Fenn George Manville

Real Gold: A Story of Adventure

George Fenn

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Содержание

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Chapter One
A Chat in a Boat

"Bother the old fish!"

"Yes; they won't bite."

"It's no good, Perry; they are having their siesta. Let's get in the shade and have one too."

"What! in the middle of the day – go to sleep? No, thank you. I'm not a foreigner."

"More am I; but you come and live out here for a bit, and you'll be ready enough to do as the Romans – I mean the Spaniards – do."

"Not I, Cyril, and I don't believe fish do go to sleep."

"What? Why, I've seen them lie in shoals here, perfectly still; basking in the hot sunshine, fast asleep."

"With their eyes shut?"

"Gammon! Fish can't shut their eyes."

"Then they can't go to sleep. – My! it is hot. I shan't fish any more."

Two boys sitting in a boat half a mile from the shore, and sheltered by a ridge of rocks from the tremendous swell of the vast Pacific Ocean, which to north and south curled over in great glistening billows upon the sand – in the former instance, to scoop it out, carry it back, and then throw it up farther away; in the latter, to strike upon sheer rocks and fly up in silver spray with a low deep sound as of muttered thunder. Away to the west there was the great plain of smooth damasked silver, lost at last in a faint haze, and all so bright that the eyes ached and were dazzled by its sheen. To the east, the bright-looking port of San Geronimo, with a few ships, and half-a-dozen long, black, red-funnelled screw-steamers at anchor; beyond them wharves and warehouses, and again beyond these the houses of the little town, with a few scattered white villas rising high on terrace and shelf of the steep cliffs. The place looked bright and attractive seen from the distance, but dry and barren. Nothing green rested and refreshed the eye. No trees, no verdant slope of lawn or field; nothing but sand in front, glittering rock behind. Everything suggested its being a region where no rain fell.

But, all the same, it had its beauty. More, its grandeur, for apparently close at hand, though miles away in the clear distance, rose the great Sierra – the mighty range of mountains, next to the Himalayas the highest in the world – and seeming to rise suddenly like a gigantic wall right up into the deep blue sky, cloudless, and dazzling with the ice and snow.

The two boys, both of them, though fair by nature, tanned now of a warm reddish brown, were of about the same age, and nearly the same physique; and as now they twisted the stout lines they had been holding round the thole pins of the boat, which softly rose and fell with a pleasant lulling motion, the first who had spoken unfastened the neck-button of his shirt.

"Hullo! Going to bathe?"

"Bathe! No, thankye. I should wake up the sharks: they'd bite then."

"Ugh!"

"Yes, you may shudder. They grow fine about here. Why, before I'd made a dozen strokes, you'd hear me squeak, and see me go down and never come up again."

"How horrid! You don't mean it, though, do you?"

"Yes, it's true enough. I'm going to have a nap."

As the boy spoke, he lay back in the stern of the boat, and placed his broad Panama hat over his face.

"I say, Perry, old chap!" he continued, with his voice sounding whistly through the closely-woven hat.

"What?"

"If you smell me burning, wake me up."

"All right," said the lad addressed as Perry; and resting his elbows on his knees, he sat gazing up at the huge towering mountain nearest at hand for a few minutes, then:

"Cil!"

"Hullo!" drowsily.

"Don't go to sleep, old chap; I want to talk to you."

"I can't go to sleep if you talk. What is it?"

"I say, how rum it seems for it to be boiling hot down here, and all that ice and snow to be up there. Look."

"Yes," said Cyril, "'tis its nature to. I don't want to look. Seen it before."

"But how far is it up to where the snow is – a thousand feet?"

"What?" cried Cyril, starting up into a sitting position, with his hat falling off.

"I said how far is it up to where the snow is?"

"I know you did," cried the boy, laughing, "and you said, was it a thousand feet?"

"Yes, and it was stupid of me. It must be twice as high."

"Perry Campion, you are a greenhorn. I say: no offence meant; but my dear, fresh, innocent, young friend, that snow is three miles high."

"Well, I know that, of course. It must be much more to where it is."

"Sixty or seventy," said Cyril, whose drowsiness had departed, and who was now all life and eagerness. "The air's so clear here that it's horribly deceiving. But I didn't mean that: I meant that the snow's quite three miles straight up perpendicular in the air."

"Nonsense!"

"But I tell you it is. If you were to rise straight up in a balloon from here, you'd have to go up three miles to get on a level with the snow."

Perry Campion looked fixedly at his companion, but there was no flinching.

"I'm not gammoning you," said Cyril earnestly. "Things are so much bigger out here than they look."

"Then how big – how high is that mountain?" said Perry.

"Nearly four miles."

"But it seems to be impossible."

"It isn't, though," said Cyril. "That one's over twenty thousand feet high, and father has seen much bigger ones up to the north. I say, squire, you've got some climbing to do. You won't hop over those hills very easily."

"No," said Perry thoughtfully. "It will be a climb."

"I say: whereabouts are you going?"

"I don't know. Right up in the mountains somewhere."

"But what are you going for?"

"I don't know that either. To travel, I suppose."

"Oh, but the colonel must be going for something," cried Cyril. "I believe I know."

"Do you? What?"

"Well, you don't want me to tell you. I suppose the colonel has told you not to tell anybody."

"No," said Perry quickly. "He has not told me. Why do you think he's going?"

"Prospecting. To search out a good place for a mine."

Perry looked at him eagerly.

"The Andes are full of places where there might be mines. There's gold, and silver, and quicksilver, and precious stones. Lots of treasures never been found yet."

"Yes, I've heard that there are plenty of minerals," said Perry thoughtfully.

"And besides," said Cyril, grinning, "there's all the gold and silver that belonged to the Incas. The Indians buried it, and they have handed down the secret of the different places to their children."

"Who have dug it up and spent it," said Perry.

"No. They're too religious. They dare not. They keep the secret of the places till the Incas come again to claim their country, and then it will all be dug up, golden wheels, and suns, and flowers, and cups, and things that the Spaniards never found. That's it; your father's going after the treasures. But if he is, you'd better look out."

"Why?"

"Because if the Indians thought you were after that, they'd kill you in no time."

Perry looked at him searchingly.

"Oh, I mean it," said Cyril. "Father has often talked about it, and he says that the Indians consider it a religious duty to protect the hiding-places of these treasures. There was a man took a party with him up into the mountains on purpose to search for them."

"Well? Did he find anything?"

"Don't know. Nobody ever did know."

"How was that?"

"He never came back. Nor any of his people."

"Why? What became of them?"

"I tell you they went up into the mountains and never came back. The Indians know what became of them."

"But was no search made for them – no examination made of the Indians?" cried Perry, looking aghast.

"Search! Where? Indians! What Indians?" said Cyril sharply. "You forget how big the place is, and what great forests and wilds there are over the other side."

"But it sounds so horrible for a party like that to disappear, and no more to be heard of them," said Perry.

"Yes, but the Indians are savages, and, as father said, they think they are doing their duty against people who have no right in the country, so your father will have to look out. I wish I were going with you, all the same."

"You're safer in San Geronimo, if it's as bad as you say," cried Perry.

"Oh, it's bad enough, but I shouldn't mind."

There was silence for a few minutes, during which time both lads sat gazing dreamily up at the vast range of mountains before them, with its glittering peaks, dark cavernous valleys, and mysterious shades, towards where the high tablelands lay which had been the seat and home of the barbaric civilisation of the Incas, before ruin and destruction came in the train of the Spanish adventurers who swept the land in search for El Dorado, the City of Gold.

Perry Campion was the first to break the silence.

"How long have you been out here, Cyril? – Cil, I say, I shall call you Cil."

"All right, I don't mind, only it won't be for long. You go next week, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Perry, glancing again at the mountains.

"Wish I were going with you. What did you say? – how long have I been out here? Nearly four years. Father sent me over to England to be educated when I was six, and I was at a big school at Worksop till I was twelve, and then he sent for me to come out here again."

"Weren't you glad?"

"Of course. It was very jolly at school; but school isn't home, is it?"

"Of course not."

"Father said I could go on reading with him, and it would brush up his classics, which had grown rusty since he turned merchant."

"Wasn't he always a merchant, then?"

"My father?" cried Cyril. "No, he was a captain in the army, and had to give up on account of his health. The doctors said he was dying. That was twelve years ago; but he doesn't look like dying now, does he?"

"No, he looks wonderfully strong and well."

"Yes. This place suited him and mother because it was so dry."

"And then he took to being a merchant?"

"Yes; and ships off drugs, and minerals, and guano, and bark."

"What! for tanning?"

"Tanning! Ha! ha! No, no; Peruvian bark, that they make quinine of. Physic for fevers."

"Oh! I see."

"It's very jolly, and he makes plenty of money; but I do get so tired sometimes. I should like to go to sea, or to travel, or something. I hate being always either at studies or keeping accounts. I wish I were going along with you."

"To be killed by the Indians," said Perry drily.

"I should like to catch 'em at it," cried Cyril. "But I'd risk it. What an adventure, to go with your father to hunt out the places where the Indians buried the Incas' gold!"

"My father did not say he was going in search of that," said Perry.

"No; he's too close. But that's it, safe enough; you see if it isn't. Only think of it – right up in the grand valleys, where it's almost dark at mid-day, and you walk along shelves over the torrents where there isn't room for two mules to pass, and there are storms that are quite awful sometimes. I say, I'd give anything to go."

"I wish you were going, Cil."

"You do?" cried the boy excitedly. "I say: do you mean that?"

"Of course I do," said Perry, looking amused at his companion's eagerness. "We've got on right enough together since we have been staying at your house."

"Got on? I should think we have," cried Cyril. "Why, it has been no end of a treat to me for you to be at our place. I can't get on very well with the half-Spanish chaps about here. They're gentlemen, of course, with tremendously grand descents from Don this and Don that; but they're not English boys, and you can't make English boys of them."

"Of course not."

