

Stoddard William Osborn

The Red Mustang



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Chapter I.

THE HORSE AND HIS RIDER

Early one bright June morning, not long ago, a high knoll of a prairie in southern New Mexico was occupied as it had never been before. Rattlesnakes had coiled there; prairie-dog sentinels and wolves and antelopes, and even grim old buffalo bulls, had used that swelling mound for a lookout station. Mountains in the distance and a great sweep of the plains could be seen from it. Never until that hour, however, since the grass began to grow, had precisely such a horse pawed and fretted there, while precisely such a boy sat in the saddle and looked around.

It is very uncommon for a mustang to show a bright and perfect blood bay color, but this one did so, and it seemed as if the glossy beauty of his coat only brought out the perfection of his shape and the easy grace of his movements. He was a fiery, powerful fellow, and he appeared to have some constitutional objection to standing still. The saddle upon his back and the bridle held by his rider were of the best Mexican workmanship, silver mounted, the very thing to complete the elegance of the

red mustang.

In the saddle sat a boy about fourteen years of age, a gray-eyed, brown-haired young fellow, broad-shouldered and well made, whose sunburned face was all aglow with health and who seemed to feel altogether at home in the stirrups. He wore a palm-leaf sombrero, a blue flannel shirt and trousers, while the revolver case at his belt and the carbine slung at his back added to the dashing effect of his outfit.

"Cowboy! I a cowboy!" he exclaimed, as the mustang curveted under him. "Look at those cattle! Look at all those horses! I'd rather own Santa Lucia ranch and ride Dick all over the range, than to live in any city I saw in the Eastern States. Hurrah!"

An exultant, ringing laugh followed the shout, but he still held in Dick. He took a long look, in all directions, as if it were part of his business to know if anything besides cattle were stirring between that knoll and the dim, cloudlike mountain-peaks, or the distant trees which marked the horizon of the plain.

Cattle and horses enough were in sight, as he turned from one point of the compass to another. The horned animals were not gathered in one great drove, but were scattered in larger and smaller gangs, here and there, and were busily feeding. Something like half a regiment of horses, however, had kept together somewhat better, and the red mustang himself seemed to be taking an especial interest in them.

"Be quiet, Dick," said his master. "Are you set on springs?"

A low whinny and something like a suppressed curvet was

Dick's reply, and it was followed by a sharp exclamation.

"Dick, what's that? What's the matter with Sam Herrick?"

At the same instant Dick was wheeled in an easterly direction and was permitted to bound away to meet a horse and rider who were coming towards him at furious speed.

Hardly three minutes later both reins were drawn so suddenly as almost to compel the two quadrupeds to sit down.

"What's the matter, Sam?"

"Indians, Cal, Indians!"

The news was of an exciting character and was given with emphasis, but neither the voice nor the face of the black-bearded, undersized, knotty-looking man who gave it betrayed the least trace of emotion. It was as if he were mentioning some important but altogether matter-of-course part of a cowboy's daily business. He added, in even a quieter tone and manner, as his horse came to a standstill, "I scored one of 'em. They've kind o' got the lower drove, but mebbe they won't drive 'em far. We can race these hosses into the timber. That's what I came for, and I'm right down glad you're here to help."

Cal's eager young face glowed with something more than health, and his eyes were flashing, but he made an effort to seem as calm and unconcerned as Sam Herrick himself.

"How far away are they now?" he asked, as he followed Sam's quick dash towards the drove of horses.

"Mebbe a mile 'n a half. Mebbe not so much. Mebbe some more. All of 'em, except the braves that took after me, went for

hosses and fresh beef, or seemed to. Guess we'll have time."

"Will they get many cattle? Were there enough of them to gather the whole drove?"

"They won't gather any cattle. It's a kind of bufler hunt for 'em. Lots of beef handy. They won't think of driving off any horned critters. Too slow, my boy. They'll take all the hosses they can get, though, and load 'em up, too."

Cal's face was in strong contrast with the dark, almost wooden sternness of the one he was looking into when he asked:

"Sam, did you say you killed one?"

"Can't say. Guess not. I meant to mark him, but it was his pony that seemed to go down. Didn't either of 'em get up, that I saw. He was an awful fool to follow me in the way he did."

Sam was shouting at the horses between his short, jerky sentences, and his long-lashed, short-handled whip was whirling and cracking in a way that they seemed to understand.

"How many were there of them?" asked Cal, the next opportunity he had.

"Hosses? Well, they must have scooped the eastern drove. More'n a hundred head. We've got about two hundred here, but your father's lost some real good ones, this time. No fault of mine."

"I didn't mean horses," said Cal. "How many Indians?"

"Oh, the redskins?" said Sam, with a tremendous crack of the long whip. "Nobody can guess how many. They seemed to swarm all around. 'Paches, of course, but it's a curiosity where

they came from. We must work, now. Further to the left, Cal. That's it. They're started. What are those mules halting for!"

Nearly a score of long-eared fellows knew, in half a minute more, why they were trying to reach the woods ahead of the horses. It must be dreadfully aggravating to any mule to hear such a yell as that of Sam Herrick behind him, and to feel himself whip-stung somewhere at the same moment.

Cal Evans whooped and shouted remarkably well, but there was something sepulchral and savage and startling in the sounds with which Sam encouraged the whole drove to reach the long, irregular line of trees and bushes, half a mile to the southward.

"Keep it up, Cal! Whoop it! They're all a-going. Never mind any cattle. Whoop it!"

"There come the redskins!" shouted Cal, at that moment, and then he seemed to almost hold his breath.

"I saw 'em," coolly responded Sam. "We'll reach good cover before they get here. The drove's running fine."

Sam was cool enough, but every muscle of his wiry body seemed to be uncommonly alive, and the horse he was on dashed hither and thither as if he also understood the matter.

"They're gaining on us," shouted Cal, at the end of another minute. "More'n a dozen of 'em. What can we two do against so many?"

"Keep cool, Cal. I'll show you when we get to the timber," replied Sam. "We're going to save every hoof of this lot, but they may get away with the other drove. I'm only half sure 'bout that,

though."

The mob of mules and horses before them had been whipped and shouted into a furious run, and the thud of their hoofs was worth hearing. The best runners were streaming out ahead, and the heavier, slower animals were sagging behind as a sort of rear-guard. Sam worked vigorously for the rescue of those slow horses, and he hardly turned his head to take a look at the Indians. Cal imitated him as well as he could, except about the looking, and with every bound of the red mustang he justified Sam's remark:

"He rides like an Indian. Isn't he a fine young feller? Reckon the old colonel 'll say I was right. I'll save his boy for him if I have to lose the whole drove – and my own hair, too; but they won't get that for nothing."

Cal Evans could not know what was passing in the mind of the swarthy cowboy. His own brain and every nerve of his body seemed to be all a tingle of excitement. He was now able to think about it and to be proud that he felt no fear. That is, no fear concerning anything but the horses.

On, on, on, went that tumultuous race, and the line of forest was very near now. It was a sort of natural barrier, stretching across the plain as if put there to check the sweep of "norther" storms and prairie fires, and any sort of stampedes. The middle of it was a winding ravine or slough, and at some seasons it was a river, instead of a string of ponds for buffalo wallows. All the wild or tame quadrupeds on that plain knew the value of Slater's

Branch, and some of them, and all of the men, knew that it never quite went dry, and that its faculty to become a river could be exercised at any time on short notice, when the snow in the mountains melted rapidly or when a cloud-burst came on this side of the Sierra.

The trees and bushes knew all about Slater's Branch, and they came and settled for life on its banks, making a timber-belt thick and tall, with here and there dense undergrowths for the deer to lie in.

Cal Evans could not quite understand the present value of that line of forest, and yet he felt that it had a sort of sheltering look, and he was particularly glad to be galloping nearer and nearer, for there was an unpleasant chorus of whoops and yells only about a quarter of a mile behind him, and it was manifestly growing louder.

"Cal," growled Sam Herrick, "they've gobbled hosses enough for this trip. They can't have any more out of your father's corral. The critters are getting into cover. Keep cool, Cal. We may have to throw lead, some; but I reckon not much."

"Won't they follow us into the woods, then?" asked Cal, doubtfully.

"That's the question," replied Sam. "If they're young bucks they may; but not if there's a chief or an old brave among 'em. I'll show you."

