

Lewis Alfred Henry

The Sunset Trail



Alfred Lewis
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INTRODUCTION

It was in my thoughts, as I wrote these chapters and arranged their sequence, to fix in types a phase of American existence that, within the touch of present time, has passed away. The West has witnessed more changes than has the East. The common impression, and one to which all Americans are bred, leaves paleface Western occupation to a modern day. Whenever one's thought wanders to what is old in this country one inevitably sets his face towards the East.

None the less, this feeling of an Eastern as an earlier settlement is error. In New Mexico and Arizona, while exploring an ancient Spanish church or considering some palace of sun-dried mud with a sixteenth-century origin, it will begin to press upon one how the East, after all, is but the younger theatre of European endeavour in this continent. Also, an odd feeling will grow, as one reflects that more than a half century before Winthrop and Standish and Bradford and Alden and those other stern and solemn ones, came ashore on Plymouth Rock, Santa Fé was a bustling capital – a centre of agriculture, of mining, of flocks and of herds.

St. Augustine is said to be the first founded town within the frontiers of this country, as the same are made and laid to-day. And yet it is in warm dispute, with a deal to tell on the New Mexican side of the question, if Santa Fé be not the age equal of her sister of the Everglades. Certainly, and say the most disappointing thing for Santa Fé, there was a no greater space than two or three years to fall between.

Considered as regions, Florida versus New Mexico, the latter should be the older. In its settlement, that stretch lying between Santa Fé and San Francisco, and south to the Rio Grande and the now North Mexican line, was in a fairly populous and flourishing condition three centuries and more ago. To say "New Mexico" or "Arizona" hath a far-off savage sound, and yet both were dominated of European influences and polka-dotted with many a white man's town long years before Salem went hanging her witches or Pocahontas interfered to save the life of Smith. It was over three and one-half centuries ago that Coronado ransacked Colorado and Kansas for those "seven cities" and the gold he could not find.

In 1803 the first American trading expedition broke across the plains and entered Santa Fé. The expedition was planned by William Morrison, the grandfather of that Colonel William Morrison who, following Civil War, won fame as a House leader, and proposed to reform the tariff by horizontally reducing it. Until the Morrison trade invasion of New Mexico, the West in its European complexion had been furnished by the Spanish. Also,

about this time the English and Scotch, with the Canadian French to aid them, came pushing southward and westward from British Columbia in a search for furs.

The fur trade grew apace. Beavers were first the purpose, then buffaloes, with such peltry folk as bears and wolves and foxes and otters and muskrats to be their incident. For fifty years the beaver was the great source of Western wealth; then came the buffalo to roundly cover twenty-five years. After that, the cattle; to be followed by the railway and the farm.

If one were to catalogue those human influences that have dealt with the West, the count in its procession would run somewhat like this: There was the Indian occupation – an occupation that has never wholly given way. In the sixteenth century, say in 1550, came the Spaniard with what we call “civilisation” and the Indians call “devilry,” to colour the control, and hold a West’s directing rein, for two hundred and seventy-five years. Then befell the English-speaking invasion from the sunrise side of the Mississippi. There was a beaver day, a buffalo day; and, covering both the beaver and the buffalo days, there was also a trader day, with its Santa Fé and Oregon trails.

On the heels of all these came the cattle day and the day of the herds, with the farm day slowly dawning. It is with that latter day, the cattle day, that I have dealt. In doing this I have seized on a real man and, in its tragedy at least, told what really happened. Speaking for its broader lines, this book is true, and there be scores who will recognise its incidents.

Alfred Henry Lewis.

New York City, February, 1905.

CHAPTER I – HOW IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT

His baptismal name was William Barclay, but before the corn-coloured pencilling on his upper lip had foretold the coming of a moustache, he was known throughout that wide-flung region lying between the Platte and the Rio Grande, the Missouri and the Mountains, as Bat. This honour fell to the boyish share of Mr. Masterson because his quick eye, steady hand, and stealthy foot rendered him invincible against bears and buffaloes and other animals, *ferae naturae*, and gray oldsters of the plains were thereby reminded of a Batiste Brown who had been celebrated as a hunter in the faraway heroic days of Chouteau, Sublette, Bridger, and St. Vrain.

There is no such season as boyhood on the plains, folk are children one day, men the next, and thus it befell with Mr. Masterson. He owned, while yet his cheek was as hairless as an egg, primeval gravities and silences, and neither asked nor answered questions, neither took nor gave advice. Among his companions of the range he gained the reputation of one who “attends strictly to his own business”; and this contributed to his vogue and standing, and laid the bedplates of a popular confidence in Mr. Masterson.

Also, Mr. Masterson, being few of years and not without a

dash of the artistic, was in his way a swell. His spurs were of wrought steel traced with gold, the handkerchief – an arterial red for hue – knotted about his brown throat was silk, not cotton, while his gray sombrero had been enriched with a bullion band of braided gold and silver, made in the likeness of a rattlesnake, fanged and ruby-eyed. This latter device cost Mr. Masterson the price of one hundred buffalo robes, and existed a source of wondering admiration from Dodge to the Pueblos.

As a final expression of dandyism, Mr. Masterson wore a narrow crimson sash wound twice about his waist, the fringed ends descending gallantly down his left leg. The sash had come from Mexico, smuggled in with a waggon load of Chihuahua hats, and when Mr. Masterson donned it, being privily a-blush to find himself so garish, he explained the same as something wherewith he might hogtie steers when in the course of duty he must rope and throw them. Doubtless the sash, being of a soft, reluctant texture and calculated to tie very tight into knots that would not slip, was of the precise best material with which to hogtie steers; but since Mr. Masterson never wore it on the range and always in the dance halls, it is suspected that he viewed it wholly in the light of a decoration.

Mr. Masterson's saddle, as exhibiting still further his sumptuous nature, was of stamped leather; while his war-bags and leggings were faced with dogskin, the long black fell warranted to shed rain like a tin roof. The one thing wanting a least flourish of ornament was Mr. Masterson's heavy, eight-

square buffalo gun – a Sharp's 50-calibre rifle.

And yet this absence of embellishment was not because of Mr. Masterson's want of respect for the weapon; rather he respected it too much. A rifle was a serious creature in the eyes of Mr. Masterson, and not to be regarded as jewelry; to mount it with silver or inlay its stock with gold would have been as unbecoming as to encrust a prayer-book with diamonds. Mr. Masterson's rifle's name was Marie; and when abroad on the range he made remarks to it, and took it into his confidence, apropos of events which transpired as part of the day's work.

When Mr. Dixon, for whom Mr. Masterson was killing buffaloes along the Canadian, told that young gentleman how his visiting sister and niece would pass a fortnight at the 'Dobe Walls, the better to realise a virgin wilderness in all its charms, Mr. Masterson made no comment. Behind his wordlessness, however, Mr. Masterson nourished a poor opinion of this social movement. At its best, the 'Dobe Walls, as well as the buffalo range of which it lived at once the centre and the ragged flower, was rude beyond description, and by no means calculated – so Mr. Masterson thought – to dovetail with the tastes of ladies fresh from Beacon Hill. Besides, Mr. Masterson was not satisfied as to the depth and breadth of what friendships were professed by certain Cheyennes, who hunted buffaloes in the neighbourhood of the Canadian, for their paleface brothers and sisters.

Mr. Masterson's opinions on this point of Cheyenne friendship was not the offspring of surmise. Within the month, eight

Cheyennes, supposed by the authorities in Washington to be profoundly peaceful, had come upon him while busy with both hands husking the hide from a buffalo bull. Full of the Washington impression of a Cheyenne peace, at least so far as deeds done of daylight and on the surface were concerned, Mr. Masterson paid no mighty heed to the visitors. Indeed, he paid none at all until one of them caught up his rifle from the grass, and smote him with it on the head. The Cheyenne, cocking the gun and aiming it, told him in English learned at Carlisle, and, with epithets learned at the agencies, to *vamos* or he'd shoot him in two. With the blood running down his face, Mr. Masterson so far accepted the Cheyenne suggestion as to back slowly from the muzzle of the rifle until he reached the edge of a ravine, upon which he had had his mind's eye from the beginning. Then he suddenly vanished out of harm's way.

Once in the ravine, Mr. Masterson flew for his camp, distant not a quarter of a mile. Getting a second rifle, Mr. Masterson bushwhacked those vivacious Cheyennes at the mouth of Mitchell's Canyon, and killed four, among them the violent individual who had so smote upon him with his own personal gun. The lost rifle, which was as the honour of Mr. Masterson, was recovered; and inasmuch as the four scalps were worth one hundred dollars in Dodge – for which amount they were a lien upon funds heaped together by public generosity to encourage the collection of such mementoes – it might be said that Mr. Masterson was repaid for his wound. He thought so, and in the

language of diplomacy regarded the incident as closed.

For all that, the business was so frankly hostile in its transaction that Mr. Masterson, young of years yet ripe of Western wisdom, went more than half convinced that the Panhandle, at the time when Mr. Dixon decided to have his fair relatives pay it a visit, did not offer those conditions of a civilised safe refinement for which ladies of culture would look as their due. Mr. Masterson was right. Mr. Dixon's approval of his sister and her daughter in their descent upon the 'Dobe Walls was weakly foolish. Still, neither Mr. Masterson nor any one else felt free to show this truth to Mr. Dixon, and preparations for the tender invasion went briskly forward.

As Mr. Masterson was buying cartridges in the outfitting store, which emporium was one of the mud structures that constituted the 'Dobe Walls, he observed that Mr. Wright was clearing away the furniture from the office, this latter being a small room to the rear of the store.

"Going to give it to Billy Dixon's sister and her girl," explained Mr. Wright.

"When do they hit camp?" asked Mr. Masterson, mildly curious.

"Day after to-morrow, I reckon; they're coming over in a buckboard. Billy says there's a French party, a Count or something, who is coming with them. It looks like he's going to marry Billy's niece. If he shows up, he'll have to bunk in with you buffalo killers over in Hanrahan's saloon."

“Just so he don’t talk French to us,” said Mr. Masterson, “I won’t care. I’ve put up with Mexican and Cheyenne, but I draw the line at French.”

There were a score of men at the ’Dobe Walls, and Ruth Pemberton confessed to herself that Mr. Masterson was the Admirable Crichton of the array. She secretly admired his powerful shoulders, and compared him – graceful and limber and lithe as a mountain lion – with the tubby Count Banti to that patrician’s disadvantage. Also, Mr. Masterson’s hands and feet were smaller than those of Count Banti.

Ruth Pemberton and Count Banti made brief saddle excursions up and down the banks of the Canadian. Mr. Wright, using sundry ingenious devices to that end, had trained one of the more sedate of the ’Dobe Walls’ ponies to carry a lady without going insane. The training was successful, and the bronco thus taught to defy the dread mysteries of skirts and sidesaddle, had been presented to Ruth Pemberton. While Ruth Pemberton and Count Banti rode abroad, Madam Pemberton uplifted herself with George Eliot’s novels, and the sermons of Theodore Parker.

Ruth Pemberton and her noble escort never traveled far from camp, for Mr. Wright had convinced them that Cheyennes were not to be trusted. The several specimens of this interesting sept whom they saw about the ’Dobe Walls, trading robes for calico and cartridges, served by their appearance to confirm the warnings of Mr. Wright.

When not abroad in the saddle, Ruth Pemberton developed a

surprising passion to know intimately the West and its methods, rude and rough. She asked Mr. Masterson if she might go to school to him in this study so near her pretty heart. That young gentleman, looking innocently into her slumberous brown eyes, said “Yes” directly. Or rather Mr. Masterson, lapsing into the Panhandle idiom, said,

“Shore!”