"Ah, you may laugh," continued Cyril, "but would you believe it? I tried to get up a cricket club, and took no end of pains to show them the game, and they all laughed at it, and said I must be half mad. That's being Spanish, that is! It's no wonder their country's left all behind."

"Then the cricket was a failure?" said Perry.

"Failure? It ended in a fight, and I went home and burned the stumps, bats, and balls."

"What a pity!" cried Perry.

"That's what father said, and it did seem too bad, after he'd had the tackle brought out from England on purpose. I was sorry afterwards; but I was so jolly wild then, I couldn't help it."

"How came there to be a fight?" said Perry after a pause, during which he watched the frank, handsome face of his companion, who was looking at the great peak again.

"Oh, it was all about nothing. These Spanish chaps are so cocky and bumptious, and ready to take everything as being meant as an insult. Little stupid things, too, which an English boy wouldn't notice. I was bowling one evening, and young Mariniaz was batting. Of course he'd got his bat and his wits, and he ought to have taken care of himself. I never thought of hitting him, but I sent in a shooter that would have taken off the bail on his side, and instead of blocking it, he stepped right before the wicket."

"What for?" said Perry.

"Ah, that's more than I know," said Cyril; "and the next moment he caught it right in the centre of his – er – middle."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Perry merrily.

"It knocked all the wind out of him for a minute, and then, as soon as he could speak, he was furious, and said I did it on purpose – in Spanish – and I said it was an accident that all people were liable to in cricket, and that they ought to be able to defend themselves. Then he said he was able to defend himself."

"That meant fighting," cried Perry, growing more interested.

"Of course it did, but I wasn't going to notice it, for the mater said I was to be very careful not to get into any quarrel with the Spanish fellows, because they are none too friendly about my father being here. They're jealous because he's a foreigner, when all the time there isn't a more splendid fellow living than my father," cried the boy warmly. "You don't half know him yet."

"Well, what happened then?" said Perry, as he noted the warm glow in the boy's cheeks and the flash of his eyes.

"Oh, Mariniaz appealed to three or four of the others, and they sided with him, and said that they saw me take a long breath and gather myself up and take a deadly aim at his chest, and then hurl the ball with all my might, as if I meant to kill him."

"What rubbish!" cried Perry.

"Wasn't it? You couldn't teach chaps like that to play cricket, could you?"

"Of course not. They didn't want to learn."

"That was it; and they egged Mariniaz on till he called me an English beast, and that upset me and made my tongue loose."

"Well?"

"He said he knew from the first I had a spite against him, and had been trying to knock him over with the ball; and, feeling what a lie it was, I grew pepper, and told him it wasn't the first time an English ball had knocked over a Spaniard, for I got thinking about our old chaps playing bowls when the news came about the Armada."

"Yes?" cried Perry, for Cyril had stopped.

"Well, then, he turned more yellow than usual, and he gave me a backhanded smack across the face."

"And what did you do?" cried Perry hotly, for the boy once more stopped.

"Oh, I went mad for a bit."

"You – went mad?"

"I suppose so. My mother said I must have been mad, so I expect I was."

"But you don't tell me," cried Perry impatiently. "What did you do?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do: tell me."

"I can't recollect, and I never could. I only know I turned very hot and saw sparks, and that there was a regular banging about, and sometimes I was up and sometimes I was down; and then all at once I was standing there, with Mariniaz lying on the ground crying, and with his nose bleeding. Another chap was sitting holding his handkerchief to one eye, and two more were being held up by some of the players, who were giving one of them some water to drink, while the other was showing them a tooth which he held in his fingers."

"Then you'd whacked four of them?" cried Perry excitedly.

"I don't know," said Cyril, with his face screwed up. "I suppose I had been knocking them about a bit, and they wouldn't fight any more. They all said I was an English savage, and that I ought to be sent out of the place; and then I began to get a bit cooler, and felt sorry I had knocked them all about so much."

"I don't see why you should," cried Perry.

"But I did. It made such an upset. There was no end of a bother. My mother cried about it when I went home, and said I should never look myself again; and when my father came home and saw me with bits of sticking plaster all over my face and knuckles, he was in a regular passion, for he had been hearing about it in the town, and had words with the other boys' fathers. Then he made me tell him all about it from the beginning, sitting back, looking as fierce and stern as could be, till I had done; and I finished off by saying, 'What would you have done if you had been me?'

"'Just the same as you did, Cil, my boy,' he cried, shaking hands; and then my mother looked astonished, and he sat back in his chair and laughed till he cried. 'Why, mother,' he said, 'they tell us that the English stock is falling off. Not very much, eh? One English to four Spanish.'

"'But it's so terrible,' my mother said. 'Yes,' said my father, 'fighting is very disgraceful. No more of it, Cil, my lad; but I've made a mistake: I ought to have made a soldier of you, after all.' I say, though, Perry, I do wish I were going with you, all the same."

"I tell you what," cried Perry; "I'll ask my father to ask yours to let you go with us."

"You will?" cried Cyril, making a rush.

"Mind! we shall have the boat over."

It was a narrow escape, but by sitting down they made the boat right itself.

"Yes, I'll ask him to. I say, though, it isn't so dangerous as you say, is it?"

"They say it is, particularly if you are going to hunt for the gold the Indians have buried."

"But I don't know that we are. Would you go, even if it is so dangerous."

"Of course I would," cried Cyril excitedly. "I do so want a change. Ahoy! Hurray! Dinner!"

"Eh? Where?" cried Perry.

"Look. Father's hoisting the flag."

He pointed in the direction of one of the white villas up on the high cliff slope, where a union jack was being run up a tall signal staff by a figure in white, clearly seen in the bright sunshine, while another figure was evidently using a telescope.

"There's my father watching us," said Perry, shading his eyes.

"Lend a hand here and help to haul up this stone," cried Cyril, and together the boys hauled up the heavy block which served for an anchor.

Five minutes after, they were rowing steadily for the wharf – Incas' treasure, perils from Indians, fights with Spanish boys, and heights of snow peaks forgotten in the one important of all questions to a hungry youth —*Dinner*.

Chapter Two
A Failure

Dinner was over at Captain Norton's. Mrs Norton had left the dining-room, after begging her son and his visitor not to go out in the broiling heat. The boy had promised that he would not, and after he had sat listening to Colonel Campion's – a keen grey-haired man, thin, wiry in the extreme, and giving promise of being extremely active – talk to his father about the preparations for his trip up into the mountains, Cyril gave Perry a kick under the table, and rose.

Taking the sharp jar upon his shin to mean telegraphy and the sign, "Come on," Perry rose as well, and the two boys, forgetful of all advice, went and sat in the dry garden, where every shrub and plant seemed to be crying out for water, and looked as if it were being prepared for a *hortus siccus* beloved of botanists, and where the sun came down almost hot enough to fry.

Here the boys had a long discussion about the promise Perry had made in the boat; after which they waited for an opportunity.

Meanwhile, as the two gentlemen sat chatting over their cigarettes, Captain Norton, a frank, genial, soldierly-looking man, said:

"So you mean to take all the risks?"

"Risks!" said the colonel, turning his keen eyes upon the speaker, as he let the smoke from his cigarette curl up toward the ceiling. "You an old soldier, and ask that?"

"Yes," said Captain Norton. "I have been here a long time now, and know something of the country."

"Are the risks so very great, then?"

"To an ordinary traveller – no: to a man going with some special object or search – yes."

"I did nut say that I was going on a special search," said Colonel Campion quickly.

"No, but everything points to it; and as you came to me with letters of introduction from an old friend and brother-officer, I receive you as my friend, and treat you as I would a brother."

"And as the man whom you treat as a brother, I am very reticent, eh?"

"Very," said Cyril Norton's father; "and if I try to know why you are going upon so perilous a journey, it is not from curiosity, but because I am eager to save you from running into danger."

Colonel Campion held out his hand, which was taken, and the two men sat for a few moments gazing in each other's eyes.

"If I spoke out, Norton, you would immediately do everything you could to prevent me from going, instead of helping me; so I am silent, for I have made up my mind to go, and no persuasion would stop me."

"Then you are going on an insane quest of the treasures of gold said to have been buried by the Incas' followers to preserve them from the Spaniards."

"Am I?" said the colonel quietly.

"I take it for granted that you are; so now, listen. It will be a very dangerous search. That the gold exists, I do not doubt; and I feel pretty sure that the Indians have had it handed down from father to son. Where this gold is hidden in the mountains is a sacred trust, which they in their superstitious natures dare not betray. It means death to any one who discovers one of these hoards."

"If found out," said the colonel, smoking, with his eyes half shut.

"He would certainly be found out," said the captain, "and if you persist in going, you must run the risk; but I beg of you not to take that boy Perry with you, to expose him to these dangers."

"What am I to do with him, then?"

"Leave him with us. He will be happy enough with my boy Cyril; and my wife and I will take every care of him."

"Thank you, Norton," cried the colonel warmly; "I am most grateful. But you are wrong: he would not be happy if he stayed here and I went alone; I believe he would prefer running all risks with me. How odd!" added the colonel, smiling; "here he is, to speak for himself."

For at that moment the door was softly opened, and Perry stood there, looking startled.

"Come in, boy, come in," cried the colonel.

"I – I beg; our pardon; I thought Captain Norton had gone."

"No, and we were just talking about you."

"About me, father?"

"Yes; Captain Norton thinks it would be too risky and arduous a journey for you up into the mountains, and he says you are to stay here and make yourself happy with Cyril till I come back."

The lad looked delighted.

"Oh father!" he cried. Then, quick as thought, his manner changed.

"It is very good of Captain Norton," he said gravely, "but I could not stop here and let you go alone."

"Don't be hasty, Perry, lad," said the captain kindly. "There, I'm going down to the wharf; you and your father chat it over, and we'll talk about it when I return."

He left the room, passing out through the veranda.

"Well," said the colonel, looking away at the window, "I think he's right, and you had better stay, Perry."

"I don't think you do, father," replied the boy. "Besides, you promised to take me."