Cal was conscious of understanding the feelings of young braves who needed an old chief to hold them back. He knew

that it would be almost a disappointment if he and Sam should succeed in saving the horses without any shooting. He had no desire to hurt anybody or to be hurt, but then the idea of a skirmish and a victory and all that sort of glory made him think of all the Indian battles he had ever read about.

Sam Herrick was armed to the teeth, as became a cowboy in that region, and yet it had been a long time since any hostile savages had troubled it. The herds and droves had multiplied, year after year, almost unmolested, for the Apache bands were either driven over the Mexican border, or into Arizona, or were gathered on their reservations. If Cal had been asked, that morning, why he carried his own weapons, his best excuse would have been "I thought I might hunt a little," and his real reason would not have been told unless he had said: "I love a gun, and I'd rather carry one than not, and a fellow can keep thinking what he'd do with it if he had a chance."

He had not tried to do any hunting, but his chance to do something else had come, or it looked like it, very suddenly.

"There, Cal. Glad we're here – "

Sam Herrick said that as he reined in his horse and sprang to the ground. Cal followed his example, and one glance around him made him draw a breath of relief. There were great oaks, in all directions. Several of the largest had fallen before the hands of time and some strong wind, and he and Sam had ridden in behind them, followed by a gust of angry whooping.

"Take your tree, Cal," said Sam, as he raised his repeater and

sent a warning shot in the direction of the whoops. "Now, my boy, if you was one of them 'Paches, how'd you feel about riding into short range of two good rifles, knowing what lead'll do for a careless Indian?"

"I'd think twice about it," said Cal, "and so 'll they; but they may ride into cover above or below us, and creep up. There's more than a dozen of 'em."

"Another time, perhaps, they might," said Sam, "but this isn't that other time. They haven't any to spare for scouting and skirmishing if they're to get away with their plunder. You and I can stand 'em off. Let drive, Cal! They're riding in too near."

Crack, crack, went the two rifles, although the distance was over three hundred yards.

"I declare!" exclaimed Sam. "One of us has knocked over a cow, on the rise, away beyond. They've seen it, though, and it's a good notice to 'em. There's just one thing troubles me. Word ought to be sent to the ranch. They ought to be warned before any mischief comes to 'em. I don't half know what to do."

He fired again, as if in vexation as well as in doubt, and the red men wheeled away as they also were uncertain what to do next.

Cal was silent for a moment, but a terrible thought had flashed into his mind. The ranch was his home.

"Sam," he said, in a changed, anxious voice, "is there any danger to them? I could dodge these fellows. I could carry the warning."

"I'd never answer to your father for letting you run any risk,

Cal. You're perfectly safe here, but it might be an awful race to Saint Lucy."

Sam Herrick's idea of perfect safety was all his own, but Cal responded:

"I'd be just as safe on Dick's back. There isn't a horse in New Mexico – "

"I know," said Sam, "but a bullet or an arrer 'll out-travel any hoss living. If you could ride along under cover, to the left, 'bout half a mile, and set off behind the herd, without their sighting you – "

"Yes," said Cal, "but why can't you come along and get to the ranch with me?"

"My name's Sam Herrick, and I never went back on myself since I was born. Colonel Evans's hosses was in my keep, and nigh half on 'em's gone, and I'm bound to save the other half. I can stand off this lot of red-skins. They haven't an hour to throw away, and they know it. Mount and ride! Good-bye, Cal. You're taking all the risk there is."

Cal sprang to the saddle, shook Sam's hand, and cantered away through the trees, but he did not hear the muttered words of the man who watched his departure.

"I reckon," said Sam, "that was the only way I could have got him to try it on. He's clear grit, like his father, and he'd have stayed to fight it out in this here death-trap. I couldn't bear to have 'em get him. Besides, what I told him may be true. He may be saving the women folks at the ranch, and perhaps these chaps

won't ride in. I'll give 'em a shot, now and then, till he's well away."

Sam seemed wonderfully relieved, as if a great load had been taken off his mind. It was a great thing to him to have nothing but Apaches to watch and to have no awful responsibility concerning the boyish rider of the red mustang.

If one of Sam's troubles had been in some small part removed, there was another question which from time to time came to his lips, and he now seemed almost satisfied with his own answer.

"Where did they come from? Well, I'd say they was from the Mescalero – 'Pache reservation, east of the mountains. They got tired of being cooped up on poor rations. How'd they get through at El Paso? I don't know how. Where'll they go next? I don't know that, neither."

When Sam first saw those Indians that morning, no time at all was given him for taking notes. He had been suddenly compelled to put spurs to his horse and to ride for his life. He had been followed by the only Indians, out of more than a hundred, that were mounted, for all the rest were on foot. The hundred, and as many more as there might be, included dozens of warriors, besides squaws and children. There were a score of heavily laden pack-ponies, besides the ponies ridden by the mounted braves, but that band was particularly in need of the kind of property which Sam Herrick had been set to guard. He guessed very correctly about them. They had broken away from the region of country set apart as their reservation, for what they deemed

good reasons. They had taken with them only such few miserable ponies as a series of disastrous seasons had left them.

They saw Sam before he saw them; for, in spite of his customary watchfulness, he had been taking things lazily. They had no idea of a grand prize so near at hand, and the news brought back by their scouts who first made the discovery came as a thrilling surprise to the entire band. All the voices of all the dusky men, women, boys, and girls, exclaimed "Ugh!"

That was followed by silence and by crouchings in the grass and behind ant-hills. The pack-ponies were led back a little distance. A tall warrior on foot gave orders with motions of his hands, hardly uttering a sound, and, in obedience to his directions, warriors, squaws, boys, and even girls, darted off to the right and left.

The horses were feeding quietly, and were not widely scattered, and Sam Herrick sat in the saddle, looking at them listlessly and not dreaming of peril to them or to himself. He did not see the dusky forms which were creeping behind tufts and knolls behind him and away on either side of him. So it came to pass that when, at last, all was ready, and the braves who had ponies came galloping towards him, it was just as he afterwards described it to Cal Evans, "the prairie seemed to swarm with them."

His only course was to dash away at the best speed of his horse, and the squad that followed him had cared very little whether or not they should catch him, except to prevent him from

carrying news of their arrival. Their miserable used-up ponies had been no match for the racer he was riding, but the whole band seemed likely to be better mounted, speedily, than it ever had been before.

There was very little whooping done by the horse collectors, for there was no wish to cause a stampede. The first horses caught and mounted were employed to catch others, and the packs of the pack-ponies were rapidly searched for lariats and bridles. Of course there was more than a little dismounting as well as mounting, for a number of unbroken colts did their entire duty in the way of refusing to be ridden barebacked. That would have been better fun at any other time. Just now it was a delay, and so a probable danger, and some of the most vigorous kickers carried their point, and were driven away instead of being ridden.

There was work for the entire band, for the cattle were next attended to, and once more Sam Herrick proved to be a good guesser. Beef was wanted, but not on the hoof, and horse after horse and mule after mule was laden with fresh meat. A poor, hungry, dismounted gang of Apaches, escaped from their reservation limits, had suddenly become almost rich. Not a soul of them had ever been taught that there was anything unlawful in what they were doing, and there was glee all around, marred only by the fact that there was nothing there to cook with, and by the fear that the solitary cowboy might get away and bring a lot of angry palefaces to take that magnificent plunder away from them. All of that wide plain had once been Apache land,

with its buffalo, its deer, and its other game, and whatever might now be found upon it by a band who considered themselves very good Indians, was fair game for them. They believed themselves to have been plundered by the whites, and to be now obtaining something like a part payment for their lost rights. Sam Herrick, standing behind the fallen trees, rifle in hand, was obstinately interfering with their effort to secure a much larger and better payment of the same old debt.

Chapter II.

HOW CAL EVANS RODE FOR HELP

The excited boy on the red mustang was not allowed to use his own judgment altogether as to the right place for riding out from the forest. Hundreds and hundreds of cows and bulls and oxen took that important matter into their own hoofs. They had not been so sensitive as the horses, and had not been whipped or shouted at. They, therefore, had not been stampeded so quickly, but they went wild enough as soon as the craze took them. They may have been wondering whether a norther or a prairie-fire or a travelling earthquake were after Sam and Cal and the horses when over the grassy rolls came that squad of yelling red-men. The whoops were an awful noise to hear, and one very thin, respectable old cow set off at once. In another moment there were tossing horns and anxious bellowing in all directions, while some half-grown calves threw up their heels and followed the cow. A wiry, vicious-looking ox, with only one horn, punched with it the ribs of his next neighbor. That example spread like wildfire; and something said by the widest-horned, longest-legged, deepest-throated old bull may have really meant:

"Now – ow, every fellow bellow and run like all ruin – uin – uin!"