Being thus permitted, Ruth Pemberton, when Mr. Masterson galloped in from his buffalo killing and the Mexican skinnners had brought home the hides in a waggon, would repair to the curing grounds, the latter being a flat, grassy stretch within two hundred yards of Mr. Wright’s store. Once there, she looked on while Mr. Masterson pegged out the green hides. It interested her to see him sprinkle them, and the nearby grass, with poisoned water to keep off hidebugs. The hidebug, according to Mr. Masterson, must have been an insect cousin of the buffalo, for he came and went with the robe-hunters, and lived but to spoil hides with the holes that he bored in them.

Ruth Pemberton asked Mr. Masterson questions, to which he replied in one syllable. Also she did not pay sufficient attention to Count Banti – giving her whole bright-eyed time to Mr. Masterson. Whereat Count Banti sulked; and presently deserting Ruth Pemberton he withdrew to Mr. Hanrahan’s saloon, where he was taught draw-poker to his detriment. Count Banti, when he left Ruth Pemberton, expected that she would call him back; she did not, and the oversight made him savage.

One morning, while they were riding among the riverside cottonwoods, Count Banti became hysterical in his reproaches; he averred that Ruth Pemberton tortured in order to try his love. Proceeding to extremes, he said that, should she drive him desperate, he would destroy Mr. Masterson. At this, Ruth Pemberton's rice-white teeth showed between roseleaf lips; she smiled in half admiration upon Count Banti.

"Oh!" thought Ruth Pemberton, "if only he would kill somebody I might love him from my heart!"

The soul of Ruth Pemberton of Beacon Hill and Vassar, having been west of the Missouri one month and at the 'Dobe Walls two days, was slipping into savagery – so friendly is retrogression, so easy comes reversion to type! She had supposed she loved Count Banti; and here was her soul going out to Mr. Masterson! How she dwelt upon him, when, bronzed of brow, cool of eye, alert, indomitable, he rode in from the day's kill! The rattle of his spurs as he swung from the saddle was like a tune of music!

Not that Ruth Pemberton wore these thoughts on her face. She hid them from others, she even concealed them from herself. Had one told her that she was beginning to love Mr. Masterson, she would have stared. Count Banti himself never thought of so hideous a possibility; his jealous petulance arose solely from her calm neglect of himself. Ruth Pemberton asked Mr. Masterson how old he was, and it pleased her to hear that he was several months her superior.

Civilisation is a disguise, and in travel one loses one's mask. One's nature comes out and basks openly in new suns. This is so true that the West, when a compliment is intended, says of a man: "He'll do to cross the plains with." What the West means is that on such an expedition, what is treacherous or selfish or cowardly in a man will appear. Wherefore, to say of one that he will do to cross the plains with, is a most emphatic declaration that the one thus exalted is unmarked of vices.

Ruth Pemberton, who on Beacon Hill would have paled at a pin-prick and the red bead of blood it provoked, now thought kindly of mere slaughter, and insisted on riding ten miles with Mr. Masterson to the buffalo grounds to witness the day's work.

"But, my child!" cried Madam Pemberton.

"It's the only chance, mamma, I'll ever have to see a buffalo killed."

Madam Pemberton was not a deep mind, but exceeding shallow; to say that any chance was an only chance struck her as a reason for embracing it.

Ruth Pemberton was to journey to the buffalo grounds in the buckboard; Count Banti might accompany her, a Mexican would drive. Mr. Masterson, when told of the good company he would have on his next day's hunt, made no objection. To the direct question as to whether the country were possible for buckboards, he said it was.

"What do you think yourself, Bob?" asked Mr. Masterson, when that evening he met Mr. Wright in Mr. Hanrahan's bar, and

they discussed this feminine eagerness to see dead buffaloes. "If we cross up with a bunch of Cheyennes, there may be trouble. It's a chance they'd try to capture the girl. Besides, they've got it in for me about that hair on my bridle."

"There's no Cheyennes about," said Mr. Wright. "When they drift within twenty miles of us, they are sure to show up at the store, and I haven't seen an Indian for two days."

Count Banti took a Winchester rifle with him. There were two seats in the buckboard; Ruth Pemberton and Count Banti occupied the rear seat, the front seat being given over to the Mexican, and a basket flowing with a refection prepared by Mr. Hanrahan's darky cook. Mr. Masterson, on his buckskin pony, Houston, rode by Ruth Pemberton's side of the buckboard. Madam Pemberton remained behind with The Mill on the Floss.

The expedition skirted the suburbs of a prairie dog village, and the shrill citizens were set a-flutter, or pretended to be, and dived into their houses. The polite diminutive owls, the prairie dogs' companions, stood their ground and made obeisances. Ruth Pemberton's cheek flushed with an odd interest as she gazed at the prairie dogs and the little polite ground owls.

Off to one side a dozen coyotes loafed along, not unlike a dozen loafing dogs, keeping abreast of the buckboard. Ruth Pemberton pointed to them:

"Isn't it strange," she asked, "that they should accompany us?"

There was the emphasis of a half alarm in her tones; a coyote was not, to her eyes, without formidable characteristics. Mr.

Masterson explained.

“They go with us to the kill. When we leave, there will be a battle royal between them and the buzzards for the beef.”

Mr. Masterson pushed forward to show the buckboard Mexican his way across a piece of broken ground. Count Banti took note of the parted lips, and that soft sparkle of the brown eyes, as Ruth Pemberton followed him with her glances. Count Banti made no criticism of these dulcet phenomena; he was too much of a gentleman and she too much of an heiress.

Count Banti, moved of a purpose to recall Ruth Pemberton from her train of fancy, did say that since a waggon, with the skimmers, must go and come every day to bring in the buffalo hides, he was surprised that Mr. Masterson didn't ride in that waggon. It was superfluous, nay foolish, to saddle a pony under such waggon circumstances.

This idiotic conversation earned the commentator on buffalo hunters and their ways immediate grief. Ruth Pemberton wheeled upon Count Banti like a little lioness, that is, a little lioness subdued of Vassar and Beacon Hill. Ruth Pemberton said that she had never been treated to a more preposterous remark! It was unworthy, Count Banti! Mr. Masterson in a waggon! One might as easily conceive of Sir Launcelot or Richard the Lion Heart in a waggon.

When Mr. Masterson returned to the buckboard, Ruth Pemberton deftly lost her handkerchief overboard. Mr. Masterson brought Houston to the right about, and riding back

stooped from the saddle and swept up the scrap of cambric from the short grass.

“Because you are so good,” said Ruth Pemberton, with a smile, “you may keep it for your reward.”

Count Banti ground his teeth; he expected that Mr. Masterson would bind the sweet trophy in his sombrero. Count Banti gasped; instead of tucking the dainty guerdon behind that gold and silver rattlesnake, the favoured dull one continued to offer it to Ruth Pemberton.

“I’ve no place for it,” said Mr. Masterson; “I’d lose it.”

Ruth Pemberton’s brow was red as she received her property; for one wrathful moment a flame showed in the brown eye like a fire in a forest. Mr. Masterson’s own eye was as guileless as an antelope’s. Was he a fool? Was he deriding her? Ruth Pemberton decided that he was merely a white Indian. She appeased her vanity by turning her shoulder on the criminal and giving her conversation to Count Banti. Under these direct rays of the sun, our Frenchman’s noble soul expanded like a flower; as the fruit of that blossoming he began to brag like a Sioux.

Having caught some glint of the lady’s spirit, Count Banti told of adventures in India and Africa. He was a hero; he had haunted water-holes by night and killed black-maned lions; he had stalked tigers on foot; he had butchered Zulus who, moved of a tropical venom, assailed him with battle axes.

Count Banti, pressing forward, set forth that he had been sustained as he crossed the Atlantic by a hope that he might war

with America's red natives. Alas, they were broken and cowed; their spirit had been beaten down! He must return wrapped in disappointment.

Still – and now Count Banti became tender – it had been the most fortunate journey of his career. If not Mars then Venus! Count Banti had found the most lovely and most lovable woman in the world! And, by the way, would Ruth Pemberton make Count Banti delirious with joy by presenting him the handkerchief which the aborigine on the pony had had neither the wit nor the gentle fineness to accept?

For reply, Ruth Pemberton furtively wadded the poor rejected cambric into a ball about the size of a buckshot, and dropped it overboard again. And, because neither Mr. Masterson nor Count Banti saw its fall, there it lies among the buffalo grasses on the flat banks of the Canadian to this day.

Count Banti repeated his request and backed it with a sigh. Thereupon Ruth Pemberton opened both small hands to show how that desirable cambric had disappeared. Count Banti made rueful eyes rearward as though contemplating a search.

Mr. Masterson halted the buckboard; they had arrived within a mile of the buffaloes; he pointed where hundreds of them were grazing or reposing about the base of a gently sloping hill. The heavy dust-coloured creatures looked like farm cattle to the untaught Ruth Pemberton.

There was a bowl-like depression a few yards from where the buckboard came to a stop. It was grassed and regular, and

one might have imagined that it had been shaped and sodded by a gardener. Mr. Masterson defined it as a buffalo wallow; he tried to make clear how, pivoting on one horn, a buffalo bull, shoulder to the ground, had excavated the cup-fashioned hollow they beheld.

While the Mexican was slipping free the team's traces, and making the few camp arrangements required for their stay, Count Banti began a lively talk with Mr. Masterson.

How long would it take Mr. Masterson to complete his day's kill?

Mr. Masterson, it seems, would kill thirty buffaloes; that would take an hour.

And then they would return? Yes; or if the visitors tired, they might hook up and start at any moment. It was not worth while to sit through the slaughter of thirty buffaloes. The killing of one would be as the killing of another; to see the first was to see all.

Ruth Pemberton interposed; she would wait and return with Mr. Masterson.

Count Banti said he could see that killing buffaloes was slow, insipid sport. Now there might be a gallant thrill in fighting Indians – painted and perilous! Count Banti would have summoned up an interest for Indians. Had Mr. Masterson ever slain an Indian? Probably not; Mr. Masterson was a young man.

Mr. Masterson bent a cold eye upon Count Banti. Saying never a word, he sauntered over to Houston, and began twisting a pair of rawhide hobbles about his fetlocks, for Mr. Masterson, like all

professional buffalo hunters, killed his game on foot. As Count Banti was ruffling over Mr. Masterson's want of courtesy, the Mexican plucked him by the sleeve.

"See!" said the Mexican, pointing to the four braids of black hair hanging from Mr. Masterson's bridle. "Cheyenne skelps, four!" And the Mexican held up four fingers.

"Scalps!" returned Count Banti, the burgundy colour deserting his heavy face. "Where did he get them?"

"Killed 'em here – anywhere!" vouchsafed the Mexican, waving a vague paw. "Killed 'em twelve weeks ago – mebbly eight – no?"

What Count Banti might have thought concerning the sinister character of the region into which he had stumbled, he was given no chance to divulge, for Mr. Masterson came up, rifle in hand, and speaking to Ruth Pemberton, said:

"Make yourself comfortable; you will be able to follow all that goes on, should you be interested in it, from the buckboard. You've brought a pair of field glasses, I see. Lucky we're down the wind! I can go straight to them."

As the ground between him and the buffaloes on the slope lay flat and open, with not so much as a bush to act as a screen, Mr. Masterson's remark about going straight to his quarry appeared a bit optimistic. However, Mr. Masterson did not think so, but seemed the sublimation of certainty; he started off at a slow, careless walk directly towards the herd.