"Um! Yes, I did, my lad; but circumstances have altered since then. They say it's dangerous up there among the Indians."

"Then you had better not go, father," said Perry quickly.

"I have undertaken to go, and I am going," said the colonel firmly. "I gave my word."

"And you can't break it, father?"

"No, my boy, not honourably."

Perry laughed softly.

"Hullo! What does that mean, sir?" cried the colonel. "Glad I am going into danger?"

"Of course not, father," said Perry. "I was only laughing because you promised to take me, and you can't break your word."

The colonel leaned back and laughed.

"And I've come with a petition, father," said Perry.

"Petition?"

"Yes; you said that it would be nice for me to be with Cyril Norton."

"Yes, I rather like the lad. He's a rackety, wild young dog, but there's a good deal of the gentleman about him. But what do you mean! You said you did not want to stay here."

"Yes, father, but he wants to stay with us."

"Stay with us? We're not going to stay here."

"I mean, go with us. He is wild to go. Take him with us, father. I should like it so much."

"Why, Perry, my boy, you're mad," said the colonel. "If the journey is so risky that Captain Norton wishes me to leave you here, do you think it likely that he will let his son go?"

"Perhaps he would with you, father. He trusts you."

"Not to that extent."

"Try him, father. It would be so nice to have Cil with us."

"Nice for you, sir – double responsibility for me."

"You wouldn't mind that, father, and we would help you so."

"Yes, nice lot of help I should get from you."

"You don't know, father; but, I say, you will ask him?"

"Ask him yourself, sir," said the colonel firmly; "here he is."

For at that moment steps were heard in the veranda, and Captain Norton appeared.

"Don't let me disturb you," he said; "I came back for some bills of lading. – Well, Perry, you're going to stop and keep Cil company, eh? I'll have the big boat out and newly rigged for you boys. You can fish, and sail, and – "

"But I'm not going to stay, sir," said Perry quietly.

"Not going to stay! I'm very sorry. But you must think better of it. Sleep on it, my lad. That journey in the mountains will be too arduous for a lad like you."

"Oh no, sir. I'm light and strong, and – "

"Yes? And what? You are afraid of outstaying your welcome? Nonsense, boy; you'll be conferring a favour upon us. I shall be glad for Cil to have your company. He likes you."

Perry exchanged glances with his father, who nodded, and his eyes seemed to say, "Now's your time."

"Yes, sir, and I like Cil. We get on together, and – and he wants to go with us!"

Perry uttered the last words hurriedly, and then wished that he had not said them, for the captain looked at him quite fiercely.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Cil said he would give anything to go with us, sir, and I promised to ask my father if he would take him."

"Well," said Captain Norton sternly, "and have you asked him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does he say?"

"He says no," said the colonel firmly. "There is no doubt, I suppose, that I am going to run some risks, and I begin to feel now that I am hardly warranted in exposing my own son to these dangers. I should certainly not be right in exposing the son of a friend to them, even if that friend consented, which he would not. Am I right, Norton?"

"Quite right," said the gentleman addressed.

"Then we need say no more about it," cried the colonel. "Pray, my boy, help us by dissuading your new friend from thinking about so mad a project. We must not make Captain and Mrs Norton regret their kindness to us."

"No, father. I understand," said Perry.

"Then there is an end of the matter," said the colonel.

"Not quite," said their host, smiling, "I am still hoping that you will stay with us, Perry."

"No, sir," said the boy, very firmly now, "I am going with my father. I wish, though, you would let Cil come too."

"Impossible, my lad," said the captain.

"Then now let's change the subject," said the colonel. "I do not start yet for a week, and plenty of things may occur to alter all our opinions and determinations."

"They will not alter mine," said the captain firmly. "If you both alter yours, I shall be very glad. There, I must go now."

Captain Norton gave Perry a friendly nod, and left them once more.

"There, Perry, you hear?"

"Yes, father, but he may alter his mind."

"Don't expect it, my lad; Captain Norton is firm as a rock in all he decides upon."

"So is Cyril, father."

"Not quite," said the colonel, smiling; "the stuff is soft yet, and will have to yield. There, go and tell him you have failed."

"Yes, father," said Perry sadly.

"And you mean to go with me?"

"Of course, father."

“Very well,” said the colonel, and Perry left the room.

Chapter Three
Preparing to Start

"Well, did you ask him?" cried Cyril eagerly, as Perry went out into the parched garden, the boy pouncing out upon him from behind a patch of dry-looking shrubs.

"Yes, I asked him, and then your father came in."

"Yes," said Cyril eagerly, "I saw him, and kept in hiding, because I thought it best to leave it for you to do. Well, what did your father say?"

"He as good as said no."

"Yes, at first," cried Cyril. "I knew he would. But he came round."

"And then your father came in."

"Yes?"

"And my father made me ask him what he had to say about it."

"Yes? Do go on, old chap. You are so slow."

"The captain was quite angry, and wouldn't listen to the idea for a moment."

"That was because he had made his plans for you to stay with me. But he came round, didn't he?"

"No," said Perry sadly. "He was firm as a rock, and they are both dead against it. I should have liked for you to come, Cil."

There was a dead silence; and as Perry looked at his companion, he saw that his brow was full of deep lines, and that the boy's face looked hard and set, the eyes fixed, and the lips tightened together into quite a hard crease.

Perry looked at him for a few moments, feeling pained to see the way in which the lad took his disappointment.

"I'm so sorry, Cil," he said at last.

Cyril did not seem to have heard him, and after a pause Perry spoke again.

"Perhaps your father will give way before we go."

"What?"

Perry started, the word sounded so sharp and harsh.

"I say perhaps he'll give way before we go."

"No, he won't. He never does. Father says a thing, and means it."

"It's very disappointing," said Perry, "but it's of no use to fret."

Cyril laughed bitterly.

"You're going," he said sharply. "It can't disappoint you."

"Yes, it can. I am disappointed. I don't care about going so much now without you."

"Then stop here with me," cried Cyril sharply.

"I can't," was the reply. "You wouldn't give up going if you were me. Don't let's think any more about it now, but go and do something."

Cyril made no reply, but walked straight away out of the garden and then down towards the harbour, while Perry watched him for a few minutes sadly, and then followed slowly, missed sight of him, and after quite a long search found him sitting on the edge of his wharf, where the sun beat down most fiercely, and staring straight out to sea. "Cil!" said Perry, after going close up, but without exciting the slightest notice of his presence.

There was no reply.

"Cil – don't be sulky with me."

"Not sulky," came with quite a snap.

"Well, angry then. It isn't my fault. I wish you could come."

"Didn't say it was your fault."

"Then why do you take it like that?"

Cyril turned upon him quite fiercely.

"What's the good of talking?" he cried. "You can't understand. You go sailing about with your father and seeing things everywhere. I never go even into the forest. It's horrible always shut up here with book-keeping and classics. I wish sometimes I was only one of the Indians, like that one yonder."

Perry felt disposed to say, which one? for there was a second Indian close by; but wishing to brighten his companion, and turn the current of his thoughts, he merely said:

"Well, I shouldn't wish to be a she Indian."

"Those are not shes – they're both men," said Cyril sharply.

Perry looked at the pair incredulously, for they certainly had a most feminine aspect, being broad of figure and face, plump-cheeked, and with thick long hair cut square across the forehead and allowed to hang down behind. Their eyes were dreamy-looking and oblique, their faces perfectly devoid of hair, and to add to their womanish look, they wore a loose kind of cotton garment, which hung down from their shoulders nearly to their ankles.

"I say, what are they doing?" said Perry, as he stared at the pair.

"Taking snuff. That's their way. They carry some in a little bag, and when they want to take any, they put the powder in that little siphon-like pipe, and hold it to their nose, and another one blows it up. That one sitting down's the guide father is getting for you. – Here, hi!"

The Indians looked round, nodded, finished the snuff-taking business, and then came deliberately toward the boys.

"They're Antis," said Cyril, as Perry watched the two sleepy-looking Indians curiously, and noted that they were both about his own height.

The men came close up, and stood there smiling, waiting to be spoken to; and as Perry had hoped, their presence took Cyril out of himself for the time.

"Been to see my father?" said Cyril in a mongrel kind of Spanish.

One of the Indians nodded.

"And his father too?"

The man replied that he was going now. So Cyril interpreted the few words.

"That's the worst of them; and it's so hard to make them understand exactly what you mean. He didn't know what I meant, and had not been – What say?" For the Indian had muttered something which he repeated.

"Wants to know if I'm going too," said Cyril bitterly; and he shook his head at the Indian, when both smiled and looked pleased.

Cyril gave his teeth a grind. "You beggars," he cried in English, "looking glad because I'm disappointed. – And I've given that first chap many a good tuck out, and lots of tobacco dust for snuff, and paid him no end of times for birds he has shot with his blowpipe, besides buying butterflies and eggs he has brought down out of the mountains. All right, though; I'll serve them out. – I say," cried the boy, and a complete change came over him, "can you speak Spanish?"

"I? No, not a word."

"That's a pity. You'll have to learn a few words, so as to be able to talk to these chaps. But you'll soon pick them up – some Indian, some Spanish, and some half-and-half. Wait a moment; I want to talk to this chap about – about your going."

He began to speak to the man in a low voice, and then grew more and more eager, while the Indian began by smiling and looking amused, but, directly after, shook his head, and seemed to be refusing something which Cyril was asking. Then Perry saw the lad put his hand in his pocket and give the Indian a good two-bladed pocket-knife, whose keenness he demonstrated to the great interest of the Indian, who tried it on one of the heavy posts by the wharf, and then transferred it to his pocket with a smile of satisfaction, nodding his head now to everything Cyril said.

Their conversation lasted for some time, and Perry began to grow impatient after he had satisfied his scrutiny of the two Indians' appearance, and wondered why they should disfigure themselves by painting horizontal lines from their noses across their cheeks.