Run like ruin they did, and, of course, they broke for the timber, although the Indians who were threatening Sam Herrick were right ahead of them. If a regiment of infantry had been in the way it would have been scattered all the same, and what were a dozen or so of mere pony-riders? Sam was safe among his fallen trees, but the Indians had to get out of the way of that stampede. Cal Evans saw the cattle coming, and he had his wits about him.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "I'll put them between me and the redskins. Now, Dick, it's our chance."

The red mustang knew that he had been called upon. There was a whinny, a bound, a swift dash of nearly two minutes into the open plain, and then a burst of whooping announced that he and his rider had been seen.

What of that, when all that tumult of tossing horns was streaming along behind them, putting its barrier between Cal and the nearest Apache warrior? Follow him? What would ponies already overdriven be worth behind the long, swinging, elastic bounds of the red mustang?

"Hurrah, Dick! There's no other such horse living! Hurrah!"

On, on, on! and there was no need of a trail to follow, for Sam Herrick's last advice had been, "Ride due north, Cal, and you won't lose any distance."

At that very moment the brave cowboy was watching the course of events almost breathlessly, but the only token of excitement was a glitter in his black eyes, until he exclaimed, "Colorado! Cal's safe! The critters have done it. They've done

me a good turn, too, if I can manage to keep out of their way."

He sprang to the saddle, and hurried along deeper into the forest. Just as the foremost bulls were charging in among the trees, Sam rode out into an open place on the bank of Slater's Branch. It was bare of trees, but it was thronged with horses, and so was the wide, shallow pool beyond; and now they all heard once more the crack of Sam's whip.

"The horned critters won't stop," he said to himself, "till their hoofs are in the mud. The redskins may follow 'em, but there's time to put the hosses on the other side."

There was fright enough among them to prevent any delay, and the last mule was braying upon the opposite bank in reply to a shout of Sam's, when the cattle began to show in the open space. Bushes and trees had checked the stampede somewhat, but there were bellows of pleasure all along the line – bellows of all sorts and sizes, as if calf and cow and patriarch alike found mental relief in a sight of Slater's Branch.

"Colorado!" exclaimed Sam; "all the critters are as nigh safe as I can make 'em. I'm free, now, to pick my way back to Saint Lucy. Redskins 'll go slow through timber with a rifle in it. If the whole band came I'd be of no manner of use. They can't catch Dick now he's got a clear start. Cal's safe; but what I want now is a fresh mount. I've taken twenty odd miles out of this one, and I may have racing to do. That gray's about X."

The gray he singled out was caught and saddled and bridled, but no ordinary groom could have performed that feat. Neither

could any timid horseman have compelled the gray to give up the disposition he had for dancing horse-waltzes and polkas among the trees. Sam did it, and forced him to go ahead with not more than three or four gaits at once.

"More fire and more mischief and more good running in him," he remarked, exultingly. "Nothing could catch him, unless it might be Cal's red mustang. My chance is a heap better than it was."

He seemed to have a habit of talking to some imaginary companion. Men who pass much of their time alone are very apt to get such a habit, but men who live among crowds never do. Away he went a mile or more down the Branch, until he came to a place where he could cross it almost dryshod.

"The 'Paches won't come this way," he remarked. "They'll either try to strike Saint Lucy, or else they'll head for the Mexican line with their plunder."

Sam could make his calculations as coolly as if the Apaches had been so many peaceable traders, but there was only one thought in the mind of Cal Evans. It grew as he rode, and it kept his mind in a sort of mingled fever and chill.

"The ranch and everybody in it! If father is there he might take them for friendly Indians until it would be too late. He isn't likely to be there. Men all gone! Mother is there! Vic is there!"

Cal's thoughts took terrible shapes as he galloped onward, borrowing horrors from all he had ever heard of the deeds of pitiless savages. More than once a fierce kind of shout burst from

him, but he had no need for urging Dick. The red mustang's racing-blood was up, as if he knew that he were riding a great match against danger and death. He responded to his master with a short, excited whinny, and seemed to lengthen the splendid stride that swept the miles away. He had been set free to run his best and wildest, with only a light weight to carry, and the distance vanished behind him.

Cal had ridden Dick more than once when there were running deer to catch, and had thought him a miracle of speed, but now there were moments when he almost found fault with him for going slowly. That, too, with the warm wind whistling past him, and his own best horsemanship called for to keep the saddle. He guided Dick a little with reference to burrows and ant-hills. He knew that there were no ravines worth mentioning. He even kept a lookout for possible Indians between him and the northern horizon.

"I'll charge through them if I do see any," he said to Dick.

His face had undergone a change for the time, and was hardly boyish, it was so full of desperate determination and awful anxiety. He was riding for the safety of his home – of his father, mother, sister. At last before him arose a long, gentle roll of prairie that he seemed to know.

"Mother!" burst from him, as Dick sprang up the slope, and at the crest of it the good horse was reined in.

"Santa Lucia! The ranch! All right yet, and not an Indian to be seen. Hurrah for Dick!"

He deserved it, although he did not look as if he had been specially exerting himself. There was hardly a fleck of perspiration upon his glossy coat, and he drew only two or three long breaths, not so much because he needed them, perhaps, as that he also was relieved at finding everything serene about the ranch.

It was, in fact, a very picture of peace that lazy summer morning. The stout stockade, containing fully two acres of ground around the spring and the buildings, seemed almost deserted, except for a few cows, some dogs, and a couple of tethered horses. The house itself, of one story, built of large blocks of sunburned "adobe," made three sides of a square, the main entrance being through a gateway in the palisades and covered veranda that guarded the fourth side. Each face was over fifty feet long, and the outer windows were mere slips. The Spanish Mexicans who built Santa Lucia, years and years ago, had planned it for a pretty strong fort as well as dwelling, and Cal Evans felt very kindly towards them at the present moment.

The gate of the stockade was wide open, unguarded, and he dashed through it and up to the house in a manner which attracted attention. The sound of a piano ceased at once, and a dignified elderly lady, who came out to the veranda, was quickly joined by a younger and slighter form.

"Cal," exclaimed the latter, "has anything happened to father?"

"No, Vic, nothing much has happened – not yet – "

"Cal, something has happened! What is it?" said the old lady, with a quick flush of anxiety.

"I must out with it. The Apaches have scooped the lower drove, every horse. They came for the upper drove, but Sam and I got them into the timber – "

"Was he hurt?" asked Mrs. Evans.

"No, mother, but he isn't safe yet – " and Cal went on to give a rapid account of all he knew.

Sam Herrick himself could hardly have shown better nerve than did Cal's mother. She grew calm and steady-eyed as she listened, but Victoria's pretty face paled and reddened again and again, for she was hardly two years older than her brother.

"Oh, if only father were here!" she said.

"Where's he gone?" asked Cal.

"Out on the range," replied his mother. "He and all of them will come in at the first sign of danger. Everybody knew that the Indians were dissatisfied, but I didn't dream of their coming this way."

"They wanted horses, mother, and they may try and strike the ranch," said Cal.

"I think not," she said, decidedly, "but you must carry the news to Fort Craig."

"And leave you and Vic here? Never!"

"You must not pause one minute. Not even to eat. Victoria and I and the servants can bar the stockade and the house, but no Indians will come. If there is really any danger, the sooner the

cavalry get here the better. Do you think you've tired Dick?"

"No, mother, but it seems as if I'd rather die than leave you here alone."

"Ride for our safety, my son. Ride steadily. It's a long push for any horse, and Dick must last till you get there."

"Yes, mother," said Cal, "but he can do it."

"Leave your rifle," she added. "You'll not need it, and it's an extra weight."

She did not let him forget to water the red mustang, and while Dick was drinking she packed a small haversack with cold meat and bread for Cal's use on the road.

He was ready to mount.

"Oh, mother, I want to stay and fight for you and Vic – "

"Bring the cavalry! Go!" she said, and it seemed to cost her something to say it.

He hardly knew, after he was in the saddle, in what words he put his good-bye. He saw two faces that watched him as Dick sprang through the gate. It seemed almost as if he had seen them for the last time, and then he thought, again, that perhaps the best hope for Santa Lucia and all in it had been confided to the swift feet of the red mustang.