Mr. Masterson had covered half the distance, that is to say,

he had approached within a half mile of his game, before the buffaloes displayed a least excitement. When he had travelled thus far, however, those nearest began to exhibit a slow, angry alarm. They would paw the grass and toss a threatening horn; at times one would throw up his nose and sniff the air. The wind being from the buffaloes to Mr. Masterson, these nose experiments went without reward.

Yielding to the restless timidity of the perturbed ones, who if set running would infallibly stampede the herd, Mr. Masterson threw himself on his face and began to creep. His brown right hand gripped the stock of his rifle, and he dragged it over the grass, muzzle to the rear. Also, he was careful to keep his face hidden from the buffaloes behind the wide brim of his sombrero.

The herd's interest was sensibly abated when Mr. Masterson forsook the perpendicular. So long as they were granted no terrifying glimpses of his face, the buffaloes would believe him some novel form of wolf, and nobody to fly from. Acting upon this wolf theory, they watched the creeping Mr. Masterson curiously; they stood their ground, and some even walked towards him in a threatening mood, disposed to bully.

As Mr. Masterson, eyes to the grass, crept slowly forward, a dry "Bzz-z-z-z-z!" broke on his ear from a little distance in advance. Cautiously he lifted his eyes; the rattlesnake lay, coiled and open-mouthed, in his path. Mr. Masterson pushed the Sharp's towards the reptile; at that it uncoiled and crawled aside.

For twenty minutes Mr. Masterson continued his slow,

creeping advance. When he was within four hundred yards of the herd he rose on one knee. There was a big bull, evidently an individual of consequence, who, broadside on, stood furthest up the wind. Deliberately and without excitement, the Sharp's came to Mr. Masterson's shoulder and his steady eye brought the sights to bear upon a spot twelve inches square, just behind the foreshoulder.

For the sliver of a second Mr. Masterson hung on the aim; then the heavy buffalo gun, burning one hundred and twenty grains of powder and throwing a bullet eight to the pound, roared, and the bull leaped heavily forward, shot through the lungs. With forefeet spread wide, blood pumping from both nostrils, the buffalo fought desperately for breath and for strength to stand. The battle was against him; he staggered, caught himself, tottered, stumbled, and then with a sigh of despair sank forward on his knees to roll at last upon his side – dead.

At the roar of the buffalo gun, the herd, fear at their hearts' roots, began to run. Instantly a change came over them. The dying bull was to windward gushing blood, and the scent of that blood swept down upon them in a kind of madness. Their wits forsook them; they forgot their peril in the blood-frenzy that possessed them, and charged ferociously upon their dying comrade. When he fell, they gored him with crazy horns – a herd of humped, four-legged, shaggy, senseless, bellowing lunatics!

“Bang!” from the big buffalo gun, and another bull stood bleeding out his life. The herd, wild and frantic, fell upon him.

“Bang!” spoke the buffalo gun; a third, shot through and through, became the object of the herd’s crazy rage.

Killing always to windward, Mr. Masterson might have stood in his tracks and slain a dozen score; the scent of the new blood would hold the fury-bitten buffaloes like a spell.

Knowing this to be the nature of buffaloes, Mr. Masterson felt profound surprise when after his third fire, and while still the last stricken bleeding buffalo was on his feet, the whole band seemed suddenly restored to their senses, and went lumbering off at a right angle.

“Cheyennes!” exclaimed the sophisticated Mr. Masterson; “they are over the brow of the hill!” Then he turned, and started for Ruth Pemberton and the others at a sharp trot.

While Mr. Masterson was creeping on the buffaloes, Ruth Pemberton from her buckboard perch, followed him through the field glasses. She saw him pause, and push forward with his rifle at the rattlesnake; while she could not see the reptile, by some instinct she realised it – coiled and fanged and venomous – and shuddered. She drew a breath of relief as Mr. Masterson re-began his stalk. She saw him when he rose to his knee; then came the straight, streaky puff of white smoke, and the dying bull stood staggering and bleeding. Next there drifted to her on the loitering breeze the boom of the buffalo gun, blunted by distance and direction. Her glasses covered the herd when in its blood-rage it held furious wake about the dying ones.

And, what was most strange, Ruth Pemberton took a primal

joy therein. She was conscious of the free, original sweep of the plains about her, with the white shimmer of the Canadian beyond. And sensations claimed her, to flow in her veins and race along her nerves, which archery and tennis had never called up. There abode a glow in her blood that was like a brightness and a new joy. If the handkerchief-declining Mr. Masterson were a white Indian, what now was she? Only she never once thought on that.

Mr. Masterson came up at top speed, and said something in Spanish to the Mexican. That hare-heart became pale as paper; instead of bringing in his team, as Mr. Masterson had commanded, he cut the hobbles of the nearest horse, and went powdering away towards the 'Dobe Walls. Mr. Masterson tossed up his Sharp's with a half-notion of stopping him; then he shook his head cynically.

"He's only a Mexican," said he. Helping Ruth Pemberton from the buckboard, where she sat in startled ignorance, he remarked: "Get into the buffalo wallow; you'll be safer there."

"Safe?" whispered Ruth Pemberton.

Mr. Masterson pointed to eleven Cheyennes on the far crest of the hill. Then he led Ruth Pemberton to the buffalo wallow, where Count Banti was already crouching.

"You've left your Winchester on the buckboard," said Mr. Masterson.

Count Banti stared glassily, the purple of his face a dingy gray. The man was helpless; the nearness of death had paralyzed him.

Mr. Masterson shifted his glance to Ruth Pemberton. Her eyes, shining like strange jewels, met him squarely look for look; there was a heave to her bosom and a red in her cheek. His own eyes were jade, and his brows had come sternly forward, masking his face with the very spirit of war. The two looked upon one another – the boy and the girl whose rearings had been so far apart and whose natures were so close together.

“I’ll get it,” she said, meaning the Winchester.

Mr. Masterson made her crouch down in the bottom of the buffalo wallow, where neither bullet nor arrow might reach her. Then, walking to the buckboard, he got the Winchester and the cartridge belt that belonged with it.

“It’s Baldy Smith’s,” remarked Mr. Masterson, as though Ruth Pemberton might be interested in the news. “It’s a good gun – for a Winchester.”

One of the Cheyennes, glimpsing the recreant Mexican, started in pursuit; the others rode down the slope for a closer survey of the trio in the buffalo wallow. Mr. Masterson threw the loop of a lariat over the head of Houston and fastened him, hobbles and all, to the buckboard.

Understanding that no surprise was possible, the Cheyennes began at a sweeping gallop to circle the garrison in the buffalo wallow, their dainty little war ponies a-flutter of eagle feathers and strips of red cloth. As they circled, they closed in nearer and nearer; at less than six hundred yards they opened fire.

Each attacking buck kept his pony between himself and Mr.

Masterson, firing from beneath the pony's neck. The shooting was bad; the bullets struck the grass and kicked up puffs of dirt one hundred yards in front, and then came singing forty feet overhead. Count Banti heard the zip! zip! zip! and groaned as he lay on his face.

Mr. Masterson, who – being on his feet – was head and shoulders above the level of the flat, paid no heed to the terror-ridden Count Banti. Once he cast a look at Ruth Pemberton, making sure she was below the danger level. She, for her side, watched his expression as he stood, rifle in hand, observing the attack. She felt no fear, felt nothing only a sweep and choke of exultation. It was as though she were the prize for which a battle was being fought – a battle, one against ten! Also, she could read in the falconed frown of Mr. Masterson somewhat of that temper wherewith he had harvested those scalps on his bridle.

While Ruth Pemberton gazed in a kind of fondness without fear, the heavy Sharp's came to the sudden shoulder of Mr. Masterson. The roar of it fell upon her so close and loud that it was like a fog to her senses. Mr. Masterson threw open his gun, and clipped in a second cartridge. The brass shell flirted over his shoulder by the extractor, struck Count Banti's face. That hero – who had hunted lions by night and tigers on foot – gave a little scream, and then lay mute.

"It was this!" said Ruth Pemberton, holding up the empty shell to Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson's bullet had gone through pony and rider as

though they were papier-mâché. What life might have been left in the latter was crushed out by the falling pony who smashed chest and ribs beneath his heavy shoulder.

The nine other circling bucks gathered about the one who had died. Clustered as they were, there could be no thought of missing, and Mr. Masterson emptied another saddle. With that, the others swooped on the slain and bore them off beyond the hill.

As they did so, far away to the right a single Cheyenne came riding; he was yelping like twenty wolves at once, and tossing something and catching it in his hand. The single Cheyenne was he who had followed the craven Mexican, and the thing he tossed and played with was the Mexican's scalp. When he had joined the others, and they had laid their dead in a safe place, the whole party again came riding – open order – down the long slope towards the fatal buffalo wallow.

Mr. Masterson picked up the Winchester and forced cartridges into the magazine until it would hold no more.

"They're going to charge," said Mr. Masterson, apologising for the Winchester. "It'll come handy to back up my Sharp's in a case of quick work. There won't be time to load, and a Sharp's is only a single-shot gun, you know."

Ruth Pemberton did not know, and her mind was running on other matters than guns, single-shot or magazine.

"They're going to charge?" she asked.

"Yes; but don't lose your nerve. They'll make a heap of

hubbub, but it's two for one I stand them off."

The assurance came as coolly as though Mr. Masterson considered the possibilities of a shower, and was confident of the integrity of Ruth Pemberton's umbrella.

"One thing!" said Ruth Pemberton wistfully.

"Yes?" said Mr. Masterson, his eye on the Cheyennes, his ear on Ruth Pemberton.

"Don't let them take me! Kill me first!"

"I've intended to from the beginning," said Mr. Masterson steadily. "First you, then me! You know the Western saying for an Indian fight: Always save your last shot for yourself!"

There was nothing of despair or lack of resolution; he spoke as speaks one who but gives a promise to one who has reason to receive it. He offered it without fear to one who accepted it without fear, and when he had spoken Ruth Pemberton felt as cheerfully light as a bird. She had a desire to seize on the Winchester and take her stand with Mr. Masterson. But her ignorance of Winchesters was there to baffle her; moreover Mr. Masterson, as though he read her impulse, interfered.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded. From where she crouched in the buffalo wallow, Ruth Pemberton heard a whirl of yells, and the grass-muffled drumming of many hoofs; and the yells and the hoof-beats were bearing down upon her with the rush of a tempest. There came a rattle of rifles, and the chuck! chuck! of bullets into the soft earth. In the midst of the din and the clamour she heard the bold roar of the buffalo gun. Then she

saw Mr. Masterson snatch up the Winchester, and spring clear of the buffalo wallow to the flat, grassy ground in front. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing beyond a resolution to be near him, live or die, she was out of the buffalo wallow as soon as was he, and on her knees at his feet. She could seize on no one element as distinct and separate from a whirling whole, made up of blur and smoke and yell and rifle crash, with feathers dancing and little ponies charging like meteors! She was sure only of the rock-bound fact to which she clung that Mr. Masterson never moved from where he stood. She heard the spitting, whip-like crack of the Winchester, so different from the menacing voice of the buffalo gun, as working it with the rapidity of a bell-punch he fired it faster than she could count.

The thing was on and by and over in a moment; the charging Cheyennes went to right and left, unable to ride up against that tide of death which set so fiercely in their faces. Nine Cheyennes made that charge upon the buffalo wallow; Ruth Pemberton counted but four to flash to the rear at the close. The four never paused; their hearts had turned weak, and they kept on along the river's bank, until at a low place they rode in and went squattering across. Five riderless ponies, running wild and lost, gave chase with neighs of protest at being left behind.

Out in front, one of the five Cheyennes who had been shot from his saddle in the charge raised himself, wounded, on his elbow. Mr. Masterson, who had recovered his Sharp's, sent a bullet into his head. Ruth Pemberton, even through the tingling

trance of battle that still wrapped her close, turned cold.