"There," cried Cyril, speaking rather excitedly, "it's all right now. He says he'll take great care of you, and wait upon you as if you were his father, and always find the best places for sleeping, and mind you don't tumble down into any of the great gaps. But, I say, Perry, old chap, you do wish I was going, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Ah, well, I suppose I must give in and make the best of it, mustn't I?"

"I'm afraid so."

"And you can't write to me and tell me how you are getting on. There are no post-offices up there."

"No, I suppose not."

"You suppose not!" cried Cyril, laughing, and looking as if his bitter fit had quite passed away.

"Why, you're going where you'll hardly see a soul, unless you meet a party coming down from the mines, or bringing bales of bark. There, I'm not going to look grumpy any more, but I did feel savage for a bit."

"That's right. Let's make the best of it while we're together, and do some more fishing, or have a mule ride or two."

"No," said Cyril decisively, "that's all over now. Father told me this morning that I should have to work and help you make all your preparations, for there would be no end to do. Come along. They're going up to see your father now."

The two Indians were both moving off, and the boys followed to the house, where they were witnesses to the meeting, Captain Norton having followed shortly, and acting as interpreter between the parties.

"It is rather awkward," he said, "but I daresay you will soon pick up enough of their jargon to make them understand."

"Oh yes," said the colonel. "I could gather the man's meaning from the Spanish words he used."

"Then you will soon manage. Of course, if you had been a Spaniard, it would have been easy enough."

"I shall not worry about that part of the business," said the colonel, "so long as the man is willing, and will do his best. But we shall want two others to attend to the mules."

"He understands that. He is going to bring another trustworthy fellow. He proposed doing so himself."

"And they can manage the mules?"

"Oh yes, you may trust them. This man, Diego, as we call him, has been in the habit of coming down from the mountains for years to trade and sell. I consider that I was very lucky in getting him for you. When will you start, shall I tell him?"

"On the sixth day from now."

"That is soon, is it not?"

"No; that ought to be time enough to get our mule-packs ready, and a sufficiency of stores. I have everything else."

"Don't hurry," said Captain Norton. "You are very welcome here, and I shall regret your going."

"I know that," said the colonel warmly, "but I am eager to begin, and shall be restless till I start."

The captain nodded, and said a few words to the Indians, who replied, and then took their departure, it being fully understood that they would be there, ready, on the sixth morning.

"Ha!" exclaimed the colonel, "that is satisfactory. – Now then, Perry, my boy, call up John Manning to unpack the luggage, and we'll make our selection of what we mean to take. Captain

Norton will keep in store for us all that we decide to leave, and he will help us with his experience in making our selection. – And you will help too, Cyril, will you not?"

"Of course, sir."

"Thanks. Sorry I can't take you, my lad, but your father is right."

Those next five days passed almost like magic. Six highly-bred mules were selected by Captain Norton's help, and furnished with packages and hide ropes, besides more for riding purposes.

"But we shan't be able to manage so many, sir," said John Manning, a lithe, dry-looking man of about forty, who had been the colonel's servant when he was in the army, and had stayed with him ever since, to Perry's great disgust; for the lad declared that he was the most disagreeable fellow under the sun, since he was always grumbling.

It was quite true, for he found fault with everything to the two boys; though silent, as if he were still in the ranks, in the presence of the colonel. But he quite won Cyril's heart in one of his grumbles, and always after, during their preparations, the boy declared that he was capital fun, and that he liked him.

"There, young gentlemen," said John, "that's as much toggery as I can get in the colonel's soft portmanter, and you'll have to make shift, Master Perry, if you want any more flannels and things."

"Oh, there'll be enough, John," said Perry. "A fellow don't want collars and cuffs up in the mountains."

"But there ain't enough, sir. The man must ha' been a hijot as made that portmanter. If it had been six inches longer, it would have held ever so much more."

"Why, of course it would," said Cyril contemptuously.

"It ain't my business," continued the man; "I'm only a servant. But what ought to ha' been done was to have had Mr Cyril here with us, and filled a portmanter up with his things. Then they'd ha' balanced quite easy on the mule's back."

"Yes, that's what ought to have been done," said Cyril excitedly.

"I wish you'd hold your tongue, John," cried Perry angrily.

"All right, sir. Cut it out, if you like. We're in savage lands, and there's no magistrates to stop it, for all I know. But there, sir, that's all I can do as I see."

"How are you getting on?" cried the colonel, joining them. "All packed now?"

"Yes, sir," said John Manning, drawing himself up stiffly.

"Did you oil the rifles and pistols?"

"Oh yes, sir; I went all over the armoury. Everything's in perfect order."

"And the cartridges?"

"Some in every package, sir; so that you can always get a few."

"That's right."

By this time the captain had had an abundance of the most portable and useful provisions packed, simplicity having been especially studied; and on the evening of that fifth day, it was felt that nothing more could be done.

"I can think of nothing else to help you, Campion," said Captain Norton.

"No, you have done wonders for me. There's only one thing I wish."

"What is it?"

"That you were coming too."

"Colonel Campion!" cried Mrs Norton, as the boys exchanged glances.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said the colonel. "I will not be so selfish. No, I do not wish that. – Come, boys, make the most of your last hours together. Shall you be up to see us off in the morning, Cyril?"

"Of course," said the boy with a sigh.

"To be sure," said the captain; "and we'll ride a few miles with you – eh, Cil?"

"No, thank you father, I'd rather not," said the lad dolefully. "I'll bid them good-bye here. – Coming out, Perry?"

"Yes," said the latter.

"Don't be long, my lad," said the colonel. "I want you to get to bed in good time. You must be up by four."

"Breakfast will be ready by then," said Mrs Norton.

"All right, father," said Perry, and the two lads went out into the soft moonlight, to be accosted directly by John Manning.

"I was looking for you, Master Perry, sir," he said. "I've been a-making of my will, and want you to see me sign it, and witness it."

"You want to sign your will?" cried Perry, laughing.

"Yes, sir; this here's going to be my last journey, I'm afraid, for one o' them mules has marked me down. He means to kick me over the first pressy pass we comes to."

"Don't let him," cried Cyril. "If he's going to, shove him over instead."

John Manning stared.

"Thankye, sir, I will. Now, do you know, I never thought o' that."

"Come along, Cil," said Perry, laying his hand upon his companion's shoulder, and they strolled along to where they could look over the sparkling lights of the town, away across the glittering ocean, with its broad path of silver, and then back up to the huge mountain, whose icy top flashed in the brilliant moonbeams, while every here and there the deep ravines marked the sides with an intense black.

They neither of them spoke, both feeling too sad at heart, but stood there, rapt in thought about the coming morrow, till they were interrupted by the coming of John Manning.

"Colonel says it's lights out, young gentlemen," he said respectfully. "There's allers something wrong in this world. – You ought to ha' been with us, Master Cyril, sir, in this forlorn-hope job. But, I suppose, we must make the best of it."

"Yes," said Cyril bitterly. "I suppose we must."

A quarter of an hour later the lads were in their bedrooms, listening to the hum of the mosquitoes, and feeling weary, but restless in the heat. Cyril felt as if he could not sleep for thinking of the coming day, but all the same, he went off soundly in spite of his depressing thoughts, and woke up with a start, to find that his father was standing by his bedside.

"Half-past three, my lad," he cried. "Up with you, and act like a man. Show our visitors that you can be unselfish, and let's start them happily upon their expedition."

Cyril tried to say, "Yes, father," cheerfully, but not a word would come.

"Sulky?" said Captain Norton rather sternly. "I'm sorry that you turn like that. I'll talk to you this evening, Cyril, my boy."

The boy drew his breath hard, but he said no word, only began hurriedly to dress, as his father left the room.

Chapter Four
Three Shadows

"Hallo, sir," cried Captain Norton, as they stood outside in the enclosure where the mules were being loaded, "where's the a other man?"

The Indian guide looked a little troubled, but spoke out quickly in his half-Indian, half-Spanish jargon.

"He will come. He will meet us soon in the mountains."

"Is that to be depended upon?" said the colonel harshly; for the absence of one man of his force jarred upon his military precision.

"Yes. I have always found the Antis trustworthy."

"But we shall be a man short for the mule-driving."

"No," said Cyril quickly. "They want no driving. All you have to do is to start the leading mule, and the others will follow right enough."

"One more thing," said the colonel, who had had many a weary march across the hot dusty plains of India. "Ought we not to take water?"

"No; the Indians will take you from spring to spring. They know all the streams and falls in the mountains."

The mules were laden after a good deal of squealing and kicking, and, during the process, John Manning shook his head, and confided to Perry that the big leading mule with the bells had squinted round and shaken one hind-leg at him.

"He means me, Master Perry, sir. I ought to have got that will done."

"Nonsense! it's all right," cried the boy; and soon after, an affectionate farewell was taken of the Nortons, it being decided, at the last moment, that the captain should not accompany them. Then the little mule train started in the darkness up the bridle road leading straight away for the mountains, Cyril sending a cooee-like call after them as they reached the first turn of the zigzag road, and, ten minutes after, they were slowly rising above the town, which still lay in the darkness below.

The guide went first quite out of sight with the leading baggage mule, the others following; then the colonel walked next, beside his mule, with John Manning behind him; lastly, followed Perry with his mule, and the second Indian came last of all.

The road was fairly wide at first, giving room for three mules to have walked abreast, but their habit was to keep in single file, and, in spite of all efforts on Perry's part, his animal followed the example of others, and walked close to the edge.

As the day broke, John Manning noticed the trouble his young master was taking, and he shook his head.

"'Tain't no good, sir; I've been a-trying as hard as a man can try to get the crittur to walk like a Christian, and he won't. One of 'em 'll go over the edge directly, and kill hisself, and serve him right."