Chapter III.

THE BAND OF KAH-GO-MISH

New Mexico is a wonderful country. It is full of places that are worth going to see, while some of its other places are well worth keeping away from. Down through the territory, east of the middle, runs north and south the main range of the Rocky Mountains. Among them rise the Picos and the Canadian and several other rivers that run away to the south and east. Westerly from the main range, with marvellous valleys between, are the Organ Mountains, made to show what strange shapes vast masses of rock can be broken into. Farther westward is the great valley of the Rio Grande and beyond this arise the Sierra Madre and the Sierra San Juan. It is all a wonderful region, with great plains as well as mountain ranges, and here and there are found remarkable ruins of ancient architecture and every way as remarkable remnants of ancient people. Some of the wide levels are mere deserts of sand and gravel – hot, barren, terrible – but others are rich with pasturage for horses and cattle, as they once were only for innumerable bisons, deer, and antelopes.

The Spanish-Mexican hidalgo who had selected Santa Lucia had shown excellent judgment, although even in that day he probably had more or less trouble with his red neighbors. The present owners and occupants of the ranch had had none at all

until the very hour when Sam Herrick found the prairie around him swarming with them.

As for Sam, he had now no suspicion how near he came to again meeting the very Apaches who had chased him and Cal and who were now hurrying to rejoin their band. They missed Sam and they brought news back with them which seemed to receive the approval of the very dignified warrior who had directed in the capture of the horses. He was a proud-looking commander now, as he sat upon one of Colonel Evans's best horses to listen to their report.

"Ugh!" he remarked. "Kah-go-mish is a great chief. Get ranch first. Then go for horses in timber."

There was pride in every tone and movement of Kah-go-mish, for he had performed a great exploit, and he and his band were no longer in poverty. There were many signs, however, that they had not been prosperous upon the Reservation, although the chief still wore the very high silk hat which had there been given him. He had tied a green veil around it to set off its beauty and his own. His only other garments were the well-worn buckskin leggings which covered him from the waist to the knee, and a pair of long red stockings through which he had thrust his arms to the shoulder. Openings in the soles let out the hands, with which he gesticulated in explanation of orders which were promptly obeyed.

About thirty warriors, now well mounted and all pretty well armed, whirled away northerly, with Kah-go-mish at their head,

and their purpose did not require any explanation.

Half as many more braves and all the squaws, boys, and girls proceeded to complete the beef business. They did it with great rapidity and dexterity, and then they, with the horses, dogs, and children, trailed away in a caravan that was headed almost due south. It was a very picturesque caravan all the time, but it looked more so than ever when it halted, after a while, on the bank of Slater's Branch.

Some very good people had been interested in the reservation set apart for those Apaches, and had gathered contributions of civilized clothing for them. It had not been in rebellion against anything of that sort that Kah-go-mish and his people had run away, for the miscellaneous goods from away Down East helped the picture at Slater's Branch amazingly. The hat and stocking legs had helped the appearance of the chief himself, but other things had done more for a fat and very dark lady whom he had addressed as Wah-wah-o-be. The many-ribboned straw bonnet upon the head of the severe-faced wife of Kah-go-mish was fine. So was the blue calico dress with the red flannel skirt over it, and the pony she rode seemed to be afraid of the whole outfit. Near her, upon two other ponies, sat a boy and girl. They were apparently younger, a little, than Cal and Victoria Evans. They were hardly as good-looking, in some respects, and were dressed differently. Among the charities at the Reservation had been a bale of second-hand trousers, of the style worn nowadays by boys, reaching to the knee. The young lady wore a pair of these,

and with them a dress of which any Mescalero girl might have been vain. A piece of yard-wide red cotton, three yards long, had a hole in the middle for the head to pass through. When proper armholes were added and a belt of embroidered antelope skin confined the loose cloth at the waist, what more was needed by the bright-eyed daughter of Kah-go-mish?

The boy on the other pony – Well, he wore another pair of second-hand trousers. They had been planned for a man and were large in the waist, requiring a belt, but had been altered to the complete style by cutting them off just below the knee. The pony he rode was one of the nearly worn-out fellows that had travelled all the way across the mountains from the Reservation. He and Cal Evans had been within a few miles of each other that morning. Both were uncommonly vigorous young fellows, of whom their parents had a right to be proud, but it was not easy to discover many points of resemblance between them. There did not seem to be the least probability that they would ever be much thrown into each other's society; but then no young fellow of fourteen knows precisely who his future friends are to be, or where he is to meet them.

Chapter IV.

THE GARRISON OF SANTA LUCIA

Fully six miles from the threatened home of the Evans family there was a deep, round sink-hole, shaped like a funnel. Nobody knew exactly when or how it was made, but down at the weedy bottom of it lay the body of an Indian pony, and over that there leaned a very tall man.

Up at the margin of the sink-hole were four horses, and three of them had riders.

"Well, colonel, how does it pan out?" asked one of the mounted men.

"Either Cal or Sam Herrick did it. Hit him right between the eyes. 'Tisn't two hours since it was done. The critter rolled down here. Joaquin, you and Key ride for the ranch. Tell Mrs. Evans I'll scout a little and be right there."

"All right, colonel," shouted one of the horsemen.

"Si, señor," responded the other.

The first was a brawny, freckled old fellow, with nothing to mark him for notice but a jaunty sort of roll and swagger, even in the saddle. The second speaker was an American, of the race that fought with Hernando Cortes for the road to the City of Mexico. He may or may not have been a full-blooded Tlascalan, but there was a fierce, tigerish expression on his face as he glanced at the

dead pony. His white teeth showed, also, in a way to indicate the state of his mind towards the tribe the pony's owner belonged to, but the words he uttered carried a surprise with them. Who would have thought that so sweet and musical a voice could come from such a thunder-cloud face?

Key and Joaquin galloped away, and Colonel Evans climbed up out of the sink-hole.

"Somebody coming," suddenly exclaimed the remaining horseman.

"Reckon it must be Sam."

"Looks like him, Bill," said the colonel. "Coming on the run."

"We'll know now!" and Bill's words came out in a harsh, rasping voice that matched exactly with his long, thin body and coarse yellow hair.

The colonel stood by his horse waiting for Sam. Nobody who saw him once was likely to forget him. His eyes and hair were like Cal's, but the likeness did not go much further. There was silver in his heavy beard and mustache, and his eyebrows were bushy, giving him a stern, and, just now, a threatening expression. More than that, Colonel Abe Evans, old Indian trader and ranch owner, stood six feet and seven inches, although he was so well proportioned that at a little distance he did not seem unusually large. As to his strength, his men may have exaggerated a little, now and then, but they declared that whenever a horse tired under him he would take turns and carry the horse, so as not to lose time. He hated to lose anything, they said, but most of all he

hated to lose his temper.

There were signs that he was having some difficulty in keeping cool just now, but his voice was steady, as yet.

"Is that your work?" he asked, as Sam reined in and stared down at the dead pony in the sink-hole.

"Colorado!" exclaimed Sam. "That's where that 'Pache went to. Hit the pony, did I? 'Peared to go out of sight powerful sudden."

He paused for a moment, and he wiped his forehead, but there was a steely light beginning to dance in the eyes of Colonel Evans, and the cowboy continued: "No manner of use blinking it, colonel. The lower drove's gone. Took me by surprise. Reg'lar swarm. I reached the upper drove in time and stampeded it across Slater's Branch. Every hoof."

"Did they follow you?"

"Oh, yes, a gang of 'em, but Cal and I stood 'em off."

"Cal!" exclaimed his father, with a start and a shiver, but Sam went steadily on in a rapid sketch of the morning's adventures.

"Sam Herrick," said the colonel, "keep the gray you're on. It's your horse. I can read the whole thing like a book. Of course they wanted beef and horses, but they may go for the ranch. Come on!"

There was an angry shake, now, in the deep, ringing tones of his voice, and the veins in his forehead were swelling. He sprang to the saddle of the broad-chested, strong limbed thoroughbred held for him, and that seemed just the horse for the strongest

man in southern New Mexico.

"Sam," said he, as they rode away, "what's your opinion?"

"Cal got there safe, long before the redskins could. We can do it, too, if they worked long enough over their beef. If we get there first, we can hold Saint Lucy against twice as many. But if we don't – "

Neither of those horsemen said another word after that. Sam knew no more than the rest did of what was actually going on at the ranch.

More than a little had been going on, and with quite remarkable results.