“What else?” inquired Mr. Masterson. “We don’t run any Red-Cross outfit in the Panhandle.”

Ruth Pemberton made no reply: her fascinated eyes saw where a trickle of blood guttered the cheek of Mr. Masterson. She thought no more on dead or living Cheyennes, but with a great sob of horror came towards him, eyeing the blood.

“Only a nick,” said he. “You can’t fight all day without a scratch or two.”

Count Banti began to stir. He sat up in a foolish way and looked at Ruth Pemberton. She turned from him, ashamed, and let her gaze rove to where the Cheyennes, far beyond the river, were rounding the corner of a hill. There was nothing she could say to Count Banti.

Mr. Masterson loosened and mounted Houston, which seasoned pony had comported himself throughout the mêlée with the steadiness which should go with his name. Presently he rode back to the buffalo wallow, and instead of four, there were eleven scalps on his bridle rein.

“A man should count his *coups*,” he vouchsafed in explanation.

There was no need of defence; Ruth Pemberton, without understanding the argument which convinced her own breast, looked upon those scalps as the fitting finale of the morning’s work.

Mr. Masterson caught up the buckboard horse, mate to the one upon which the Mexican had fled, and strapped a blanket on

its back for the use and behoof of Count Banti – still speechless, nerves a-tangle. Then Mr. Masterson, taking a spare cinch from his war-bags, to the disgust of Houston, proceeded with more blankets to construct a pillion upon which Ruth Pemberton might ride behind him. Houston, as he felt the cinch drawing, pointed his ears resentfully.

“Well?” threatened Mr. Masterson.

Houston relaxed the resentful ears and acquiesced with grace, fearing worse.

Mr. Masterson from the saddle held out his hand; Ruth Pemberton took it and, making a step of the stirrup which he tendered, sprang to the pillion.

“You can hold on by my belt,” quoth Mr. Masterson.

And so they came back to the 'Dobe Walls; Ruth Pemberton's arms about Mr. Masterson, her cheek against his shoulder, while her soul wandered up and down in a world of strange happinesses, as one might walk among trees and flowers, with birds singing overhead.

Four days; and the buckboard bearing Ruth Pemberton, Madam Pemberton and Count Banti drew away for the North. A lieutenant with ten cavalrymen, going from Fort Elliot to Dodge, accompanied them by way of escort.

“And so you hate the East?” Ruth Pemberton had asked Mr. Masterson that morning before the start, her eyes dim, and her cheeks much too pale for so innocent a question.

“No, not hate,” returned Mr. Masterson, “but my life is in the

West.”

As the buckboard reached the ridge from which would come the last glimpse of the Canadian, off to the south and west, outlined against the sky, stood a pony and rider. The rider waved his sombrero in farewell. Ruth Pemberton gazed and still gazed, the hunger of the brown eyes was as though her love lay starving. The trail sloped sharply downward, and the picture of the statue horseman on the hill was snatched away. With that – her life turned drab and desolate – Ruth Pemberton slipped to the floor of the buckboard, and buried her face in her mother’s kindly lap.

CHAPTER II – THAT TRANSACTION IN PONIES

Aunt Nettie Dawson, because of her tenderness of heart and the hard acridities of her tongue, had made for herself a place in the popular esteem. The well-to-do and healthy feared her for her sarcasms, while upon the sick she descended in the guise of an unmixed blessing. Those who mourned, and by whose hearths sat trouble, found in her the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Cimarron Bill was the personal nephew of Aunt Nettie, the other inhabitants of Dodge being nephews and nieces by brevet, and it was to Cimarron Bill that Mr. Masterson was indebted for the advantage of Aunt Nettie's acquaintance.

"She's some frosty, Bat," explained Cimarron Bill, in apology for the frigid sort of Aunt Nettie's reception, "she's shore some frosty. But if you-all was ever to get shot up, now, for mebbly holdin' four aces, or because you had become a drawback to a quadrille, she'd nacherally jump in an' nuss you like you was worth savin'."

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill had met for the first time the Autumn before, and their friendship came about in this fashion. Sun City, a thriving metropolis, consisting of a tavern and a store, lay far to the south of Dodge and close against the

Indian Territory line. Mr. Masterson, coming north from the buffalo range, rode into Sun City late one October afternoon, and since his affairs were not urgent decided to remain till morning.

Mr. Stumps, proprietor of the Palace Hotel, being the tavern aforesaid, wore an uneasy look when Mr. Masterson avouched his intention to tarry, and submitted that his rooms were full.

"Leastwise," observed the doubtful Mr. Stumps, "all three beds is full but one; an' that is took by Cimarron Bill."

"Is this Bill person here?" queried Mr. Masterson.

"Well he ain't exactly here none just now," responded Mr. Stumps, "but he's liable to come pirootin' in. He p'inted out this mornin' for Tascosa; but he's a heap uncertain that a-way, an' it wouldn't surprise me none if he was to change his mind. All I know is he says as he rides away, 'Don't let no shorthorn have my room, Mr. Stumps, as I may need it myse'f a whole lot; an' in case I do I don't want to be obleeged to bootcher no harmless stranger for its possession.'"

"All the same," said Mr. Masterson with asperity, "I reckon I'll take that room."

"Thar'll be an uprisin' if Cimarron Bill comes back," said Mr. Stumps, as he led Mr. Masterson to the second floor.

"You won't be in it," replied Mr. Masterson confidently. "I won't ask you to help put it down."

Mr. Masterson was searching his war-bags for a clean blue shirt, meaning to do honour to Sun City at its evening meal. Suddenly a youth of his own age appeared in the door. So cat-

foot had been his approach that even the trained ear of Mr. Masterson was given no creaking notice of his coming up the stair. The youthful stranger was equipped of a dancing eye and a Colt's-45, and Mr. Masterson by some mighty instinct knew him for Cimarron Bill. The question of identity, however, was instantly made clear.

"My name's Cimarron Bill," remarked the youthful stranger, carefully covering Mr. Masterson with his weapon, "an' I'd like to ask whatever be you-all doin' in my apartments?" Then, waiving reply, he went on: "Thar, don't answer; take the short cut out of the window. I'm fretted, an' I wants to be alone."

Mr. Masterson, to facilitate those proposed improvements in his garb, had unbuckled his pistol and laid it on the bed. Cimarron Bill, with militant genius, stepped in between Mr. Masterson and his artillery. Under these convincing circumstances the suggested window seemed the one solution, and Mr. Masterson adopted it. The twelve-foot leap to the soft prairie grass was nothing; and since Cimarron Bill, with a fine contempt for consequences in nowise calculated to prove his prudence, pitched Mr. Masterson's belt and pistol, as well as his war-bags, after him, the latter was driven to confess that erratic personage a fair and fearless gentleman. The tacit confession, however, served as no restraint upon his movements, and seizing his weapon Mr. Masterson in his turn went cat-foot up the stair. As had Cimarron Bill before him, he towered presently in the narrow doorway, his steady muzzle to the fore.

“Jump!” quoth Mr. Masterson, and Cimarron Bill leaped from the same window which so lately had been the avenue of Mr. Masterson’s departure.

Cimarron Bill did not have the luck which had attended the gymnastics of Mr. Masterson, and sprained his ankle. Whereupon, Cimarron Bill sat up and called for a glass of liquor, solacing himself the while with evil words. Following the drink, Mr. Stumps negotiated a truce between his two guests, and Mr. Masterson came down and shook Cimarron Bill by the hand. “What I like about you,” said Cimarron Bill, as he met Mr. Masterson’s courtesy halfway, “is your persistency. An’ as you seem sort o’ took with them apartments of mine, on second thought we’ll ockepy ’em in yoonison.”

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill became as Damon and Pythias. In the months that followed they were partners, killing buffaloes and raiding Indians for ponies, share and share alike. Mr. Masterson came finally to know Aunt Nettie. And because Cimarron Bill loved her, he also loved her, and suffered in humble silence from her caustic tongue as did his mate. For was not the fortune of one the fortune of the other? and were they not equal partners in all that came their way?

Cimarron Bill’s most glaring fault was a complete inaptitude for commerce. It was this defect that taught him, while at play in Mr. Webster’s Alamo saloon, to place a value on “queens-up” so far in advance of their merits, that in one disastrous moment he was swept clean of his last dollar and his last pony. For a

buffalo hunter thus to be set afoot was a serious blow; more, it smelled of disgrace. Your Western gentleman, dismounted and obliged to a painful pedestrianism, has been ever a symbol of the abject; also his standing is shaken in what social circles he affects. These several truths were abundantly known to Cimarron Bill, and on the morning after his bankruptcy he begged the use of a pony from Mr. Masterson with a purpose of straightening up his prostrate destinies.

"I'll ride down," explained Cimarron Bill, easily, "to the divide between Medicine Lodge Creek an' the Cimarron, an' the first Cheyenne who comes teeterin' along on a proper pony ought to fit me out. I won't be afoot long enough to wear out my moccasins; you can bet a blue stack on that!"

Cimarron Bill's plan to remount himself was one feasible enough. True, as stated in a previous chapter, there existed an official peace between the Cheyennes and their paleface brothers. Unofficially, it was the quenchless practice of both sides to kill and scalp each other, whenever an opportunity linked with secrecy and safety was presented. It was the pleasure of the Cheyennes to fall upon isolated camps of buffalo hunters and exterminate them; the broad prairies, had they spoken, would have told a hundred such red stories. By way of reprisal, the enterprising paleface wiped out what Cheyennes crossed his path. Moreover, it was the delight of the paleface, when not otherwise engaged, to raid a Cheyenne village, and drive off the ponies. The ponies, saleable as hot cakes, went at thirty

dollars the head in Dodge; wherefore the practice, apart from the thrill and joy thereof, was not without its profit. Cimarron Bill, however, did not contemplate a raid; what he aimed at was a single pony, and there were safer, even if more sanguinary methods by which a single pony might be arrived at.

Bear Shield's band of Cheyennes had pitched their tepees on the Cimarron, thirty miles to the south of Sun City. The region was a fair hunting ground, rife of buffalo. The attraction to Bear Shield's people, however, was Sun City itself. What was a thirty-mile ride to a Cheyenne, with nothing upon his mind but firewater? The latter refreshment abode privily to his call in Sun City, and he might purchase at the rate of a pint for a buffalo robe. So brisk was trade that every day from one to a dozen Cheyennes, whose hearts were low and thirsty, rode into Sun City, each with a modest pack of robes, to presently ride forth robeless but rapturous.

Southward from Sun City ran the trail for that point on the Cimarron where Bear Shield and his tribesmen, their squaws and papposes and dogs and ponies, lived and moved and had their aboriginal being. As the trail crossed Medicine Lodge Creek it crowded the base of a thickly wooded knoll, at the back of which a bald precipice fell away for a sheer two hundred feet.

It was the wont of that paleface, who felt pressed upon by the need of a Cheyenne scalp or pony or both, to lie in hopeful ambush on the wooded knoll. He would not grow weary with much watching; his reward was sure to appear within the hour,

in the shape of a drunken Cheyenne, reeling in his saddle with the robe-bought hospitality of Sun City fifteen miles away. The sullen Sharp's would speak, and the bibulous Cheyenne go headlong. Then the paleface who had sniped him would mount his own pony with speed, and round up the riderless pony of that Cheyenne who had been. Once the Cheyenne's pony was secured, the paleface would scalp and strip his victim; then, using his lariat, he would drag what he didn't want to the precipice adverted to, and toss it over.

