAPTER X.

LONE WOLF

Lone Wolf spoke English like a native; and, having waited until the admiration of Ned Chadmund had been given time to expend itself, he spoke in a deep, guttural voice:

"Does the child of my white brother mourn for those who have fallen?"

The lad was so surprised at hearing himself addressed in this manner, that he stared wonderingly at him for a moment without making reply. Then he rose to his feet, and, looking up in the painted face, replied:

"I am all alone, and long to go to my father."

"What is the name of your father?" asked the chief, in the same excellent English.

"Colonel Edward Chadmund."

"Is he at the fort, yonder?" continued Lone Wolf, stretching out his hand so as to point toward the southwest.

"Yes; he is the commandant there, and has a large number of brave soldiers, and will send them out to take me to him."

Had Ned been a few years older, he would not have made this reply. It was not politic to threaten the chief; and he had no suspicion that the confession of the identity of his father only intensified the hatred of these redskins before him. But perhaps,

after all, it was as well; for Lone Wolf was sagacious enough to recollect that he was talking to a child, from whom he was more likely to hear truth than from an older person.

"He has sent some brave soldiers to take you to him," said the chief, with a wolf-like grin, displaying his long, yellow teeth. "But they have left you on the way; they have given you to Lone Wolf, and they will not go back to the fort, nor to Santa Fe. If he sends more, they will do the same."

"There were only a dozen of them, while you had hundreds. If they had had anything like an equal chance, not one of the Apaches would have been left alive! We would have killed them all!"

This was a brave answer, in a certain sense, but it was not a very prudent one; for Lone Wolf was known to be the possessor of a fearful temper, easily excited into a tempest of passion; and the words of the boy were not calculated to be very soothing to him. There was too much paint upon the face of the chieftain for the boy to observe the flush which overspread it at hearing himself addressed in this manner, but he could understand the lowering of that gruff voice and the quickening of the utterance.

"Lone Wolf and his brave Apaches care nothing for the soldiers of the Father at Washington. His agents deceive us; they make treaties and do not keep them; they lie to us, and then we turn upon and rend them. Do you see that?"

As he uttered this inquiry in the fiercest kind of language, he whipped out from beneath his blanket the reeking scalp of one of

the soldiers that had fallen in the gorge a short time before, and shook it in the face of the terrified lad. The latter could not fail to see what it was, and drew back in horror and disgust, realizing what a bloodthirsty monster stood before him. He saw that it would never do to excite the other's anger, and he endeavored to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Do you and your brave warriors mean to stay here till morning?"

"It is as Lone Wolf wills," was the instant answer, in a voice not quite so severe, indicating a subsidence of the troubled waters.

"And what are you going to do with me?" was the next question, which no one besides a lad of Ned's age would have dared to put, when placed in a similar position.

"That, too, is as Lone Wolf wills," was the rather non-committal answer.

"And that is the reason why I asked you. How soon can I return to my father? When I reach him I will tell him that it was Lone Wolf that sent me back and he will be friendly toward him."

"Lone Wolf asks not his friendship," said the chieftain, with something of the old fire gleaming in his eye. "He has killed our bravest and best warriors. He has followed them to the mountains and slain them by their camp fires, when they dreamed not that the white man was near. He has murdered their squaws; and Lone Wolf shall not die until he tears his scalp from his head."

The poor boy was horrified. He was too young to understand

fully the causes of such deep enmity upon the part of the chieftain, but he was not too young to understand that his own life had been spared through no sentiment of mercy. The leader had some other cause, but Ned did not see much hope of making a favorable impression upon this intractable chief, and he would have been very much relieved had he taken himself off and left him alone.

Some fifteen minutes had passed since the lad had opened his eyes upon the strange scene by which he was surrounded, and the preparations which seemed to be going on were completed. The entire Apache troop suddenly broke out in a series of whoops and yells that would have appalled a hundred famishing wolves. At the same instant they began dancing – not a motion of the feet, such as we are accustomed to see in civilized regions, but a series of demoniac gymnastics, risking the dislocation of all the bones in their bodies. They leaped up and down, swung their arms, threw out their legs, and circled around each other – the whole forming a wild and appalling revelry more like that of wild beasts than of human beings.

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