Hardly had Cal disappeared through the gateway of the stockade before the two in the veranda turned and looked wistfully at one another.

"Mother," said Victoria, "do you think there is really any danger?"

"Terrible danger, my dear," said Mrs. Evans, with a quiver in her firm lips.

"Then what made you send Cal away? Oh, mother!"

"We are as safe, almost, without him as with him, and the whole valley is in danger until the army officers are warned. They believe that everything is quiet."

"How I wish they were here! And father!"

"Victoria," exclaimed Mrs. Evans, with a face that grew very pale, "he went to look at the lower drove, the one that the savages have captured."

"Sam didn't see him, or Cal would have said so. Mother, you don't believe they killed him?"

There was a strange look in the resolute face of Mrs. Evans.

"Vic," she said, "I don't believe they have touched him. He's not the man to be caught. We must work, though, for they'll be here pretty soon. We must bar the gate, first, and any prowling Indian needn't be told that there are only women behind the stockade."

Vic's quick dash for the gate expressed her feelings fairly, but she put up the bars of the gate with more strength and steadiness than might have been expected of her. But for the reddish tint of her hair she would have looked even more like Cal than she did when she turned and said: "There, mother, that's done. Now, what?"

Mrs. Evans studied the gate for a moment.

"Vic," she said, "everybody must help. I think we can hold the ranch. Come with me."

In half a minute more they were standing in the courtyard of the adobe, explaining the terrors of the situation to a group of five startled and frightened women. Seven in all, they were the only garrison of Santa Lucia, and Kah-go-mish and his warriors were coming to surprise it. How long could they hold out?

Chapter V.

CAL AND THE CAVALRY AND THE RED MUSTANG

"Sixty miles to Fort Craig!"

That had been the mournful exclamation of Cal Evans, a little distance from Santa Lucia. Then he made a brief calculation, and added: "Dick has had ten miles of easy going and ten miles of running. Not many horses could stand sixty more. I believe he can, but I'll take care of him, as mother said. It's awful! I don't wonder some people want to kill all the Indians, right away. I do."

He had some lessons yet to learn about Indians, but now he reined in the red mustang to a steady-going gallop instead of the free gait that Dick was inclined to take.

An hour went by, and it was a trying hour to Cal Evans, crowded as his mind was with fears and with imaginations concerning what might be doing at Santa Lucia.

"Wasn't mother beautiful!" was one thought that came to him. "Vic, too, and they're brave enough, and they both know how to shoot, but what can they do against Indians?"

He felt that he was doing his duty. He was, at all events, obeying his mother. He was a boy who wished to be in two places, but his mind grew calmer with the regular beat of Dick's hoofs. A sharp appetite came, too, and put him in mind of his haversack.

He ate as best he could, and the next stream of water he came to invited him to dismount and get some, and to let Dick do the same and rest a little. It was very hard work to stand still and eat cold meat and bread, and pat Dick and think about Santa Lucia.

After that the red mustang was pulled in for a breathing-spell at the end of every half-hour, or a little more, but every minute expended in that way seemed like an hour to Cal Evans.

Noon came and went, as the long miles went by. Groves, tree-lined sloughs, gangs of deer to the right and left, hardly attracted a glance from the sore-hearted young messenger. Mountain-tops, easterly, that had been cloudy in the morning, were showing more distinctly against the sky, when Cal at last pulled the red mustang suddenly in.

"A smoke!" he exclaimed. "It can't be Indians. No danger of their being away up here. I'll find out."

Courageously, but warily, he rode some distance nearer, and he was just about to dismount when a loud voice hailed him.

"Hullo! What are you scouting around for? What are you afraid of?"

"Hurrah!" shouted Cal, for the hitherto unseen horseman, who now came out from behind a clump of mesquit trees, wore the yellow-trimmed uniform of the United States cavalry.

Explanations followed fast, and were made more full in front of the camp-fire, where rations were cooking for a score or more of what Cal thought were the best-looking men he ever saw. That is, they were the very men he wanted to see, and the bronzed,

gray-bearded captain in command of them was really a fine-looking veteran.

"So," he said, "my young friend, we ought to have set out a day earlier. Colonel Sumner had heard that a band had been seen near El Paso, days ago, and we were coming your way. Your father isn't the man to be taken by surprise. He can hold the ranch."

"Father isn't there, Captain Moore!" exclaimed Cal.

"I'll trust him to get there, then. That's a splendid fellow you're riding. What did you say? Twenty miles and more before you left Santa Lucia? Forty odd, since, to this place. Pretty near seventy miles. That's enough for him or you for one day."

It was in vain for Cal to plead the peril of his family. The cavalry had made a long push and must rest their horses. One tough fellow was given only time to eat before he was again mounted, on a spare horse fresher than the rest, with despatches for the commander at Fort Craig.

Dick was provided with ample rations, and so was his master; but Cal Evans needed all the cheerful encouragement of Captain Moore to keep his heart from sinking under his heavy forebodings concerning the fate of Santa Lucia.

The nearer the sun sank to the horizon the more strongly he felt that it was impossible for him to spend that night in the cavalry camp. He said so to Captain Moore, stoutly denying that his day of hard riding had wearied him.

"I know how you feel," said the kindly veteran at last. "There'll be a good moon, and you know the way. I'll let you have one of

our led horses. You mustn't ride to death that red beauty of yours. We'll bring him on. Tell your father we shall start at sunrise, and that I've sent word to the fort."

Cal was sincerely grateful, but while a soldier was saddling for him a good-looking black, he went to say good-bye to Dick, praising and caressing him in a manner that brought from him whinny after whinny of good-will.

His master had not known how tired he was himself until he mounted the black – so stiff, so sore, so almost without any spring left in him; but he felt better the moment the horse began to move under him.

"Take your bearings by the north star," shouted Captain Moore. "Go easy and you'll get there. Then I think you'll want to go to bed."

Cal thanked him and cantered away. He was glad enough of the glorious moonlight and of the stars, especially the north star. He was carrying news of help found quicker than he had expected. What then? Would he find Santa Lucia as he had left it? Would it be besieged? How many Apaches might he not fall in with before getting there? He knew that they never rode around after dark, and that was something.

"If I don't get too tired and tumble off," he said to himself, "and if the black holds out, I'll get home before daylight, and I'll ride through to the gate if the Apaches are camped all around the ranch."

The black galloped steadily. He was a good horse, but he

lacked the easy swing of the red mustang, and there was more weariness in riding him. He was allowed to rest, at intervals, and Cal tried hard not to ask too much of him.

"Captain Moore said about forty miles to the ranch," remarked the young rider to his horse, at last. "You must have done about half of them. You're doing well enough, but I never felt so tired in all my life. I'm going to make a good, hard push of about ten miles, if it's only to keep me from going to sleep."

The push was made and the black stood it well enough, but it grew harder and harder on Cal. At the end of it he knew that he could not be more than ten miles from the ranch, but he found that the black was disposed to walk. It might be unwise to urge him any more. At the same time every mile was probably bringing Cal and his news within more or less danger of Apache interruption. Oh, how he longed for a glimpse of the Santa Lucia stockade! Oh, how sleepy he was, and how hungry and how sick at heart!

As the black plodded onward he caught himself nodding heavily, and he recovered his senses in the middle of a half-waking dream in which he had seen the cavalry arriving and chasing away Indians.

"I may fall off," he said, "if I try that again. I'm afraid if I did fall I couldn't climb into the saddle again. I'm stiff and numb all over."

Plod, plod, plod, on went the very good-natured black, and Cal did not know how long it was before he had another dream.

It seemed to him as if the red mustang came and walked along with the black, and as if he himself had said: "Hullo, Dick. Glad you've come. You can carry me easier, and you know where to go."

Then, in the dream, Cal rode the red mustang.

Chapter VI.

THE PERIL OF SANTA LUCIA

After Cal rode away from the cavalry camp on the black, Captain Moore made a number of remarks about him.

"Plucky boy," he said. "Tough as whipcord, but he'll be pretty well used up before he gets to the ranch."

The other officers and the men agreed with their commander in all he had to say about Cal Evans or about his horse.

The red mustang was in the corral. He had been tethered, by a long lariat, to the same pin with a mean-looking, wiry little pack-mule, and he had given early tokens that he did not like his long-eared company.