Full two hundred leading citizens of Bear Shield's village had been blotted out, before the Cheyennes became aware of their fate and the grim manner of it; for the paleface never exposed his ambush by letting any Cheyenne get away. If the census of the Cheyenne party exceeded the count of rifles on the knoll, they were permitted to ride by in innocent drunkenness, unconscious of the death they had grazed. As for what dead Cheyennes went over the cliff, certain coyotes and ravens, educated of a prevailing plenty to haunt the spot, would in an hour remove the last trace of their taking off. Full two hundred Cheyennes, the flower of Bear Shield's band, were sent to the happy hunting grounds, at the base of the wooded knoll on Medicine Lodge Creek, before their wondering relatives solved the puzzle of their disappearance. Once the gruesome riddle was read, the Cheyennes as a nation painted for war. It was then that Bear Shield drove North like a storm, leaving Sun City a memory, and killing out the last injurious paleface for forty miles around. That, however, is to one

side of our narrative, which has to do with Cimarron Bill, about to re-establish himself as a mounted and therefore reputable member of society.

Mr. Masterson sought to dissuade Cimarron Bill from his enterprise. It was not that he objected to the other's vigorous scheme of gaining a remount; he wasn't so tenderly given towards Cheyennes as all that. The government, in favor of appearances, might pretend to preserve the Cheyenne; but Mr. Masterson knew that in reality no close season for Cheyennes existed more than it did for gray wolves. But the wooded knoll on Medicine Lodge Creek was distant; to go and come meant days; the profit, one pony, was slight for so much effort and time and travel. Mr. Masterson, in comparison with the investment, pointed out the meagre sort of the reward. Also he offered to give Cimarron Bill a pony.

Mr. Masterson's arguments availed nothing; Cimarron Bill was in that temper of diligent virtue, common with folk who have just finished a season of idleness and wicked revelry. He declined Mr. Masterson's pony; he would win a pony for himself.

"No se'f-respectin' gent," observed Cimarron Bill, "can accept gifts from another gent. As you sow so shall you reap; havin' recklessly lost my pony, I must now win out another by froogality an' honest industry. Besides it ain't jest the pony; thar's the skelp – worth twenty-five dollars, it is, at the Dodge Bank. That's a bet you overlooks. With that pony, an' them twenty-five dollars for the skelp, I can begin life anoo."

"Then," returned Mr. Masterson, disgustedly, "if you're going to play the fool, and waste five days and ride seventy-five miles and back to get a thirty-dollar pony and a twenty-five-dollar scalp, I might as well be a fool mate to you, and go along."

"No, you stay here," expostulated Cimarron Bill. "I might get downed; in which event it'll be for you to look after Aunt Nettie."

Cimarron Bill, despite his restless ways and careless want of forethought, always provided for Aunt Nettie. This was no work of difficulty; Aunt Nettie's needs were neither numerous nor expensive, and, since a gentleman of the lively accuracy of Cimarron Bill could in the season kill and cure for his share fifty dollars' worth of buffalo robes a day, they were readily overcome.

"One hundred shots," Cimarron Bill was wont to say, "from my old eight-squar', an' Aunt Nettie is fixed for one plumb year."

Mr. Masterson was about to remonstrate against remaining in Dodge, but Cimarron Bill interrupted.

"As a favor to me, Bat," he said, "merely as a favor to me. I won't be gone a week; an' I'll feel easier thinkin' you're left to look after Aunt Nettie in case of accidents. It's inside o' the possible, d'ye see, for this B'ar Shield outfit to get me; an Injun, now an' then, does win a pot, you know."

Mr. Masterson made over to the use of Cimarron Bill a chestnut broncho, famous for bottom and bad habits. After he had cantered away, Mr. Masterson reflected uneasily on Cimarron Bill's anxiety over Aunt Nettie, the same being out of common. Mr. Masterson thought this a portent of bad luck. The

notion made Mr. Masterson nervous; when Cimarron Bill had been absent a fortnight and no news of him, the nervousness grew into alarm.

"I wonder," mused Mr. Masterson, gloomily, "if those Bear Shield outcasts have bumped him off. He was that careless, Bill was, some such turn might have been waiting in the deck for him any deal at all," and Mr. Masterson sighed.

Mr. Trask's freight teams came sauntering into Dodge from Fort Elliot; they might have cut the trail of the missing Cimarron Bill, and Mr. Masterson sought the Trask mule-skinners for information. They had freighted through Sun City, indeed their route ran by the wooded knoll so fatal to Cheyennes; not one, however, had heard sound or beheld sign of the vanished Cimarron Bill. At that, Mr. Masterson buckled on his six-shooter, thrust his rifle into the scabbard that garnished his saddle, and while the frost was on the short dry buffalo grass one December morning, sped southward for news.

At Sun City, Mr. Stumps of the Palace Hotel bore testimony that Cimarron Bill had passed one night at his caravansary, making merry, and departed full of confidence and Old Jordan in the morning.

"But he didn't pack no outside liquor with him," observed the experienced Mr. Stumps, who was capable of a deduction, "an' what jag he carried would have been worn plumb away long before ever he reached Medicine Lodge Creek."

Mr. Stumps averred that this was the last and all he knew of

Cimarron Bill.

Mr. Masterson might have gone thirty miles further and interviewed Bear Shield himself. That befeathered chieftain, however, was a savage of prudence and counsel, and no one to boast of paleface scalps, though a thousand were drying in the lodges of his people. No, nothing could be gathered from the Cheyennes themselves. It was less trouble, and quite as sagacious, for Mr. Masterson to believe that Cimarron Bill had fallen a Cheyenne sacrifice, and abandon investigation. Adjusting it, therefore, in his own mind that Cimarron Bill had perished, Mr. Masterson started for Dodge, cogitating vengeance.

Mr. Masterson, while sad, was not to be shocked by a thing so commonplace as death, even though the one fallen had been his own blanket-mate. And he blamed no one – neither Cimarron Bill nor the Cheyenne who had taken his hair. Such events were as the certain incidents of existence, and might be counted on in their coming. Yesterday it had been the fate of Cimarron Bill; it might be his own to-morrow. Meanwhile, by every Western rule, it was his instant business to take a price from the Cheyennes, in scalps and ponies, for the lost life.

And there was Aunt Nettie. Mr. Masterson recalled the final urgency of Cimarron Bill's exhortations to look after her in case he never returned.

"And I surely will," ruminated Mr. Masterson. "When he said that, Bill must have felt, even if he couldn't see, the cloud that hung over the future."

Mr. Masterson deemed it his duty to acquaint Aunt Nettie with the demise of Cimarron Bill; at the terror of such a mission he shook in his saddle. Slowly he rode up to the little three-room cottage where Aunt Nettie made her home.

“Miss Dawson,” began Mr. Masterson, for while the lady was “Aunt Nettie” in the conversation of Dodge, she was invariably “Miss Dawson” to her face, “Miss Dawson, I’m afraid Bill’s dead.” Mr. Masterson faltered as he spoke these words. “If I knew how,” he went on, “to break the information soft, I’d do it; but such delicate plays are beyond my reach. All I can do is ride in and say that in my judgment Bear Shield’s outfit has downed him.”

“Oh!” retorted Aunt Nettie, retaining, with hand on hip, that attitude of scorn which she had assumed as she listened to Mr. Masterson, “oh, all you can do is ride in an’ say that in your jedgment” – the word came off Aunt Nettie’s tongue most witheringly – “B’ar Shield’s outfit has downed my Billy! Well then let me tell you this, Bat Masterson; thar ain’t no Cheyenne ever painted his face who could corral my Billy. Thar, *vamos*; I ain’t got no time to waste talkin’ to children in their teens – which you ain’t seen twenty none as yet, Bat Masterson – who can’t think of nothin’ better to do than come pesterin’ into camp with a theery that them B’ar Shield felons has bushwhacked my Billy.”

“But, Miss Dawson,” urged Mr. Masterson, “what I wanted –”

“No matter what you wanted,” interrupted Aunt Nettie. “You get yourself together an’ pull your freight! If, as you says, in

your judgment Billy's gone, what be you doin' in Dodge, I'd like to ask? Why ain't you back on the Cimarron gatherin' ha'r an' ponies, an' gettin' even for Billy? Thar, line out o' here! While I'm throwin' away time on you-all, my bread's burnin'. I can smell it plumb here."

"Aunt Nettie," thought Mr. Masterson, as he withdrew, "is goin' to be a difficult lady to take care of. It's four for one, when I have to offer her money, or try to hang up a hindquarter of buffalo in her kitchen, she'll chunk me up with stove-wood, or anything else that's loose and little, and handy at the time. However, it'll have to be gone through with; Cimarron Bill is dead, and his last word was for me to look out for Aunt Nettie."

As he swung into the saddle, following his visit to Aunt Nettie, a flush of shame and anger, which even the terrors of that formidable spinster could not suppress, showed through the bronze on Mr. Masterson's face. The taunt about being in Dodge when he ought to be over on the Cimarron, harvesting a vengeance, had stirred him deeply. To have it intimated that his courage was slow, and his friendship cool, wore sorely on the soul of Mr. Masterson. It was the harder to bear when flung from the tongue of a woman; for his hands were tied, and his mouth was closed against resentment. "One thing," thought Mr. Masterson, by way of self-consolation, "the man never made a moccasin track in Dodge who could have said as much and got away. Aunt Nettie's right though; I ought to be evening up for Billy right now."

Time stood a week later, and along the shallow Cimarron – as in every other region civilised or savage – it was Christmas night. The weather was mild, the bare earth without frost, while on the slow wind creeping in from the north there rode the moist odour of snow. The moon, old and on the wane, was swinging low in the western sky, and what dim lights it offered were made more dim by a constant drift of clouds across its yellow face.

Scattered along the north bank of the Cimarron, a straggling mile or more, stood the tepees of Bear Shield's people. It was well beyond midnight, and nothing vocal about the camp save the occasional short yelp of a dog, made melancholy by the hour's lonesomeness. Now and then an ember of some dying fire burned for a fierce moment, and then blinked out. Mr. Masterson, riding slowly down the opposite bank, and taking shrewd care to keep deep within the shadow of the woods, counted seventy-two lodges – a probable population of seven hundred and twenty, for a plainsman's census argues ten to a lodge.

Mr. Masterson had located the band of ponies, which made up the riches of Bear Shield, late in the dull gray afternoon, while he lay hidden in a dry arroyo. As it grew darker, he had crept nearer, keeping ever the location of the ponies which, in a rambling, ragged herd, were grazing up the wind. Mr. Masterson, on the south bank of the Cimarron, was heedfully to leeward of the herd; a proper piece of caution, for an Indian pony, at the earliest paleface taint to alarm the breeze, will scream like a wronged panther.

Arriving at the place where he meant to ford the river and begin his drive, Mr. Masterson halted for a cloud of unusual size and thickness to blanket the blurred radiance of the dwindling moon. Such a cloud was on its way; from where it hung curtain-wise on the horizon it should take ten minutes before its eclipse of the interfering moon began.

While he waited Mr. Masterson removed his sombrero and fastened it back of the cante by a saddle-string. Also, he unstrapped his blanket and wrapped it about his shoulders, for it was part of Mr. Masterson's strategy to play the Cheyenne for this raid. It was among the chances that he would run across an Indian herder or meet with some belated savage coming into camp. The latter was not likely, however, since the last journey an Indian will make is a night journey. The night is sacred to spirits, and he hesitates to violate it by being abroad; in the day the spirits sleep.