But the mule team plodded on, in their slow patient way, higher and higher, while from time to time the travellers stopped to gaze back away over the town, at the glittering, far-spreading sea, till all at once, after surmounting the last zigzag up the side of the mountain, the leading mule turned a sharp corner and disappeared from Perry's view, the others following, just as if they had entered a door in the side of the mountain. But, upon leaching the spot, Perry found that they had entered a chasm in the slope – a huge rift, not twenty feet wide, and made quite dim by the distance to where it opened upon the sky; while below, it rapidly ran together, and closed some forty feet beneath the ledge along which the path ran, and with a swift gurgling stream hurrying downward to the shore.

It was Perry's first sight of a mountain stream whose waters came direct from the melting snow of the heights above, where winter always reigned, but he could see little but an occasional flash

as the mules plodded on close to the edge of the path, which, as it rose, grew narrower and more rugged. And, as they still ascended, and the walls on either side of the gorge shut out the light, the boy shuddered, and wondered whether the way would become more dangerous, for, if so, he felt that he dared not mount and ride where a false step on the part of the mule would send him down headlong from the shelf-like track, twenty – forty – why, it must be a hundred feet down to the stream!

"Two, I should say, boy," said the colonel, for Perry had involuntarily spoken aloud. "Don't take any notice of the depth; you'll soon get used to it. Look at the mules, how they keep to the very edge."

"Yes, it's horrible, father. The guides ought to train them to keep close to the wall."

"The mules know best, boy. They are used to carry loads which spread out on either side, and they avoid the wall because it is as dangerous. They might catch their burden against it, and be jerked off."

"I don't think I shall ever get used to such paths as this."

The colonel laughed.

"Not in half a day," he said. "In a short space of time you will run along them as fearlessly as if you were on an English road."

"But are there many like this?"

"Pooh, this is nothing, Perry. You are going up into a land of wonders, where everything is so vast and grand that you will have no time to feel nervous."

"But what are we going for?" asked Perry.

The colonel turned and looked his son full in the eye. Then, smiling:

"Wait," he said. "You will know in good time."

Perry felt abashed, and wished that he had not asked, mentally determining not to question his father again, while, as he recalled his conversations with Cyril, he began to feel that his new friend's ideas must be right. Directly after, he felt sure that they were, for John Manning edged up to him, where the path was a little wider, and said in a whisper:

"Master won't tell you, then, Master Perry?"

"Won't tell me what?" said Perry rather shortly.

"What we're going after. Strikes me as we're going treasure-hunting, and we shall get into one of them wonderful valleys you read of in the *'Rabian Nights*, where the precious stones lies about so thick, you can scoop 'em up."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Do you know what the next country is to this?"

"Well, I suppose, if you went far enough over the mountains, you'd come to Brazil."

"Zackley, sir; and what comes from Brazil?"

"Nuts," said Perry, laughing. "Hard-shelled, oily nuts, that are horribly nasty to eat."

"Yes, sir, and di'monds. So don't you say it ain't likely that we may come to a valley of precious stones, because it strikes me that's what it means."

Onward and upward, along paths partly natural, partly cut in the sides of the gorge where the stream ran, and about mid-day Perry began to realise how high the mountains were, for, upon reaching an opening where he could look up and down, he saw that they had been climbing up and up for about seven hours, and were able to look down at a wonderful panorama of mountain-side and valley; but upon looking upward, the great snowy peak appeared to be as far away as when they started.

Just then the guide spoke to the leading mule, his voice echoing back from across the gorge, for they had reached a slope where the sun shone, and there were patches of grass and green shrub which promised pasture for the animals. They all stopped at once, waited patiently to be relieved of their burdens; and then, when the packs were neatly arranged in a circle, the patient beasts threw themselves down, had a good roll, tossing their legs high in the air, so as to balance themselves for a few moments upon their spines, and then rose again, to begin nibbling at such herbage as they could find.

John Manning busied himself at once and started a fire, while, taking a tin, the second Indian went down the steep slope to the bottom of the gorge, and toiled up again with his load of clear icily-cold water, into which, when it boiled, a small handful of tea was thrown, the tin removed from the fire, and the provisions the colonel's servant had taken from a basket were served out.

The Indians took what was given to them, and sat down by themselves, while the others partook of their portions with great gusto.

Then, upon looking round, Perry found that the Indians were fast asleep, and asked his father whether he ought not to go and wake them up.

"No, boy; they'll take their mid-day nap and wake up soon."

And so it proved, for at the end of a couple of hours, the two men suddenly sprang up, caught the leading mule and led him back to the path, the others following and standing patiently to be laden.

Then onward again till dark, when the guides halted at a spot like the last, the fire was lit, the evening meal prepared, and, well tired out, Perry lay down to pass the first night in the awful solitude to which they had climbed, and gazed up at the brilliant stars seen between large walls of rock. He wondered what Cyril was doing; felt that it would be impossible to sleep cushioned on that hard rock, and fell asleep directly, as a matter of course.

The night was cold up there beneath the glittering stars, but when Perry woke up, warmly rolled in his blanket, there was a sight before him that was as new to him as it was grand.

Right away, apparently at the head of a long narrow valley, and high up toward the heavens, there was a huge peak that might have been the mass of glittering rock from which broke away the diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, opals, and amethysts, which went to form the valleys of precious stones of which John Manning had spoken. For it was all dark below, but up there one of the gigantic Andean peaks was bathed in the full blaze of the rising sun.

The boy lay gazing up, enraptured, thinking of the delight of climbing up into such a world of glory, and then rolling himself out of his blanket, he leaped up, with the stiffness and uneasiness of the past night quite gone, for the colonel's voice reached him:

"Now, my lad, jump up; breakfast."

At the same moment he heard the crackling sound of burning wood, and in a nook of the great wall of rock, where otherwise it would have been quite dark, the glow of a bright fire shone upon the intent, hard face of John Manning, who was baking a bread cake upon a disc of iron, while the two plump, effeminate-looking Indians watched him complacently.

Just below, the mules were cropping the green herbage, and from below them came the rush, roar, and splash of falling water.

"That's right," cried the colonel, holding out his hand. "Slept well? Find your bedroom draughty?"

"I don't know, father," said Perry. "I was looking at the stars one minute, and the next I was staring at that glorious peak."

"Glorious indeed, my boy. Hah! There's nothing like a tramp in the mountains, and a night's rest in the beautiful, crisp, fresh air. Come along down to the dressing-room."

"Where?" said Perry, staring.

"Down yonder for a wash," said the colonel merrily; and, leading the way, they descended the precipitous slope to where the stream ran thundering by, reaching first a place where it was not above a couple of yards across.

"Why, I thought it would be bigger than this," said Perry, "from the noise it makes."

"Bigger than you think, my lad," said the colonel. "There is an enormous amount of water going by here. I daresay that crack is a hundred feet deep. Look at the speed at which it runs."

"Yes, it seems to run fast."

"Seems!" cried the colonel. "Here, give me your hand. Don't be afraid. Stop a moment; roll up your sleeve above your elbow. That's it. Set your feet fast, and trust to me."

The boy obeyed, and after making sure of his own footing, the colonel let his son sink down sidewise till he was nearly horizontal, and could plunge his arm right into the stream above the elbow.

It was a strange sensation for the boy to be sinking lower and lower, gazing in the gloom at that rushing, glassy water, which, as it darted along, carried with it another stream – one of air, which blew his hair about and felt icily-cold, but nothing to compare with the water into which he plunged his arm.

The shock was electric. It was as if he received a blow from a mass of ice which numbed him, and gave his limb a sudden snatch and drag to draw it from the socket.

Perry gave a gasp, and pulled his arm out of the torrent.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated. "It's freezing."

"Yes; would you like a plunge in?"

"What! there, father? It would sweep me away."

"Yes, if you were a thousand times as strong, my lad. The force is tremendous. Come along here."

He led the way upwards to where there was a fall of some few feet, and at the side a shallow pool of the water, wonderfully round, and forming a basin, giving them ample room for their ablutions; after which, fresh and glowing, they climbed up past the mules to where the breakfast was waiting, the hot coffee, bread, and frizzled charqui, or dried beef, being partaken of with an appetite Perry had never felt before.

Then the remains were packed up, the squealing mules loaded, and they started once more; now rising a thousand feet, now descending, but always following the stream deeper and deeper into the mountains, till the grandeur and weird sternness of the gorge's defiles through which they passed grew monotonous, so that at the end of two days Perry began to long for some change and the open sunshine, away from the tremendous precipices which closed them in, and, in spite of the elasticity of the air, had sometimes a strangely depressing effect.

John Manning felt it, evidently, and sought every opportunity of keeping Perry by his side, so as to have a good grumble about the colonel.

"I don't know what he could be thinking about, Master Perry, to come to such a place as this. It's the world's end, I say. We shan't have a bit o' shoe to our foot when we've gone a bit farther."

"Why don't you ride more, then?" said Perry. "You've got a mule on purpose."

"What!" said John Manning, turning sharply round, "ride that mule? No, thankye, sir. I've seen him kick. I'm not going to give him a chance to send me over his head down into one of them cracks. I believe some of them go right through the world. Look at this one now. I can't see no bottom to it – can you?"

He pointed down into the deep chasm along one of whose sides the rough path led.

"No, not from here," said Perry, glancing down, and wondering at the absence of giddiness.

"Nor from anywhere else, sir," grumbled the man. "Why, if any one told me that if you dropped down there, you'd come out somewhere by Simla, I should believe him, for I know they go right through."

"Nonsense!" said Perry, laughing. "There, father's beckoning to me."

It was evening once more, and they were coming again to an opening among the lower mountains, where they would halt for the night. In fact, half an hour later the leading Indian checked his mule in a bowl-shaped hollow, where there was a dense little wood of goodly-sized trees, and a thread-like fall of water came curving down into a mossy basin, while the whole place was brightened by the reflection from the mountains, made dazzling now by the setting sun.

The preparations were made for the evening meal with quite military precision; the arms were placed near the fire, and, as if in imitation, the two Indians placed together their long stave-like blowpipes and bows and arrows, before helping to unload the mules, and then sitting down patiently to administer snuff to each other, and wait to be asked to join the meal.