Dick had travelled fast and far since sunrise of that day. Cal had given him a friendly rubbing down after supper, and he felt pretty well. One admiring cavalryman had given him a full army ration of corn, and another had brought him some nice pieces of hard-tack, while several more had said things about his shape and color and the miles he had travelled, all in a way to rouse the jealousy of a sensitive mule. After the men went away, Dick considered himself entitled to lie down and did so, but the mule did not. There was moonlight enough to kick by, and it was not long before the red mustang was suddenly stirred up. He was not hurt, for that first kick had been seemingly experimental, as if

the mule were getting the exact range of Dick's ribs. A low squeal expressed his satisfaction at his success, but it was followed by a disappointment, for his own lariat was several feet shorter than the brand-new one given to the red mustang, and the latter had stepped almost out of danger. It was almost, but not quite, and Dick was compelled to keep in motion to get out of harm's way. It was too bad not to have quiet, after so hard a day's work, but that mule was a bitter-hearted fellow. Dick moved along, backing away and watching, and the mule slowly, sullenly, followed him. Santa Lucia was a better place than this, Indians or no Indians. Dick had seen Cal depart, and he had felt deserted and lonely then, but his homesickness increased rapidly under the treatment he was receiving from the wickedly perverse beast he was tied up with.

Back, back, back, until both lariats were tightly wound once more around the pin. They were shortened eight inches by that twist, and the next wind around shortened them nine inches more. The mule grew wickeder and made a dash that did not cease until three more twists had shortened the lariats. Meantime there had been all sorts of jerks and counter-jerks upon the wooden pin, and it was getting loosened in the soft ground. Winding up the lariats, the game went on until both tethers were short indeed, and that of the mule was less than three yards long. The strain of it disgusted him, and he gave a plunge and pull against it just as Dick was drawing hard in the opposite direction. Up came the pin, but once more the mule was disappointed. The next dash he

made brought him and Dick to a stand, for they were on opposite sides of the trunk of an oak that caught the lariats in the middle. They could bring their heads and shoulders together, but the tree protected Dick from his enemy's heels. The tree and the knotted lariats held hard, and the red mustang could not prevent that ugly head from coming close to his own.

Would he bite?

No, he was a bad mule, but the mischief in him, except such as naturally settled in his heels, was of another kind. He preferred to gnaw a hide lariat around a horse's neck rather than the neck itself. Dick was compelled to stand still while the gnawing proceeded, and it was very unpleasant.

The mule had good teeth, and he knew something about lariats. It was remarkable how short a time elapsed before, as Dick gave a sudden start, he found himself free.

Liberty was a good thing, but that camp was not an attractive place for a horse which had seen his master ride away from it. Besides, it contained the tormenting mule, and all of the red mustang's thoughts and inclinations turned towards Santa Lucia.

Notable things had occurred there since Dick and Cal came away, and after Mrs. Evans made her courageous appeal to her five servants. Four of these were evidently Mexicans, and the fifth declared her own nationality in the prompt reply that she made to her mistress.

"Wud I foight, ma'am? 'Dade'n I'll not be skelped widout foighting. I want wan of thim double goons, and the big wash

toob full of b'ilin' wather and the long butcher knife and the bro'd axe. I'll make wan of thim 'Paches pale like a potaty. There's plinty of good blood in Norah McLory."

Evidently there was, but Mrs. Evans did not feel so sure of the others. Anita, Manuelita, Maria, and a very old woman spoken to as Carlotta, seemed at first disposed to call upon an immense list of saints rather than listen to a plan which their mistress tried to explain, but Norah succeeded in shutting them up.

It was a remarkable military plan, and, when it was all told, "Oh, mother!" exclaimed Vic, and in a moment more she added: "Splendid!"

"Dade, an' I'm ready, ma'am," said Norah, as she made a dash for the boiler, and heaped the stove with fuel. "Faith, I'd rather bile thim than ate thim."

A bustling time of it followed, and courage grew with work. Weapons were plentiful, and the stockade had been regularly pierced for rifle practice. All that was needed there or in the adobe was a supply of riflemen. There was a tall flagstaff at one corner of the adobe, but its halliards had swung emptily for many a day.

"Mother," said Vic, at the end of about twenty minutes, "what will they say?"

"The Indians?" said Mrs. Evans, "They may not come at all. Take your father's field-glass and go up to the roof. We must keep a sharp lookout. I'll tend to things down here."

Up went Vic, her bright young face all aglow with excitement,

and she carried Cal's repeating rifle with her, as well as the double field-glass with which to sweep the prairie for Indians.

"Not one in sight," she shouted down to her mother. "Guess Cal's safe, anyhow. I don't believe they're coming."

She should have questioned Kah-go-mish about that. While she was nervously patrolling the roof of the old hacienda and watching for him, the prudent leader of the now well-mounted Mescaleros was pushing steadily forward. He had given out a careful set of orders, which proved his right to be considered an uncommon Apache.

"Ugh!" he said. "No kill. Borrow! Make pale-face lend poor Mescalero gun, horse, mule, blanket, knife, cartridges, kettle. Keep 'calp on head. No want 'calp now."

He hoped to find the ranch almost if not quite undefended and to take it by surprise, getting what he wanted without doing anything to provoke the altogether unforgiving vengeance of the military authorities.

Half an hour more went by that was very long to the watchers in the adobe.

"Four Indians, mother," shouted Vic, at last, from her station on the roof. "'Way off there, eastward. I can't see anything of father or the men."

"They will come, Vic. Watch!" replied Mrs. Evans.

"If they were near enough," said Vic, "I'd fire at them. They've halted."

They had done so, on a roll of the prairie, for they were a mere

scouting-party, and they quickly hurried away as if they had an unexpected report to make concerning the state of things at Santa Lucia. Five minutes later Vic laid down her field-glass and took up Cal's rifle.

"More Indians, mother!" she shouted, and the loud report which followed testified strongly to the condition of Vic's fighting courage.

Nobody seemed to be hit by that bullet; but the warning shot, long as was the range, compelled one Indian to remark:

"Ugh! Kah-go-mish is a great chief! Pale-face heap wide-awake."

"They've halted, mother, but I didn't hit anybody. Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"What is it, Vic?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Evans. "Do you see anybody else?"

"Not Indians, this time. On the other side. Key and Joaquin. Perhaps they won't dare to ride in."

"Nothing could stop your father."

That was very true, and nothing did. Key and Joaquin had had somewhat the start of him, but had been delayed on the way, repeatedly, by the necessity of keeping out of sight of a dangerous-looking squad of Apaches, so that they were but a little in advance of three more white men who quickly rode up.

"Colorado!" exclaimed one of these. "What's lit on to the ranch?"

It was a fair question for Sam Herrick or any other man to

ask. A wide-winged American flag floated proudly from the flagstaff, at the foot of which stood what seemed to be an army officer in very full uniform, cocked hat, epaulets, sword, and all. Another flag fluttered at the gate, and in front of it paced up and down a sentry in uniform, while outside of him, at regular intervals, were ostentatiously stacked a complete company's allowance of muskets, bayonets fixed, ready for service.

"Colorado!" again exclaimed Sam Herrick; but the angry look was fading from the face of his employer. It did not return, even when a score or so of yelling Apaches came out in full view at the right.

"Boys," he shouted, "give 'em a volley and ride in. The drove is gone, but the ranch is all right."

Crack went the rifles; but the range was long, and not one of the red men was harmed. A whoop, a yell, and they wheeled away, for they had no idea of storming a stockade defended by an infantry company in addition to Colonel Abe Evans and his cowboys.

"Hurrah!" roared the deep voice of the colonel. "There's fun coming!"

Loud rang the answering cheers of the cowboys, but at that instant the sentry at the gate threw away his musket, exclaiming: "Howly mother!"

The army officer on the roof made a quick motion as if he were gathering his skirts to go down a ladder, and he disappeared, while four soldiers inside the stockade dropped their muskets

also, and their commander ceased a remarkable use she was making of an old drum. The garrison of Fort Santa Lucia had been seized with a sudden panic and had disappeared, leaving the gate open for the colonel and his men to ride in and take possession.

Mrs. Evans had not been in uniform. She had put down her drum, and she was now in the doorway ready to meet her husband. Norah had dashed past her, exclaiming: "'Dade, ma'am, I'd not let the owld man and the byes see me wid the like o' this on me bones."

Reports were quickly exchanged between the colonel and his wife.

"Nothing lost but the horses and a few cattle," he said. "It was just like you, Laura. You did the best thing, all around. Cal is safe, but if the cavalry come, he and I are going to ride after the redskins with 'em, far as they go."