While Mr. Masterson waited deep beneath the cottonwoods, a splash from the river's brink would now and again show where the bank was caving, or the crackling of branches, and the profound flapping of great wings overhead, mark how some wild turkey – a heavy old gobbler, probably – had broken down a bough with sheer stress of fat, and was saving himself from a fall. Far away could be heard the faltering cry of a coyote, bewailing a jackrabbit which he had not caught.

That thick cloud, waited for, began to encroach on the moon, and Mr. Masterson, his pony stepping as though walking on a

world of eggs, headed for the river. The place had been well considered; there was no tall bank off which to plump, but instead a gradual sandy descent.

The pony walked into the water as silently as a ghost. The current rippled and rose in petulant chuckles of protest about the pony's legs; but, since its deepest was no more than to the hocks, Mr. Masterson honoured it with scant attention.

Among Bear Shield's ponies was a giant mule, renegade and runaway from some government train. This long-eared traitor remembered his days of burden, and the thing to please him least was the sight or sound or scent of a paleface. The paleface was the symbol of thralldom and sore stripes, and the old bellsharp desired none of his company.

By stress of brain, which counts among mules as among men, the old bellsharp had risen to the rank of herd leader, and the Bear Shield ponies would drill and wheel and go charging off at his signal. As Mr. Masterson and his pony scrambled up the bank a flaw in the wind befell, and a horrifying whiff of the stealthy invader reached the old bellsharp. Thereupon, he lifted up his voice in clangorous condemnation, after the manner of his species. The harsh cry echoed up and down the slumbrous Cimarron like an outcry of destruction.

With that cry for his cue, Mr. Masterson drove home the spurs and began a rapid round-up of the startled ponies. At the warning call of the old bellsharp, the herd members came rushing towards him. Placing himself at their head, his "hee-haw" of alarm still

ringing like a bugle, he bore them away at a thunderous gallop for the tepees.

Hard at the hocks of the flying battalion came Mr. Masterson. The outfit swept through Bear Shield's village for its entire length, Mr. Masterson lying low along his pony's neck and letting his blanket flap in the wind bravely, for purposes of deception. After the ponies, charged Mr. Masterson; after Mr. Masterson, charged a riotous brigade of dogs; the uproar might have been heard as far as Crooked Creek.

As the mad stampede swept on, ever and anon a pony more blind or more clumsy than his fellows would bump into a lodge. At that, an indignant Cheyenne would tear aside the lodge-flap, protrude his outraged head, and curse the ponies aboriginally. Observing the blanketed Mr. Masterson, the savage would go back to bed, gratefully taking him for some public-spirited neighbour who was striving to return the ponies to their grazing ground and inspire them with normal peace.

The flying ponies – the vociferous old bellsharp having fallen to the rear, through lack of speed – wheeled against a thick clump of cottonwood, and then broke north into the open. Their fever of fear was subsiding, they were taking a more modest pace, and Mr. Masterson began turning in the corners, and closing up the flanks, of the retreating band. He made no effort to crowd or press, but gave them every encouragement to regain their confidence, and moderate their flight. Presently the herd was jogging comfortably; and because the wind was in their faces

they were furnished no disquieting notice of Mr. Masterson's paleface identity through the medium of their noses.

The ponies had traveled twenty minutes, and were cleverly bunched, when Mr. Masterson made a discovery. Off to the right in the dull half-dark he beheld a figure, blanketed, mounted, riding like the wind, and busy with the stragglers as they pointed out of the herd. Like a flash, Mr. Masterson whipped his rifle from its scabbard. Throwing the blanket aside, to free his hands and arms, he fell a trifle to the rear, and began edging towards the stranger.

From his riding, and because he seemed so willingly bent on sending the ponies northward, Mr. Masterson felt assured that the stranger was a white man. The expiring moon threw a last parallel ray along the surface of the plains, and Mr. Masterson saw that the stranger's pony was a chestnut. Also it had the hard and bitter gait of Alazan, the bronco wherewith he had equipped Cimarron Bill when that lost one issued south from Dodge to his wiping out.

Mr. Masterson drew nearer; of a truth the jolty pony was Alazan! Who then was the stranger? Could he, by some miracle of heaven, be Cimarron Bill? Mr. Masterson gave a curlew's whistle, which had been a signal between him and Cimarron Bill. At the sound the stranger wheeled upon him.

Mr. Masterson pulled up his pony; the sharp cluck! cluck! of the buffalo gun clipped the night air as he cocked it, for Mr. Masterson was a prudent man. The stranger, sitting fearlessly

straight in his stirrups, bore down upon him with speed. Mr. Masterson watched him with the narrowed gaze of a lynx; as much as he might tell in the night, there was no weapon in the stranger's hands.

"Howdy, Bat!" cried the stranger, as he came up with a great rush. "I've knowed you for an hour."

Then Mr. Masterson let down the hammer of his Sharp's, slammed it back in its scabbard beneath his saddle-flap, and taking the stranger in a bear-hug, fairly tore him from the saddle. The stranger was Cimarron Bill; and in his youth Mr. Masterson was sentimental.

"Where have you been these weeks?" cried Mr. Masterson.

"I'll tell you later," returned Cimarron Bill. "We'd better clot up these ponies an' begin the drive, or they'll get our wind an' stampede for B'ar Shield's village."

It was beginning to snow – great soft clinging flakes, and each like a wet cold pinch of wool! The snow storm was both good and bad; it made it difficult to handle the ponies, but it subtracted from the chances of Bear Shield's successful pursuit.

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill, one on the right and one on the left flank of the herd, riding to and fro like setter dogs quartering for birds, drove on throughout a hard four hours. They broke eastward to avoid Sun City; for it would have been impolite to bring those ponies through hamlet or ranch, and so threaten it with Bear Shield's anger.

With the first of dawn the tired riders, having brought the

bunch into a stretch of country choice for that purpose, halted to make an inspection. The snow had ceased to fall, and the sun coming up gave them light enough to tell good from evil as presented in the shape of ponies. While Mr. Masterson held the herd, Cimarron Bill commenced cutting out the spent and worthless ones. When the weeding was over, there remained one hundred and thirty head, and the worst among them worth thirty dollars in the Dodge corrals. Throwing the riff-raff loose, Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill again took up their travels at a stiff road gait. They were forty-five miles from Dodge; worn as they were, they should still reach the Arkansas and Dodge by nightfall.

“And now,” quoth Mr. Masterson, when they were straightened away for the north, “what have you been doing? Aunt Nettie was scared speechless. She thought the Cheyennes had run their brand on you.”

Cimarron Bill’s adventures were laid open. Ten miles out from Sun City he had crossed up with Red River Tom of the Bar-8-bar ranch. That well-informed boy had told him of a dance to be given three nights away, in the new camp-house of the B-in-a-Box outfit. “No common fandango,” explained Cimarron Bill, “but the real thing, with people comin’ from as far away as Tascosa an’ Fort Sill. Nacherrally, I decided to attend. That Cheyenne I was after, an’ his pony, could wait; the dance couldn’t.”

Cimarron Bill, continuing, told how he had cut across country for the home ranch of the B-in-a-Box. He arrived in good time,

that is to say four hours prior to the fiddlers, which, as he expressed it, gave him space wherein "to liquor up" and get in proper key for the festival impending. While engaged upon these preliminaries he was shot in the leg by a fellow-guest with whom he disagreed.

"You see," explained Cimarron Bill, "this outlaw was a Texas ranger, an' after about six drinks I started to tell him what I thought of a prairie dog who would play policeman that a-way, for thirty dollars a month an' furnish his own hoss. One word leads to another an' the last one to the guns, an' the next news is I get plugged in the off hind laig. I wouldn't have cared so much," concluded Cimarron Bill, in mournful meditation over his mishap, "only he shot me before the first dance."

Cimarron Bill had been laid up in the new camp-house of the hospitable B-in-a-Box. Being able to mount and ride away, three days before Mr. Masterson encountered him, he had deemed it expedient to make a driving raid on Bear Shield's village on his journey home, and carry off a handful of ponies. Thus, by a coincidence of pony-raiding impulse, the two had been restored to one another.

"For you see," said Cimarron Bill, "I was still shy a hoss, the same as when I started out of Dodge."

"All the same," observed Mr. Masterson, severely, "you ought to have sent word to Aunt Nettie."

"Send Aunt Nettie word!" exclaimed Cimarron Bill. "I wasn't that locoed! Aunt Nettie would have been down on me like a

fallin' star! Shore! she'd have deesended on that B-in-a-Box outfit like a mink on a settin' hen! I saveyed a heap better than to send Aunt Nettie word."

Vast was the joy of Dodge as Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill rode in with those Bear Shield ponies; prodigious was the trade-hubbub when, over at Mr. Trask's corrals – Mr. Wright officiating as auctioneer – one by one the herd was struck down to the highest bidder. Under the double stimulation of the holidays and the ponies, commerce received a boom, the like of which had not before been known in the trade annals of Dodge. In proof whereof, not alone Mr. Short at the Long Branch but Mr. Kelly at the Alhambra declared that never since either of them last saw the Missouri, had so much money been changed in at roulette and farobank in any similar space of time. Mr. Wright of the outfitting store confirmed these tales of commercial gorgeousness, and Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill were greeted and treated as public benefactors. Meanwhile, far away on the ravished Cimarron, Bear Shield was making wrathful medicine, and dancing the dances and singing the songs of him who has been robbed.

"Thar, you Bat Masterson!" exclaimed Aunt Nettie, as she heaped high the banquet board before him and her prodigal nephew. "Which it goes to show how feeble-witted you be. Yere you comes ghost-dancin' 'round with a yarn about my Billy bein' killed an' skelped! I told you then, what you now have the livin' sense to see, I hope, that thar was never the Cheyenne painted his

face who could down my Billy, B'ar Shield himse'f not barred.”

CHAPTER III – INEZ OF THE 'DOBE WALLS

Inez was a mustang – a small, wild-born thing, and the pet of the 'Dobe Walls. Those Indians who came calling at the 'Dobe Walls sniffed suspiciously at Inez and said she was the “White Man’s Medicine.” When put on the scales and weighed, Inez kicked the beam at seventy pounds, or about one-eighth of what she might have weighed had she lived out the life designed for her by Providence, and escaped the dwarfing influences of bread and milk as furnished by Mr. Hanrahan’s black cook.

Inez’s share in the life of the 'Dobe Walls began in this way. The horse-hustler had found Inez and her little mustang mother visiting among the ponies when he went to make his morning round-up. The mother fled like a shadow, but Inez, then in her babyhood and something the size of a jackrabbit, fell into the hands of the horse-hustler. That personage of ponies rode into camp with Inez in his arms, and presented her as a common charge. She was adopted and made much of, and soon forgot her griefs and her little mother whinnying among the hills.

Except that she ceased to grow, civilization agreed with Inez. Whether from the fright of capture or the menu of the 'Dobe Walls, and although with time she slimmed and shaped up to be the silken image of a full-grown mustang, Inez stood no higher

than nine hands. One might pick her up and carry her under one's arm like a roll of blankets; and occasionally, for the fun of the thing, one did. To be thus transported, threw Inez into a temper; she was a petulant mustang, and when again on her four small hoofs – as black as jet and as shiny – she ran open-mouthed after her tormentor.

If time hung heavy Mr. Wright or Mr. Masterson would cinch a small saddle-tree onto Inez. Thereat, our peevish one arched her small spine, dropped her velvet muzzle between her fetlocks – as slender as a woman's wrists – and sunfished about the scene. Inez did not have to be trained to this trick; it was in her blood and she “bucked” by instinct.