"It's very awkward, Perry, my lad," said the colonel suddenly. "We ought to have had a guide who could understand us more easily."

"It *is* awkward, father," said Perry.

"Come and help me now, and between us we may make the man comprehend."

Perry followed to where the Indians were squatting down in their loose cotton smock-frock-like garments, and at a sign the leader rose.

"The other man – where is the other man?" said the colonel in Spanish; but the Indian gazed at him vacantly, till in a fit of inspiration Perry repeated his father's words as nearly as he could, and then began to count, laughing as he said in Spanish, "One – two" – and gave an inquiring tone to the word "three," as if asking for it.

The man smiled and pointed to the ground as he answered, and then closed his eyes and let his head fall over upon one hand.

"What does he mean by that, father?" said Perry.

"I can't tell, my boy, unless he wants to show us that the other man is coming while we sleep."

They tried again, but could get no farther. The Indian grew excited at last and voluble, making gestures too, pointing forward and then at the ground, ending by pointing at them in turn, throwing himself down and pretending to sleep.

"I give it up," said the colonel, turning away towards the fire; "but we must try to learn their language as fast as we can, or we shall never get through our journey."

A good meal near the fire, whose glow was comfortable enough up at the height they now were, and then father and son strolled a little way about their camp, the wood proving very attractive; but the darkness soon closed in, and they began to return toward the fire, which glowed brightly and cast the shadows of the Indians against the rock-wall as they sat prolonging their meal.

"What is John Manning doing eating with them?" said the colonel suddenly. "I told him he was to keep those men in their places. They are my paid servants while – "

"He's over yonder," said Perry, interrupting his father, "stacking guns together, I think."

"Nonsense!" said the colonel; "there he is, sitting with the Indians, eating."

"He can't be, father; I can see him over there."

"But look, boy, there are three shadows against the cliff."

"One – two – yes, there are three shadows," said Perry dubiously; "but it is something to do with the fire."

"Absurd, my lad; there are three shadows cast by three men sitting there."

"I know," cried Perry excitedly; "that is what the Indian meant – that the third fellow would be here to-night to sleep, or while we slept."

"To be sure," cried the colonel, in a tone full of satisfaction. "I'm glad of it, not but what we could have got on without him, for the mules go well enough, but because it proves the guide to be trusty and a man of his word."

Chapter Five
Perry is Startled

The guide came to the colonel smiling as soon as he saw him seated, and pointed to; the other side of the fire, as he spoke words which evidently announced the coming of the promised assistant.

The colonel replied in Spanish, and the Indian went back to his companions. Soon after, the smell from John Manning's pipe rose on the cool night-air, and Perry sat talking to his father in a questioning mood.

"When are we going over the top of one of the snow-mountains, father?" he said.

"I have no intention of going over the top of either of the mountains," replied the colonel. "We have nothing to gain but hard labour up there. We want to get through the first ridge, and on to the rich tablelands, or among the beautiful valleys."

Perry said "Oh!" in a tone of voice which suggested "Do we? I did not know." Then aloud: "How high up are we now?"

"About eight thousand feet, I should say; perhaps a little more, for it is rather cold. There, let's get to sleep; I want to start early and be well on our way soon after sunrise."

The colonel had his desire, for, long before the lower part of the ridge was quite light, the mules were all loaded, and the party made their start, with Diego the Indian leading, the new arrival second, and the other man right in the rear as before.

Perry had one glance at the new-comer, and made out that he was a more stunted fellow than the others. In other respects he seemed to be similar in aspect, but wore a good deal of radiating paint upon his cheeks, from which it was drawn along in lines right up to his brows, and downward toward the jaws. He wore the same loose, many-folded gown, reaching just to his knees, and carried a bow, arrows, and a long blowpipe, but he was wanting in his friends' plumpness and breadth of shoulder.

"Looking at the new mule-driver, Perry?" said the colonel. "Yes? Seems to be quite a stripling. But so long as he does his work well enough, it does not matter."

He did do his work and well, as it proved, trudging along by the mules, helping to unload and load again, managing those under his charge admirably, and proving to be most industrious in fetching water. But he was timid and distant to a degree, shrinking away when either of the English party approached him, and on one occasion showing so evident an intention to hurry away into the mountains, that the colonel checked his son when next he saw him making for the Indian lad.

"Let him be," said the colonel; "he's wild as a hawk, and he doesn't look particularly clean."

"No," said Perry, laughing, "he is a grub. Those fellows don't wash, I suppose, for fear of spoiling their paint."

They ceased then to take much notice of their fresh follower all through that day and the next; and the Indian trudged on beside the luggage mules, with his shoulders up and his head bent, as if he were carefully watching where he should next place his feet, speaking to nobody but Diego, when the guide left the leading mule for a few minutes to stop and look right along the line, inspecting the loads as the mules passed him, smiling at the colonel and Perry, and exchanging rather a fierce look with John Manning; for, somehow, these two did not seem to be the best of friends. Then he would let his companion who guarded the rear come right up, walk beside him, talking for a few minutes, and then start forward again at a trot, passing them once more till he had reached the leading mule.

There was little change that day, always a constant succession of precipitous walls to right and left, their way being along a narrow shelf, with the stream they followed thundering beneath them, sometimes a hundred feet beneath, at others perhaps a thousand, and quite invisible, but making itself evident by the echoing roar of the rushing waters.

They passed nobody, neither did they see a single animal to tempt them to use rifle or gun that hung by its sling across their backs, till late in the afternoon, when, just as they turned the corner of a great buttress of rock, a huge bird suddenly swept by, gazing wonderingly at them. By one consent, father and son paused to watch the ease with which the great-winged creature glided along the gorge, half-way between the top and the stream below, turned suddenly and came back, as if to renew their acquaintance, and then curved round again, sweeping along for a short distance, and again wheeling round, not in a series of circles, but ellipses, each turn sending it almost without effort higher and higher, till it had reached a sufficient elevation, when it passed out of sight over the wall on their left.

"Eagle?" said Perry.

"Vulture," replied the colonel. "There you have seen one of the biggest birds that fly. Didn't you notice its naked head?"

"Yes; and it had quite a comb over the top, and a ruff round its neck. I thought it was an eagle from its great hooked beak."

"The featherless head is a general mark of the vultures," said the colonel. "I wish I had had a shot at it; but I don't know: I don't want to be burdened with bird-skins, especially of such a size as that."

"What a monster to skin!" said Perry thoughtfully. "Why, its wings must have been six or seven feet from point to point."

"Double the length – say fourteen or fifteen, my boy," replied the colonel. "It must have been that. Old travellers used to make them out to be twenty-five or thirty feet from wing-tip to wing-tip; but they do reach the size I say. Hallo! what are we stopping for?"

"Why, there's a bridge," cried Perry; "and the path goes along on the other side of the gorge."

"And what a bridge," muttered the colonel.

He might well exclaim, for it was formed in the narrowest part of the gloomy gorge, and though not more than five-and-thirty feet in length, it looked perilous in the extreme, being formed merely of a couple of thick ropes of twisted fibre, secured at either side round masses of rock, and with a roadway made by rough pieces of wood laid across and firmly bound to the ropes.

"A suspension bridge with a vengeance," continued the colonel. "We shall never get the mules to cross that."

And he had perfect warrant for his words. For some forty yards below, the water foamed along in a perfect torrent, falling heavily from a shelf above, and sending up quite a thick mist, which magnified the surrounding objects and added to the gloom of the place.

Perry felt appalled, but the halt was of short duration, for after turning to them and shouting something which was almost inaudible in the roar of the torrent, the Indian stepped on to the bridge, and walked coolly across, half hidden by the mist; while the mule which played the part of leader bent its head, sniffed at the stout boards which formed the flooring, stepped on and walked carefully across, with the bridge swaying heavily beneath its weight.

"Not so bad as it looked, my lad," said the colonel, as the next mule followed without hesitation. Then, after a pause, their new Indian crossed, followed with the mule by which he had walked, and then the rest, including those from which the travellers had dismounted, for no one thought of venturing to ride across the chasm.

"Our turns now, Perry," said the colonel. "How do you feel?"

"Don't like it," said Perry huskily.

"Summon up your nerve, my lad; forget that there is any torrent beneath you, and walk boldly across. Here, I'll go first."

"No, no, please don't," cried Perry, setting his teeth. "I'll go."

"Go on, then," said the colonel.

The boy descended from the few yards of loose stony way to where the wet rough-hewn boards began, drew a deep breath, and stepped on to the bridge, conscious that the guide was looking back,

and that the new Indian was at the other end, watching him earnestly, with his lips slightly parted and his teeth bared.

To Perry it was a sign that their attendant felt the danger of the place, and was watching to see him fall. And if he did, he felt nothing could save him, for he would be swept away in an instant down that narrow chasm full of rushing water, where it was impossible for any one to climb down and stretch out a helping hand.

One step, two steps, three steps, all descending, for the middle of the bridge hung far lower than the ends, and Perry could feel it vibrato beneath him, and his nervous dread increased. And yet it was so short a distance to where the Indians were waiting, as he stepped cautiously on till he was well past the middle, when all at once the sky above him seemed to be darkened over his head, there was a peculiar, whistling, rushing sound, and looking up sharply, Perry saw that the huge bird which had passed out of sight had wheeled round and was flying so close above him, that it seemed as if its object were to strike at him with its powerful talons.

As a matter of fact, the bird swept by five-and-twenty feet above his head, but it was near enough to destroy the lad's balance as he started and bent down to avoid the fancied blow. The colonel uttered a loud cry of warning, and Perry made an effort to recover himself, but this stagger caused the bridge to sway, and in another moment or two he would have been over into the torrent had not the bridge vibrated more heavily as a guttural voice whispered to him:

"Quick! *mano*– hand!"

It was accompanied by a sharp drag as his own was seized, and, recovering his balance, he half ran – was half pulled – up the slope into safety on the other side.

Perry felt giddy and dazed as the Indian loosed his hold and hurried away among the mules, while before he had half recovered himself, his father had crossed and was at his side.