"Of course," she quietly responded.

"Laura," said he, "I'm glad all that old army stuff was in the storeroom; but I shall not take Major Victoria Evans along. I shall leave her here to garrison Santa Lucia, with General Laura Evans as commander-in-chief."

Sam Herrick and the other cowboys brought in the stacks of muskets and closed the gate.

"All that old iron is good for something, after all. So's the flag," said Bill.

"Colorado!" remarked Sam. "The redskins may think they've

struck Fort Craig, by mistake."

"They'll smell a mouse," said Key, "and they may not give it up so easy."

"If they do try it on," said Sam, "it won't be till about daylight to-morrow morning. Let's have something to eat."

"Byes," said Norah, as they entered the kitchen. "Hilp me off wid the b'iler. It was put there to cook 'Paches, but I'll brile you some bacon instid."

The kitchen table looked warlike enough with its collection of the weapons required by Norah, but she was no longer in uniform, and looked peaceful. She and her Mexican assistants cooked vigorously, but before the coffee was hot the colonel sent for Joaquin.

"Eat your dinner," he said, in Spanish, "and then take a fresh horse and ride to warn the upper ranches. We're safe enough; even if they try a daylight attack, we can stand 'em off till help can get here. Bring me a dozen good men. I'm going to chase that band of redskins, cavalry or no cavalry."

"Si, señor," replied Joaquin, and he was quickly away, seeming to hardly give a thought to any possible interruption by scouting Apaches.

Some work was done by scouting cowboys that afternoon in the vicinity of the ranch. No Indians were seen; but for all that the night which followed was not a sleep-night. The men slept fairly well, except the sentry whose turn it might be, but they were all dressed and had their weapons by them. It was nearly so with the

female part of the garrison. They did not sleep at all well, but they were all dressed, and they kept more guns and swords and axes within grasping distance than did the men.

The dawn came at last, and it did not bring any alarm; but, just as the sun was rising, the gate in the stockade swung wide open, and a man stepped out, gazing earnestly towards the east.

"Colorado! What's that?" he exclaimed. "I won't rouse the ranch, but it beats me all hollow. Hosses. Two of 'em."

There was evidently something curious in the fact that a pair of horses were plodding slowly along towards Santa Lucia, all by themselves, at that hour of the morning.

Sam stood by the gate as if waiting for an explanation, when there came a sound of steps behind him.

"Sam," asked an anxious voice, "do you see anything?"

"I'd say 'twas the red mustang, if there wasn't a pack on him, and a black hoss with him. Didn't know you was up, ma'am."

"Cal's mustang, Sam? I've not been abed or asleep."

"Mother, is it Dick? Is it Cal? Are there any Indians?"

"Vic, I'm afraid it's Cal. I'm going to see. He's wounded!"

"Most likely," said Sam, with a sharp change of voice. "They'd better turn out. Stay here, madam."

He raised his repeater as he spoke and fired a random shot, the report of which brought every soul in Santa Lucia bolt upright, and then he started on a swift walk, followed closely by Cal's mother and sister.

There were the two horses, red and black, and Vic reached

them first. They stood stock-still, as if waiting for her, when she came near, and she was sure that the black carried Cal's silver-mounted saddle.

Dick carried Cal!

Was he wounded? Was he dead? How came he on Dick's bare back? A dozen excited questions burst from Mrs. Evans and Vic, but no answer came until Sam Herrick drew a long breath and responded: "Sound asleep! The boy's tired clean out, riding, and Dick's been caring for him. He walked as if he was treading among eggs. 'Fraid Cal'd fall off."

There was nobody to tell just how many slow miles Cal had ridden, unconsciously, or nearly so, with his arms around Dick's neck. Sam was just about to lift him off when the deep voice of Colonel Evans, behind him, said: "Don't wake him, Sam; I'll take him. There isn't money enough anywhere to buy that red mustang."

Dick held as still as a post while his master was gently removed in the strong arms of the old colonel, but the moment that was done he accompanied a sharp whinny with a weary attempt to throw up his heels. Another pair of arms was around his neck now, however, and Vic tried hard to make him understand her intense appreciation of him.

"Hope he isn't hurt," said Sam. "I guess he isn't, nor Cal either."

No, Cal was not hurt, but he was a boy who had been through a tremendous amount of excitement, as well as of hard riding.

Just as he was being carried through the gate he opened his eyes for a moment and saw the flag floating over Santa Lucia.

"Glad the cavalry got here," he murmured. "Captain Moore said they'd start at sunrise." He saw his mother and Vic, and tried to say something, but he was sound asleep again before the smile on his lips could be turned into words.

Cal was put upon a bed and his mother sat down by him. Norah McLory had teetered fatly around them all the way to the house, whispering remarkable exclamations, and she was evidently in great fear, even now, of awaking the weary sleeper.

"Wud hot wather do him any good, ma'am?" she huskily suggested.

"Breakfast will, by and by," said Mrs. Evans. "Oh, my boy!"

"Glad the cavalry are coming," said the old colonel, as he turned away from gazing down at Cal. "I'll know all about it when he wakes up."

The whole ranch had for many minutes been in a state of turmoil, and mere quadrupeds had been left to take care of themselves, for even Sam Herrick came pretty near to being excited about Cal. He was out in the veranda now, and Cal's watchers heard him exclaim, "Colorado!"

"Something's up," said the colonel, and he and Vic hurried out.

There stood Dick, with no bridle or saddle, but with a look about his drooping head which seemed to ask, "Is there anything more wanted of me?"

The black waited a few paces behind Dick, as if he also had an idea that his task was not completed.

"Dick!" shouted Vic. "What can we do for him, father? Would some milk do him any good? Dick, you're the most beautiful horse in the world!"

Milk was not precisely the thing he needed, but Sam led him away, the black following; and if rubbing, feeding, watering, and a careful inspection of every hoof and joint could do a tired racer any good, all that sort of comfort came abundantly to the red mustang.

Chapter VII.

BOUND FOR THE BORDER

The warning-shot fired from the roof of the ranch by Major Vic Evans had been a great surprise to the Apaches. It had informed them that they could not surprise Santa Lucia, and that they were known as enemies. At the same time, they had not been supplied with field-glasses for the better inspection of the marksman.

Kah-go-mish knew something about the army of the United States. Blue-coats at Santa Lucia meant danger to him and his. Loss of horses and a possible forced return to the Reservation seemed to stare him in the face. Of course, he gave up the ranch, but he had yet a hope remaining.

The braves who had chased Sam Herrick that morning had reported one lonely cowboy, and no end of horses and cattle stampeded into the timber at Slater's Branch. There was the point to strike at, therefore, and success was sure if it had not been for the horse from which Sam Herrick dismounted when he transferred his saddle to the dancing gray for his ride home. He was a good horse, and he had run well when the Apaches were behind him. Sam had now left him, but it seemed to him that his morning-work had been cut short. Perhaps, too, he had a curiosity as to where Sam was riding to upon the gray. At all

events, the dashing cowboy was not out of sight before the horse he had unsaddled started after him.

That was example enough for a drove which was still tremendously nervous from a big stampede. Horse after horse and mule after mule set out in a lively four-footed game of "follow my leader." Not one of them was willing to be left behind to be captured by Indians or by another stampede. Even the horned cattle on the opposite bank began to wade through the mud of Slater's Branch as if they thought of joining the procession. The self-appointed leader of the horses did not see fit to take a very rapid gait, but seemed able to follow the trail of Sam Herrick to the ford where the cowboy had returned to the other side. Here a half hour or so was expended in feeding, neighing, kicking up of heels, and other tokens of horse deliberation. Then one and another of the more influential members of the drove decided to try the grass nearer Santa Lucia, and began to lead their comrades northerly. Sam's friend appeared to be superseded in command, but the net result was bad for Kah-go-mish. The chief and his warriors were guided well after giving up the ranch, and on their arrival at Slater's Branch they found the cattle in the timber. A noble herd; endless beef; but all too heavy to carry and too slow to be driven by red men who were likely to be pursued by cavalry.

Slater's Branch was crossed at once, and all the muddy margin told of the horses which had marched away. Where were they now? The puzzle deepened as the disappointed braves rode

onward down the branch. Even at the ford a brace of braves dashed across for a search, but they gave it up, and came back disappointed. The escaped drove of horses had been under too much excitement to halt long anywhere, and had even enjoyed a small stampede, which carried them half-way to the ranch.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief," sullenly remarked the Apache commander. "Cavalry come. Save horses. Ugh! Heap bad luck."