The 'Dobe Walls consisted of Mr. Wright's store, Mr. Kimball's blacksmith shop, and Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. This latter mart, of course. The West without a barroom would be London without a club. The 'Dobe Walls was a casual camp of prairie commerce, pitched on the banks of the Canadian, and meant for trade with the buffalo hunters, taking skins for calico, flour, fire-water, sugar, coffee, cartridges and guns. It lay two hundred miles to the back of no-where, and Dodge, ten days' journey away on the Arkansas, called itself the nearest civilization. The fixed population counted eleven at roll-call; but what with the coming and going of the buffalo hunters there were few moments of any day or night when a count of noses would not have shown more than a score. The public ate its meals in the saloon, which Mr. Hanrahan turned into a restaurant three

times a day.

Inez came with the rest to these repasts, and stood about behind the benches and looked over the shoulders of her feeding friends. This she did because it was her privilege, and not by virtue of any tooth of hunger. If by design or accident the doors were closed, Inez wheeled indignant tail and testified to a sense of injury with her heels. Since she broke a panel on one of these spiteful occasions, Mr. Hanrahan had been taught to open his portals with speed. The door being opened, Inez would enter, snorting her small opinion of him who had sought to bar her from her rights.

When it rained, Inez took shelter in the saloon. Also, she passed her hours of leisure there, for while Inez declined intoxicants and went committed to water as much as any temperance lecturer, the company she found in Mr. Hanrahan's was to her liking, being more unbuckled and at ease than were those busy ones of the stores – deep with their foolish barter.

This was in the year when the Panhandle coyote rolled in fat from much buffalo meat, and a buffalo's skin brought five dollars. The June night had been sweltering hot. In the store and about the clay floor of Mr. Hanrahan's saloon, blanket-bedded and sound asleep, lay twenty-one men. Most of them were buffalo hunters, all were equal to death at four hundred yards with one of their heavy guns. There were no pickets since there were no suspicions; for were not the Comanche, the Arrapahoe, the Cheyenne, and the Kiowa their friends; and had not delegations

of these aboriginal clans been smilingly about the 'Dobe Walls but the day before? The snores and deep-lunged breathings told of a sense of sure security.

Suddenly a pattering racket of rub-a-dub-dub broke on the sleeping ears. It was Inez beating an ecstatic longroll with the door for a drum.

“Who shut that mustang out?” growled Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson sat up and rubbed his eyes. He glanced towards the door; it was not closed. Inez, standing inside, continued to beat it with her hoofs by way of tocsin. Mr. Masterson through the open door could see by the blue light on the eastern-southern sky that the sun was coming up.

“What’s the matter with the baby?” thought Mr. Masterson. The “baby” was one of many titles given Inez. “What’s she kicking about? That Congo hasn’t fed her something that gives her a colic, has he?” Mr. Masterson arose to talk it over with Inez, and learn and locate her aches.

As Mr. Masterson drew near the door, his quick eye caught a movement under the cottonwoods that a half mile away fenced the Canadian. There were five layers of tan on Mr. Masterson’s face, each the work of a Panhandle summer. A moment was all he required to solve the mystery of that move beneath the cottonwoods.

“Indians!” shouted Mr. Masterson.

Then Mr. Masterson closed and barred the door. The door closed, he blazed away from a window with a six-shooter by way

of general notice.

Every man jack of the twenty-one in store and bar-room was on his feet like magic. In that Western day, rather from habit than apprehension, one would as soon think of going to bed without his blankets as without his guns. Once aroused, the 'Dobe Walls was instantly an armed fort.

The Indians made a gorgeous charge. There was a red line of them, five hundred strong – picked fighters of the Cheyennes, the Arrapahoes, the Kiowas, and the Comanches. To give them spirit and add éclat to the fray, two hundred of their friends from the Pawnees and the Osages, had come to see the fight. These copper gentlemen of peace and curiosity were seated upon a near-by hill, like an audience at a bull fight.

It was a pageant to remember – that swoop of the red five hundred over the half mile of grassy flat between the cottonwoods and the 'Dobe Walls. Great war-bonnets of eagles' feathers floated from every head. The manes and tails of the ponies streamed with ribbons. On they swept, each buck managng with his knees his saddleless, bridleless little war horse.

For a fortnight, the medicine man of the Comanches had starved and danced himself into a frenzy. He had burned "medicine" tobacco, and occult grasses, and slips of sacred cedar. Coming forth of his trances and his songs, he brought word that the Great Spirit would fight on the side of His red children. His medicine told him they might ride into the 'Dobe Walls and kill the palefaces in their sleep with clubs. There would

be no resistance; it was no more than just riding in and stripping off the scalps.

Also, there were rifles and tons of cartridges which the Great Spirit designed for His red children. These would be as make-weight with the scalps, and pay His red children for the work of waging war. Thus preached the medicine man; and his hearers were prompt with their belief. And thereupon they made stealthy tryst on the Canadian that June morning, and without yelp or outcry or war-shout, swept down upon their prey as softly silent as spectres.

The medicine man's medicine would have been true medicine, had not the counter medicine of the white man been hard at work. Inez was so wholly of the palefaces that she disdained an Indian. Let one but cross her ladyship to windward, and with squeal of protest she furnished notice of her displeasure. Inez had gotten the taint of that line of copper battle, and fled for refuge to Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. It was her contempt for Indians, expressed on Mr. Hanrahan's door, that brought out the 'Dobe Walls to defend its hair.

There was no such Eastern foolishness as a pane of glass in any of the buildings. The mud walls were perforated with openings eighteen inches square. These let in light and air. Also, they made portholes from which to shoot. Ten seconds after Mr. Masterson's warning fusillade, two lynx-eyed gentlemen with buffalo guns were ready at each of those openings. They were a committee of reception likely to prove as warm as one might

wish.

It is the vanity of the paleface to hold that he can whip twentyfold his weight in any alien race. He will prove this on the teeth of men red or yellow or black. No disaster drives this notion from his vainglorious pate. He believes it, and thereon he transacts his wars. Upheld by it, his steady, cool ferocity of heart, makes his enemies believe it also; and in the end they abandon him as the creature indomitable and above defeat. That cocky conceit of himself has gotten the paleface into uncounted trouble; and then brought him victoriously through it.

The twenty-one who waited with the buffalo guns were full-breathed specimens of their race. Wherefore, the fear of being beaten at the old game of war, which their fathers had played for a thousand years, never once crossed their slope of thought. They would cord up those flambuoyant savages; they would have a scalp to show and a new yarn to tell about their camp-fires. That was the most the coming trouble promised; looked on in that light, to repulse those savages was relaxation.

The charging Indians were a minute covering the space between those river cottonwoods and the 'Dobe Walls where the buffalo guns so hopefully awaited them.

Every charging buck wore on his bow arm a round shield of double buffalo hide. It had been stripped from the shoulder of a bull, and would stop the bullet from a common rifle. The oncoming buck covered himself with this bull's-hide buckler. His quiver of arrows stood up above his left shoulder. As he charged,

he would whip his right hand toward the quiver. Each time he brought away an arrow by the feather-end. With one motion the arrow was thrown across the bow; drawing it to the head, he sent it singing on like a hornet. The charging line of five hundred was preceded by an arrow-flight as thick as stubble, for these red experts shot so fast that the seventh arrow would leave the bow while yet the first was in the air. In that opening charge they did not employ rifles. At ranges not to run over one hundred yards the arrow would do as well. Every one of those missiles came twanging off the bowstring with a vengeful force that would have sent it smoothly, cleanly through a buffalo calf. And they must save their rifles for long range, should the war take on that shape.

"Billy," said Mr. Masterson to Mr. Dixon, his comrade of the loophole, "I'm going to hive that big one on the pinto pony." This to the end that Mr. Dixon pick out another target.

On came Mr. Masterson's selection, shield held forward and arrows streaming from his bow like splinters of white light. Mr. Masterson's finger, trained to wait instantly on his eye, unhooked his rifle the moment the shield showed through both sights. The great bullet struck the shield where the bunch of painted feathers floated. It went through bull's-hide, arm, and savage shoulder behind the arm. The stricken one seemed to rise in the air like a kite; and then he struck the grass in a half-stunned heap to roll and clutch, and at last to lie still. Mr. Masterson snapped in another cartridge, and laughed cheerfully.

"Did you see the look of surprise, Billy," asked Mr.

Masterson, "on my Indian's face? That was because he found his shield no good. The bullet went through as though the shield were brown paper, and disturbed that Comanche's military theories."

Mr. Dixon, whom Mr. Masterson addressed, made no response. He had piled up an Indian of his own, and was watching him with the keenest interest, with intent to send another bullet into him if he moved, which he didn't.

As Mr. Masterson peered forth on the heels of the charge, he counted a round dozen of the Indians, scattered carelessly about, not one of whom would ride again. The buffalo hunters had been sedulous to aim low and to see their hind-sights before they pressed the trigger. With the dozen Indians were half as many ponies, kicking and tossing in the death-heave.

The volley broke the teeth of that charge; the Indians split on the buildings to right and left, as the stone piers of a bridge split the river's ice in the spring. They flashed by and ran into the low hills, a third of a mile to the rear. After the charge, those Osage-Pawnee spectators, on their hill of curious peace, lighted pipes; they saw that the fight was to be a long one.

"Bat," exclaimed Mr. Dixon, pointing to where Mr. Masterson's Indian lay waving his one good hand for a sign, "your buck ain't dead. Why don't you drill him ag'in?"

"Let him alone," returned Mr. Masterson. "It's like baiting a trap. If he lives long enough, you and I by being sharp can kill a dozen over him, for his people will swoop down and try to carry him off."

The big double door was the weak point. To strengthen it, Mr. Hanrahan tore loose the tall rum counter, and piled it across. This uncovered Inez, who for all her hot temper was timid and had crept behind the counter, regarding it as a cave of refuge in this trying hour. Stripped of her defences, Inez, who felt the peril though she might not understand, scuttled to the rear of the room and pushed in among a thicket of stools and poker tables, which had been thrown there to have them out of the way.

There was a lull, the Indians still hugging the hills. Taking advantage of it, Mr. Hanrahan sent round their morning whiskey to the people at the openings.

“After the next charge,” observed Mr. Hanrahan, who was not without wisdom concerning Indians, “they’ll be so sick they’ll give us time for breakfast.”

Then a thing occurred that struck the colour from more than one brown cheek. It was the clear, high note of a bugle, sounding a rally, then a charge.

“This ain’t a band of whites painted up, is it?” said Mr. Wright. “If it’s another Mountain Meadow racket, boys, if we’re up against white men, we’re gone fawnskins!”

“One thing sure,” returned Mr. Masterson, “no Indian blew that bugle. Why, an Indian can’t even whistle.”

White or red, again came the swoop of the enemy. Again the buffalo guns broke them and crumpled them up. They flew on, however, and took position under the cottonwoods from which they had first charged. As Mr. Masterson foretold, two riding

side and side had made a dash for the wounded Indian, who still lifted up his arm. They would have gone to right and left of him and picked him up.

“Take the one to the left, Billy,” said Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson and Mr. Dixon carefully added the rescue party to that one whom they came to save. “What did I tell you!” exulted Mr. Masterson, as he clicked in a fresh cartridge and closed the breech of his Sharp’s.

“Which you called the turn!” said Mr. Dixon, who having been three years from Boston, now spoke with a Brazos accent.

Again the mysterious bugle sang the tan-ta-ra-ra of a rally. The sound came from down in the fringe of cottonwoods; the bugler, whoever he might be, had charged each time with the others.

As the bugle sounded, a big Osage, one of the pacific audience on the hill, started to ride over to the warriors forming their third line of battle beneath the trees. Doubtless he had thought of a word of advice to give his fighting friends, whereof they stood in need. He was gravely walking his pony across the space that lay between the red audience and the red actors in this drama of blood.