"Perry, my lad, you sent my heart into my mouth."

"Yes," faltered the boy. "It was very horrid. That bird."

"It was startling, my lad, but you ought to be able to walk boldly across a place like that."

"Ahoy! colonel!" came from the other side, as John Manning hailed them.

"What is it?" shouted back the colonel.

"Hadn't I better go back, sir?"

"Back? No. Come over!"

John Manning took off his hat and scratched his head, looking down at the hanging bridge and then up at his master.

Just then there was a shout from Diego and some words in the Indian tongue, which resulted in the other Indian offering his hand to the colonel's servant, who resented it directly.

"No," he growled; "I'll do it alone. One must be safer by one's self;" and stretching out his arms like a tight-rope dancer, he came down cautiously, stepped on to the bridge and slowly walked across, the Indian following at a trot, as if astonished at any body finding so good a pathway difficult.

"I hope there ain't many more o' them spring playthings, sir," said John Manning gruffly. "I thought Master Perry was gone."

"Nonsense!" said the colonel shortly. "That great bird startled him. Forward again; the men are going on. – Perry, my boy, you must give that Indian lad a knife, or something as a present: he saved your life."

"Yes, father," said the boy, looking dazed and strange. "I – I'm better now."

"Yes, of course you are. Pish! we mustn't dwell upon every slip we have. There, think no more about it," he continued, as he noticed the boy's blank, pale face. "Go on, and mount your mule."

"I think I would rather walk," said Perry.

"Walk, then," said the colonel shortly, and he went on and mounted his mule.

"Quick! *mano*– hand!" buzzed in Perry's ear, and at the same time he seemed to hear the booming roar of the torrent beneath his feet, and the rush of the huge bird's wings just above his head – "Quick! *mano*– hand!"

"I say, Master Perry, sir, don't look that how," said John Manning in a low voice; "you're as white as taller candle. You're all right now."

"Yes," said Perry, trying hard to recover his natural balance. "I'm all right now."

"You've made the colonel look as black as thunder, and it wasn't our fault. They've no business to have such bridges in a Christian country. But it was enough to scare any one, my lad. I thought that there bird meant to have you."

"That was fancy," said Perry hastily. "I ought to have known better."

"No, it wasn't fancy, my lad. I think he'd have had you, only seeing us all about made him give you up. But it's all right."

"All right?"

"Yes, sir, we're on the c'rect track."

"Of course we are," said Perry, as they marched on once more behind the mules, followed by the Indian.

"You dunno what I mean, sir," said John Manning testily. "I meant on the track for one o' them di'mond valleys. Know what that bird was?"

"Yes; a condor."

"Con grandmother, sir. It was a roc, one o' them birds as carried Sindbad out o' the valley. This was only a chicken, I should say; but it was a roc, all the same."

"What nonsense!" said Perry. "That was all fancy tale and romance."

"Not it, sir. I might have thought so once, but I don't now. Let me ask you this, sir," said Manning: "suppose there was no way out or no way into the valleys we've come along, could you climb up the sides?"

"No, of course not."

"And if you'd heard tell of birds with wings thirty foot across before you'd seen 'em, would you have believed in them?"

"No, and I don't now."

"What! after one of 'em come down to attack you, and we scared it away."

"That was only about half the size."

"Oh, come, Master Perry, sir, don't get a haggling about trifles; there ain't much difference between fifteen foot and thirty. You mark my words, sir, the colonel's been studying up his *'Rabian Nights*, and he's on the right track now for one of them valleys, and we shall go back to San-what's-its-name with these ugly-looking donkey mules loaded up with all kinds of precious stones. You're a lucky one, Master Perry, sir, and your fortune's about made."

"Think so?" said Perry, for the sake of speaking, for he was very thoughtful.

"Yes, sir, I just do; and as for me, I hope it's going to be my luck to get just a few nubbly bits for myself, so as I can buy myself a cottage and a bit o' garden, and keep a pig, so as to live retired. You'll come and see me, Master Perry, then, won't you?"

"Of course," said the boy, and then, making a trivial excuse to get away, he hurried along the line of slow-going mules to see that his father was right in front before their guide, who walked by the first mule; then there were three more plodding along, just far enough behind each other to be safe from any playful kick. By the head of the third mule their new Indian driver was walking with his bow over his shoulder, a handful of long arrows tucked under his arm, and his head bent down watching his footsteps.

Perry kept behind at some distance, watching the Indian's every gesture, till he saw his father returning, for the track had become wider, and the boy watched intently; for he saw the colonel bend down from his mule and tap the Indian on the shoulders as he said a few words in Spanish. But what

they were Perry was too far off to hear, the mules too making a good deal of clattering on the rocky track, which noise was echoed all around in a wonderful way.

"It must have been my fancy, but I could have been sure he said something to me in English," muttered Perry. "I was so excited, I suppose."

Chapter Six
A Night Alarm

"Did you give the Indian lad the knife?" said the colonel as they came abreast.

"No, father."

"Go and do it at once, and mind how you give it; the fellow's as wild as a hawk. I thought he was going to spring over the precipice as soon as I touched him."

Perry took out the pocket-knife he had with him, and stepped forward; but a word from his father checked him.

"I don't want to make too much fuss over this, Perry, my lad," he said, "but you displayed a great want of nerve. You did not act like a healthy, sturdy, English boy, and but for that Indian's quick decision, you would have lost your life."

"Yes, father, I'm afraid so."

"Then, for goodness' sake, my lad, try to shake off this girlish cowardice, or you'll make me regret bringing you."

"I'll try, father," said the boy, his face flushing hotly.

"That's right. I'm sure Captain Norton's son would have cut a better figure."

Perry's face grew hotter, and he felt a bitter feeling of annoyance at being compared so unfavourably with the lad who had been his companion.

The feeling was only momentary, though, and he went on and overtook the Indian, with the knife in his hand.

He was going to give it without a word, but the idea that, perhaps, after all, the half-savage being might understand a few words of English, flashed into his mind, and he said:

"This is not worth much, but I hope you'll keep it in memory of my gratitude for your bravery to-day."

To his disgust, the Indian paid not the slightest attention, but trudged on barefooted beside the mule, as if perfectly unconscious of any one beside him, and Perry's nerves being all on the jar, he felt irritated at giving, un-noticed, a pretty speech.

"Here, catch hold," he said. "This is for you."

He thrust the knife into the Indian's grimy hand as he spoke, and then walked on to where Diego received him with a smile of welcome, and began talking directly in his mongrel tongue, perfectly content if the boy seemed to understand a word here and there, when he pointed to cavernous-looking holes in the cliff face opposite to him, to some brighter and greener spot in the gorge, or to some distant fall which glittered in the sunshine which came obliquely down into the narrow vale.

All at once there was a beating of wings, and one of the huge condors, startled from the eyrie it occupied high up above their heads, suddenly threw itself off, and began to fly round, rising higher and higher, while the Indian rapidly fitted one of the long feathered arrows be carried to the string of his bow, waited till the great bird was gliding by, and then loosed the shaft. The arrow struck the condor in the wing, and made the huge bird give itself an angry jerk, as if it were disposed to turn upon its aggressor; but as Perry watched, the bird gave a few rapid beats with its pinions, shooting upwards rapidly, and though it was some distance away, the air was so clear that Perry distinctly saw the long feathered arrow shaken out of the condor's white wing, and fall slowly down into the depths of the gorge, while the great bird literally shot up for some distance, and then glided over a shoulder of the mountain they were flanking, and disappeared.

The Indian looked at Perry and shook his head, as he muttered some words which were easily interpreted.

"Lost my arrow, and did not get my bird."

"And a good thing too," said Perry. "It would have been of no use, and only wanton destruction."

The man nodded and smiled as if Perry's words were full of sympathy for his loss. But they fell upon other ears as well, for the colonel was close behind.

"Rather misdirected sympathy, I'm afraid, Perry, my lad," he said. "The bird would have been no use to us, but I dare say its death would have saved the lives of a good many young vicunas and llamas."

Perry stared for a moment or two, and then: "Oh yes, I know. Do they live up in these mountains?"

"Yes, you'll see plenty by-and-by."

"Sort of goats, aren't they, father?"

"Well, my boy, they partake more of the nature of a camel or sheep, as you'll say whenever you see the long-necked, flat-backed creatures. But it's getting time for camping. The mules are growing sluggish, and sniffing about for food."

"I hope we shan't camp here," said Perry with a shiver.

"Not an attractive place, but I daresay Diego has some spot marked out in his eye, for he has evidently been along here a good many times before."

Ten minutes later, as the snowy peaks which came into view began to grow of a bright orange in the western sunshine, one of the mules in front uttered a whinnying squeal, and the rest pricked up their ears and increased their pace.

"Steady there! Wo-ho!" shouted John Manning. "Hadn't we better sound a halt, sir, or some of 'em 'll be over the side of the path."

"I think we may trust them; they smell grass or something ahead, and know it is their halting-place."

"But look at that brown 'un, sir; he's walking right out from under his load."

A few hitches, though, and a tightening of the hide ropes, kept the loosened pack in its place; and soon after, to Perry's great delight, the gorge opened out into a bright green valley, where, a snug, well-sheltered nook being selected, the mules were once more unloaded, and a fire lit. Then, thanks to John Manning's campaigning cleverness, before the light on the mountain tops quite died out, they were seated at a comfortable meal, with a good fire crackling and burning between them and the Indians, wood for once in a way being fairly plentiful, there being a little forest of dense scrubby trees low down by the stream which coursed through the bottom of the valley.

"Not quite such a savage-looking place, Master Perry," said John Manning, when the colonel had taken his gun and gone for a final look round before they retired to their blankets on the hard ground.

"Savage! Why, it's beautiful," cried Perry, who had been watching the colours die out on one snowy peak.

"Yes, sir, I suppose it is," said the man, shaking his head; "but we didn't take all the trouble to see things look beautiful. We can do that at home. What I'm thinking is that the place don't look healthy."