It required what seemed almost like rashness, under such circumstances, to linger at Slater's Branch, but the Apaches felt bitterly about being robbed in that way of Colonel Evans's larger horse-drove. More cattle were slaughtered and more fresh beef was prepared for transportation; fires were kindled, and an hour of what might have been precious time if any cavalry were near, was spent in cooking and eating.

Keen had been the eyes of Kah-go-mish, and they had given him an interpretation of the stacks of bayoneted muskets in front of the stockade gate. He knew that the garrison of Santa Lucia consisted, as yet, of infantry only, and that he and his braves could finish their dinner before the supposed return of the dreaded cavalry.

They ate well, nobody could have disputed that, and then they mounted and rode away in high spirits. While the people at the ranch were anxiously reasoning as to whether or not their enemies would reappear, the exultant Mescaleros were miles and miles nearer, with every hour, to the Mexican border, and to the point where they were, in due time, to meet their equally happy

families. Their camp, that night, was as peaceful as if it had been a picnic, and at the earliest dawn of day they were stirring again, very much as if they had taken for granted the march of Captain Moore and the angry determination of Colonel Abe Evans. The air rang with whoops and shouts, and among them could be heard a very positive assertion concerning himself from the deep voice of Kah-go-mish.

At about the same hour, and in as perfect safety, fires were kindling and fresh beef was cooking, and eating began at the camp where Wah-wah-o-be and all the family part of the band had passed the pleasant summer night. It was a number of miles to the southward; it was nearer to the very southern edge of the United States, but over every breakfast might have been heard expressions of a general desire to be nearer still.

That entire party, as well as the warriors in the other, had dismal days of poverty and privation to look back upon. Days when most of them were compelled to walk instead of riding, and when footsore squaws were forced to carry burdens which were now transferred to the strong backs of captured mules and ponies. Walking was over and hunger was gone, and even the overworked ponies saw their packs put upon fresher carriers. It was a great relief to a poor fellow who had panted under a small hill of family property all the way from the Reservation to have nothing now but a squaw to carry, or a couple of small boys, or perhaps three girls or so. No pony had more than that when all was ready for the day's march.

Several of the captured Evans colts had a busy time that morning. They had rebelled too vigorously the previous day, and had reached their first Apache camps unbroken. Their time for service had come now, however, and they were rapidly instructed how to go along under wild-looking riders whom they were unable to throw off. Several there were, nevertheless, who earned another day of comparative freedom. Time was precious, and too much of it could not be spent in horse-breaking.

"Ugh!" said Wah-wah-o-be. "Pale-face pony kick a heap."

That was when a skilful mustang had pitched a young Apache brave clean over his head.

It was a gay cavalcade when at last it got in motion. From one end of it to the other there did not seem to be one sign of anxiety. Its immediate wants had been provided for wonderfully, and it had great confidence in the future. There was something very hopeful to talk about, for every Mescalero, young or old, was on tiptoe with eagerness to hear the report of the doings of Kah-go-mish and his warriors.

"Sun go down, great chief come," said Wah-wah-o-be, and there was no telling what or how much he would bring with him.

Chapter VIII.

GETTING READY TO CHASE KAH-GO-MISH

It was noon when Cal Evans opened his eyes, and even then the lids came apart reluctantly. He saw his mother sitting by him, and Vic was peering in at the door, but he did not quite understand matters.

"Mother," he said, "are you all safe?"

"Yes, we're all safe – " she began.

"He's awake! Mother, may I come in?" shouted Vic. "Cal! we had such a time. We all dressed up in those old uniforms and played soldier. I fired at the Apaches from the roof."

Cal struggled to sit up, and found out how sore and stiff he was, while he exclaimed:

"Vic, did you? There was an attack? You beat them off?"

"Scared them off," said his mother. "Why, how lame you are!"

"Awful!" he groaned, as he lay back again. "But about the fight – "

"There wasn't any," said Vic, and she added a rapid sketch of the garrison – Norah McLory at the gate, and Mrs. Evans with the drum, and the Mexican women parading as sentinels.

"Tell us about your ride," she said, as she paused for breath.

"Ride?" he said. "Well, yes, it was a great ride, but I don't

know the whole of it, myself. How's Dick?"

"Sam says he's all right," said Vic, "and there isn't such another horse in all New Mexico."

"Guess there isn't," replied Cal, very emphatically. "The black is a good fellow, but it was his gait that made me so sore. I can't turn over."

He could tell all that he knew, however, and he could hear all that they had to say, and he found that he could sit up when Norah brought in his breakfast.

"Hungry? I guess I am. Never was so hungry in all my life. But I'm going with father after 'em."

He was as much in need of a thorough rubbing as Dick had been, but when Sam Herrick gave it to him, a little later, he had to shut his mouth hard, for Sam's gentleness was of a cowboy kind, and he did his whole duty. After that was over Cal could walk fairly well, and he went out at once for a look at the red mustang, and Vic and his mother went with him.

"There he is," he said, "that's a fact, but I can't tell how it came to be so. I left him picketed in the corral, at the cavalry camp. He must have untied himself and got away."

Cal knew nothing about the teeth of the persecuting mule.

"Did you mount him in your sleep?" asked Vic.

"I don't know," he said. "I was so tired I went to sleep more than once. Dreamed, too. It was all a good deal like a dream. Seems so yet, from the beginning. I've a kind of memory that Dick came alongside, crowding close and whinnying, and that he

and the black stood still, so I could crawl on Dick's back and lie down, somehow, and sleep more comfortably. That's all I know about it, except what you've told me."

If the red mustang felt any stiffness as a consequence of his remarkable performances, he kept the matter to himself and accepted graciously all the petting given him. The black came in for his share of praise, but he was regarded as an enlisted private horse of the regular army, while Dick's last performance had been altogether as a volunteer.

It was just about noon when Captain Moore, riding at the head of his men, listened to a message from Colonel Evans, brought to him by Bill, the long, lank, yellow-haired cowboy.

"All right," said the captain. "Glad I needn't push any faster under this hot sun. Glad Cal got in safe. Gritty young fellow. You'll have to tell him, though, that his horse and one of our pack-mules got away in the night. Sorry, but there's no help for it."

"Well, yes, that's so," replied Bill, "but that there red mustang. Why, captain, do you know, Cal Evans rid into Saint Lucy on to him? The hoss was a-caring for him like a human, and Cal was sound asleep. He hadn't begun to wake up when I kem away."

The captain and his fellow-officers had questions enough to ask, then, and they learned all about Dick's volunteer work when they reached the ranch the next day. They knew nothing about the mule then, but at that very hour the long-eared rascal reported himself for garrison duty and rations at Fort Craig, having for

the time delivered himself from the pack business and from the fatigues of a long chase after Apache horse-thieves.

There were delays in the preparations for following the band of Kah-go-mish. Captain Moore had to wait for further instructions from Fort Craig, and Colonel Evans also waited for Joaquin and the expected cowboy recruits from the upper ranches.

Sam and the rest had already gathered, with keen satisfaction, the drove of horses which had so nicely dodged Kah-go-mish, and they had scoured the plain to Slater's Branch and beyond. They reported all things safe and serene, and then Cal and Vic and their mother rode out and went over all the scene of his first adventure.

From the mound on the prairie Cal showed them how the cattle and horses were stampeded. Then they went to the timber and the fallen trees where he and Sam "stood off" the Apaches. Then they rode away down to where Sam had first been swarmed around by the Mescaleros, and there was Sam to tell about it.

"Colorado!" remarked he, "but didn't they butcher a lot of cattle! They got about a dozen mules, thirty good hosses, and sixty or seventy second-rates and ponies. Mounted their whole band, I reckon!"

"I don't care so much about that," said Mrs. Evans, but she was looking at Cal just then.

"Vic," said Cal, "you was three years at school, away off there in the settlements, and so was I."

"No Indians there," said Vic.

"Good thing you was," said Sam. "I never had any schooling. Hope you learned a heap."

"Hope I did," said Cal, "but I tell you what, it seems to me as if I'd learned more in one day's riding."

"Well, yes, like enough," replied Sam, "more of one kind. Glad you didn't learn how an arrer feels. I did, once. Bullet, too. Tell you what, though, if you go on the trail with your father and the captain, I reckon you'll learn some more."

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