"Not healthy? Up here in the mountains?"

"Tchah! I don't mean that way, sir; I mean healthy for your pocket. This looks like a place where you might have a farm and gardens, and keep sheep. You'd never come here to search for di'monds, and sapphires, and things."

"N-no," assented Perry.

"O' course not. We want good wild broken stone muddle over rocky places, where you have to let yourselves down with ropes."

"Or ride down on rocs' backs, eh, John?"

"Yes, sir, that's your sort. We've passed several good wholesome-looking places that I should have liked to have hunted over; but of course the colonel knows best, and he is leading us somewhere for us to have a regular good haul. Tired, sir?"

"Yes, pretty well, but one feels as if one could go on walking a long way up in these mountains."

"Well, sir, we've got every chance, and I'd just as soon walk as get across one of these mules, with your legs swinging, and the thin, wiry-boned crittur wriggling about under you. I always feel as if my one was groaning to himself, and looking out for a good place where he could thrust his hind-legs up and send me flying over his head into the air, where he could watch me turn somersaults till I got to the bottom."

"Oh, they're quiet enough," said Perry.

"Oh, are they, sir? Don't you tell me. My one never misses a chance of rubbing my leg up against a corner, and when he has done there, he goes to the other extreme and walks right along the edge, so that my other leg is hanging over the side; and if I look down, I get giddy, and expect that every moment over we shall both go."

"I tell you, they don't mean anything," cried Perry.

"Then why does my one, as soon as he knows he has frightened me, begin to show his teeth, and laugh and wriggle his ears about, as if he were enjoying himself right down to the roots. I don't believe these mules are any good, Master Perry, that I don't, and as aforesaid, I always feel as if I'd rather walk."

Further conversation was put an end to by the return of the colonel, and soon after, leaving the Indians crouching near the fire, which they seemed reluctant to leave, the English party sought the corner which had been selected for their sleeping-place, rolled themselves in their blankets, and with valises for pillows, and their stores piled up for a shelter from the wind, they were not long in dropping off to sleep.

Perry's was sound enough at first, but after a time he began to dream and go through the troubles connected with crossing the swinging bridge again. He found himself half-way across, and then he could go no farther in spite of all his efforts, till, just as the condor was about to take advantage of his helplessness, and descend to fix its talons in the sides of his head and pick out his eyes, the Indian made a snatch at him, and dragged him across for him to awake with a start.

It was all so real that his brow was wet with perspiration, but he settled what was the cause, and changed his position peevishly.

"That comes of eating charqui late at night, and then lying on one's back," he muttered, and dropped off to sleep again directly.

But only to begin dreaming again of the condor, which was floating overhead, spreading its wings quite thirty feet now; and there was the scene of the day repeated with exaggerations. For the Indian guide bent an immense bow, and sent an arrow as big as a spear whizzing through the air, to strike the huge bird, which swooped down close by, and looked at him reproachfully, as it said in a whisper: "I only came to bring back your knife."

Perry lay bound in the fetters of sleep, but all the same, his ears seemed to be open to outer impressions, for the words were repeated close to him, and he started up on to his elbow.

"Who's there? who spoke?" said a low firm voice close to him. "That you, Perry?"

"Yes, father," replied the boy, as he heard the ominous *click-click* of the double gun that lay by the colonel's side.

"What were you doing?"

"Nothing, father. I just woke up and fancied I heard some one speak."

"There was a whisper, and some one brushed against me just before. Did you move from your place?"

"No, father," said Perry, feeling startled now.

"Manning!"

"Sir!"

"Have you been moving?"

"No, sir; fast asleep till you woke me, talking."

"Then some one has been visiting us," whispered the colonel. "Hah! what's that?"

"Something rustling along yonder, sir."

Bang! bang! Both barrels were discharged with a noise which seemed to have awakened all the sleeping echoes of the mountains around their camp.

Then, as the colonel hastily reloaded his piece, Perry and John Manning sprang up, each seizing his gun, and waited.

"I missed him; but, whoever it is, he won't come prowling about again. Follow me quickly. Stoop."

Bending down, they hurried across the few yards which intervened between them and the smouldering ashes of the fire, which, fanned now and then by the breeze sweeping along the valley, gave forth a faint phosphorescent-looking light, by which they could just make out the figures of the three Indians standing with their bows and arrows ready, as if about to shoot.

"Which of you came over to us?" said the colonel in Spanish; but there was no reply, and the speaker stamped his foot in anger. "What folly," he cried, "not to be able to communicate with one's guide!"

"Could it have been some one from the valley lower down?" whispered Perry, who then felt a curious startled sensation, for he recalled perfectly the words he had heard while asleep, or nearly so: "I only came to bring back your knife."

"Then it must have been the little Indian, and he could speak English after all."

Accusatory words rose to Perry's lips, but he did not speak them. A strange reluctance came over him, and he shrank from getting the poor fellow into trouble, knowing, as he did, that his father would be very severe on the intruder upon their little camp. For it was a fact that the little Indian had crept up to where they slept and spoken to him. The excitement had prevented him from noticing it before, but he held in his hand the proof of the visit, tightly, nervously clutched: the knife was in his left hand, just as it had been thrust there while he slept.

"Attend here," said the colonel. Then very sternly: "You cannot understand my words, perhaps, but you know what I mean by my actions. One of you came for some dishonest purpose to where we lay sleeping, and I wonder I did not hit whoever it was as he ran. – Give me your hand, sir," he cried; and he seized and held Diego's right hand for a few moments.

Then dropping it, he held out his hand to the other Indian, who eagerly placed his in the colonel's palm.

"An outside enemy, I'm afraid," muttered the colonel; "they are both perfectly calm. – Now you, sir," he continued, turning to the last comer, who hesitated for a moment, and then held out his hand.

This was all in the dim starlight, the figures of the men being made plainer from time to time by the faint glow from the fire; but their faces were quite in the shade as the colonel took the last comer's hand and grasped it tightly, while Perry's heart began to beat, for he felt that the discovery was coming; and hence he was not surprised at the colonel's fierce and decided action.

"Your pulse galloping," he cried angrily, as he dragged the dimly-seen figure forward. "Perry, Manning, cover those two men, and if they make a gesture to draw their bows, fire at once. – Now, you scoundrel, it was you, and you had come to steal."

"No, he had not, father; he came to give me back my knife."

"What!" cried the colonel angrily.

"It's a fact; he put it in my hand while I slept; and here it is."

"Then – "

"It's quite true, sir, and no good to keep it up any longer."

"Cil!" cried Perry in astonishment.

"Yes. Don't be very angry with me, Colonel Campion. I felt obliged to come; I couldn't stop away."

"Why, you treacherous young rascal," cried the colonel, shaking him violently.

"Don't, sir, please; you hurt!" cried Cyril half angrily.

"How dare you mutiny against your father's commands, and come after us like – ?"

"I dunno," said Cyril mournfully. "I felt obliged; I wanted to be with Perry there."

"But to come masquerading like this, sir! How dare you?"

"I dunno, I tell you," said the boy petulantly. "It isn't so very nice to come over the stones without shoes or stockings, and only in this thing. It's as cold as cold, besides being painted and dirtied up as I am. My feet are as sore as sore."

"And serve you right, you young dog. What will your father say?"

"I don't know what he'd have said if you'd shot me," grumbled Cyril.

The colonel coughed.

"You precious nearly did, you know," continued Cyril querulously. "I heard the shots go crashing in among the bushes as I ran."

"Then you shouldn't have come prowling about the camp in the middle of the night," cried the colonel. "Of course, sir, I took you for some wild beast or marauding Indian."

"Well," said Cyril, "now you know, sir, and I suppose I can go back and try to sleep."

"Go back? Yes, sir, first thing – to your father," cried the colonel fiercely. "I suppose he does not know you have come?"

"No, sir."

"Of course not. A pretty disgraceful escapade, upon my word, sir! I only wish I were back in my regiment, and you were one of my subalterns. I'd punish you pretty severely for this, I promise you."

"Would you, sir?" said Cyril drearily. "I thought I was getting punished enough. I'm sorry I disturbed you, sir; I only wanted to get close up, and touch Perry's hand."

"Bah!" cried the colonel. "Why did you want to touch Perry's hand?"

"Because I was so lonely and miserable, lying there with my feet sore. I couldn't sleep, sir. The stones have cut them, and I was afraid to wash them, for fear you should see how white my legs were."

The colonel coughed.

"Here; stop a moment, sir," he said, in rather a different tone. "You see, I might have shot you."

"Yes, sir," said Cyril dolefully. "And it did seem hard to be shot at, because I felt glad the poor fellow didn't go off the bridge."

The colonel coughed again.

"Hum, ha, yes," he said, a little huskily. "It was a very narrow escape, of course, and you behaved very well. You – er – yes, of course, you quite saved his life. But I shall say no more about that now. – Here, Manning, get Mr Cyril Norton a couple of blankets. – And you'll come and lie down by us, sir; and mind this: no more evasions, no attempts to escape."

"I shan't try to escape in the dark," said Cyril drearily. "Where should I escape to, sir?"

"Ah! of course. Where to, indeed! So recollect you are a prisoner, till I place you back safely in your father's hands. – Stop! Halt! What are you doing, Perry?"

"Only shaking hands with him, father," said the lad.

"Then don't shake hands with him, sir. Shake hands with gentlemen, and not with lads who disgrace themselves by disobeying their father's orders, and satisfying their own selfishness by causing others intense anxiety."

Perry drew in a long, deep breath, which did not go down into his lungs properly, but seemed to catch here and there.

"One moment," said the colonel; "can you make that man Diego understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then tell him and his companion to go to sleep again."

Cyril said a few words to the guide, and the two Indians dropped down at once, close to the warm ashes.

“I suppose, then, he knew all about your escapade, sir, eh?” cried the colonel. “Of course, he must have got you the Indian clothes and paint.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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