“It would be a good thing,” remarked Mr. Wright, who was the Ulysses of the ’Dobe Walls, “to break that Osage of his conversation habit right here. And yet, it won’t do to hurt him and bring the Osages upon us. Can’t you down his pony, Bat, and send him back on foot? You’re the best shot; and it would be a

warning to the others, smoking on the hill, that we won't tolerate foreign interference in this fight."

Mr. Masterson notched up his hindsight for seven hundred yards. The rifle flashed; the Osage pony made a forward jump and fell. At that, the owner picked himself up, rearranged his blanket, and soberly strutted back to his tribal friends whom he had quitted. His said friends took their pipes out of their mouths and laughed widely over his discomfiture. They were pleased thus to have his officiousness rebuked. He should have kept his nose out of this scrimmage, which was not an Osage scrimmage.

The bugle called down the third charge. There came the low, thick patter of the hoofs, and soon the hail of steel-tipped arrows set in. The arrows broke against the mud walls of the building, and fell to the harmless ground. One glanced through an opening, lifting the long locks of a defender.

"Tryin' to cut your ha'r, Jim," jested his window mate. "Don't blame 'em; it needs trimmin'."

"All the same," retorted the one of the locks, "I nacherally trimmed the barber a lot;" and he pointed to a savage who was twisting out his life on the grass.

The arrow grazed Inez as it came clattering into her covert of stools and tables. Inez being dislodged, ran screaming to Mr. Masterson for protection. She knocked against that excellent marksman in time to spoil his shot, and save the life of a Kiowa on whose destruction he had set his heart.

Mr. Masterson, a bit disgusted with the timorous Inez, picked

her up and put her in a great empty bin, wherein shelled corn had been kept. Inez became instantly engaged with the stray kernels which she found in the bottom, fumbling them and tasting them with her lips, half guessing they were good to eat.

There were no more swoops; the Indians had lost faith in the charge as a manoeuvre of war. They leaped off their ponies, the most of them, and from the hills popped at the palefaces, looking from those openings in the 'Dobe Walls, with their rifles. The distance was a fair third of a mile, and the chance of a bullet finding its way to anyone's disaster was as one in one thousand.

After the lapse of fifteen minutes Mr. Hanrahan's black cook began tossing up a bacon and flap jack breakfast for the garrison. Water was at hand; Mr. Hanrahan's well had been dug cautiously inside the building for just such a day as this. While the garrison were at breakfast, a sentinel went through the manhole and watched from the roof. There was no disturbance; the Indians kept discreetly to the hills, and put in time with a breakfast of their own. Fighting is hungry work, and will give folk white or red an edge.

After breakfast, Mr. Masterson lighted one of Mr. Hanrahan's cigars, and took a look from a rear window. It was well into the morning. A long six hundred yards away a score or more of the younger savages, restless with a lack of years and sore to be thus knocked about on their first warpath by a huddle of buffalo hunters, were galloping hither and yon. Their war bonnets still flaunted, and their ponies still streamed with ribbons; but where

was that hot courage which had brought them a trio of times up to the muzzles of those buffalo guns? Mr. Masterson counted the distance with his eye; then he shook his head.

“Bob,” said he to Mr. Wright, “I can’t be sure at that range with my gun. It’s got buckhorn sights – coarse enough to drag a dog through ’em. Where’s that closed-sight gun you brought out last week, the one with the peep sight in the grip?”

“It’s here,” returned Mr. Wright, “but there’s no cartridges nearer than the store.”

“That’s all right,” said Mr. Masterson. “You boys cover me, and I’ll make a dash for the store. I want to see how they’re getting on over there, at that.”

Mr. Masterson went through one of the eighteen-inch openings. The distant Indians saw him, but appeared indifferent. There was a tall wall of mud between the store and Mr. Hanrahan’s saloon. There was a gate, but that had been closed and locked by Baldy Smith. Mr. Masterson’s plan was to crawl under the gate, being invited by an open space of at least a foot. It was better than climbing; were he to do the latter some far-off lucky savage might manage a cock-shot of him as he went over the top.

As Mr. Masterson stooped to dive beneath the gate, he shouted loudly to those in the store. He had no desire to be mowed down by his friends, upon a notion that he was some enterprising Indian, piercing their defences. At Mr. Masterson’s shout, a wounded Indian, who was lying low in a clump of weeds,

sat up and with the utmost good will pumped three bullets at him from a Spencer seven-shooter. The bullets chucked into a pile of chips, heaped up where the cook was wont to chop his fire wood. They buried the crawling Mr. Masterson beneath a shower of bark and chips and splinters, but did no harm.

Mr. Masterson's feelings were ruffled by the shower of chips. On reaching the store, his first care was to borrow a rifle, poke a hole in the mud wall and quiet that uneasy personage in weedy ambuscade.

"I don't want him whanging away at me on my return," explained Mr. Masterson.

There were five in the store. Young Thurston had been shot through the lungs. His days were down to minutes; parched with the death-fever, he lay calling for water.

There was no well in the store as in the forethoughtful Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. The store pump was fifty yards away in the stark, undefended open.

"I reckon now," said Daddy Keeler, "I'll go fetch a bucketful. I'm the gent to go, because my eyes are too old and dim to do anything at six hundred yards. I'd just waste cartridges."

Daddy Keeler was called Daddy Keeler for two reasons. For one matter, he had passed sixty years; and for another, everybody loved him. In the West when a man is loved they give him a nickname.

Also, there are no struggles for precedence in the West. Each man plays his part in peace or war as best dovetails with his

pleasure. Not one in the beleaguered store would have hesitated to run the gauntlet of those savage rifles to bring water to young Thurston as he died. Yet not one would offer to take the place of Daddy Keeler. To do so would have been in violation of Panhandle proprieties, and Daddy Keeler would have resented it to the death.

Daddy Keeler took a bucket and tossed it through an opening. For all his years and hair of gray, he was as active as a cat. He made no task of sliding through the opening after the bucket. The four who remained stood ready, should the sight of him cause a rush to cut him off. As, bucket in hand, he started for the pump, a frightened dog, in hiding behind a heap of lumber, came forth and followed whiningly.

The savages were not slow in getting to work. They didn't charge; their stomachs were too weary for that. But their rifles cracked by twos and tens and twenties. The bullets zipped and whistled as thick as twilight bats.

The pump was sun-dried and slow; it cost two minutes to start the water from the cracked spout, and five to fill the bucket. Smack! smack! the pump was struck a dozen times, while in twenty places the well-platform was rasped or whitely splintered by the flying lead.

Daddy Keeler pumped doggedly, and never raised his head; the creaking of the pump-handle matched with the low howling of the frightened dog. Daddy Keeler's sombrero went whirling, the dog was shot down at his feet; still he pumped on. The bucket

at last was filled. Daddy Keeler picked up his hat and fixed it on his head. Then he brought the bucket and passed it through the opening without spilling a drop. The next moment he had followed it, and never a mark upon him.

"It's some hot out thar in the sun," said Daddy Keeler, apologetically, wiping the great drops from his forehead. Then taking off his sombrero, and considering the double hole the bullet had left: "It was a forty-four did that; some of 'em's shootin' Winchesters." For fourteen long, hot days the fight went on; now and then a charge, more often long-range shooting, whereat the buffalo hunters excelled. When the fight flagged the garrison played poker, leaving one to watch.

Every night one-half the garrison must dig graves for the dead – pony and Indian alike. The argument for these sexton labours was sanitary, not sentimental. In the blinding height of a Panhandle summer it is no good thing to be cordoned about with dead ponies and dead Indians. There was never a danger; your savage lies close, and will not move in the dark unless one crowd him. He is so much the Parthian that it is against his religion to fight in the night.

Before the burial parties tumbled an Indian into his sepulchre, they were at pains to have his scalp as an incontestable method of keeping accounts. On the fifteenth day, when the troops from Dodge relieved the siege, there were eighty topknots to tell the loss of the enemy.

Inez, when the fighting fell to long-range, cried to be lifted

from her box. Inez did not fear bullets; arrows were a different commodity and set her nerves on edge. She could see them; besides, they smelled fearfully of Indians. As long as no arrow came spitting and splintering through the openings, Inez was without a care. She would have been content were it not for her rations of merely bread and water. This she thought squinted at parsimony, and it aroused her spleen.

When the cavalry came riding down from Dodge the beaten remnant of that war party went squattering through the shallow reaches of the Canadian, and headed south for the Staked Plains. Then the visiting Osages and Pawnees, pipe in hand and blankets wrapped about them, came beamingly from their audience hill to offer congratulations.

“How!” said Black Feather, the Osage chief, extending his hand to Mr. Wright “How! Heep big fight!”

Then Black Feather went over the four score scalps, and whether by tint of plume or mark of braid, hidden to the white man, confidently told the tribe of each.

“Comanche!” grunted Black Feather, picking up a scalp; and then: “Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arrapahoe,” as he pawed the others over one by one.

“Who were right in this shindy?” asked the captain of cavalry. That officer was curious to hear what Black Feather would say to the question. Black Feather, who believed firmly in the equities of force, did not hesitate.

“White man right,” said he. “The longest lance is right.”

What of that mysterious bugle, whereof the music so shook the men of buffaloes? It was blown by a caitiff negro, a deserter from Uncle Sam's swart cavalry. The third charge was the black bugler's last. Striped and painted like the others, the burial party might never have known the race or colour of him had it not been for his want of a scalp lock. They took his bugle instead, and rolled him into the trench with the others.

"By the way, Bat," remarked Mr. Wright, when two days after the fight, life at the 'Dobe Walls had gone back to old-time lines, "we forgot to thank you for seeing those Indians that time. They'd have cinched us, sure, if you hadn't; killed us, as it were, on the nest. It ain't too late to take a drink on it, is it?"

"The drink goes," returned Mr. Masterson, drawing up to Mr. Hanrahan's counter, which was again happily in its place; "the drink goes, but it ought to be for Inez. It was she who gave warning. If it hadn't been for Inez every man of us would have gone with Thurston, and those eighty bucks might be riding yet. It was pretty work, Bob, to stand off five hundred Indians fourteen days, and only lose one man against their eighty." Here Inez came mincingly through the door, like a fine lady thinking on her skirts. She nosed up to Mr. Masterson for a caress. "That's right," said Mr. Masterson, patting her satin neck, "you're just in time, Ladybird. We're going to drink to the White Man's Medicine, Inez, of the 'Dobe Walls."

CHAPTER IV – THE WILD ROSE OF THE CANADIAN

The town's name was Mobeetie and, for the expansive suddenness of its springing up, might better have been Mushroom. A Cheyenne killed a buffalo in the flats that stretch from the Canadian, and as he peeled the husk from that buffalo the nearest paleface was thirty miles away. The next day came engineers, and ran lines and mapped out town lots on the ground where that buffalo was slain; within a week thereafter Mobeetie buzzed and bustled.

Mr. Masterson, ever full of the spirit of progress, gave up buffalo hunting for the nonce, and carried "chain" and pegged corners, and did what other deeds an amateur might do towards aiding the surveyors in laying out Mobeetie. Later, he aided the public in laying out certain predatory characters who from time to time rode into Mobeetie with a purpose of spoil. These latter intermittent lifts to law and order endeared Mr. Masterson to Mobeetie; the more since he was not, speaking strictly, a resident of that hamlet, having his roofless habitat on the buffalo range, with a home-camp at the 'Dobe Walls.

All folk, whether they be white or black or red or wheat-hued, are idolators in their hearts, and those of Mobeetie worshipped Mollie Brennan. The women worshipped her because her little

feet took hold on innocence, the men for the beauty of her face – for brown of cheek, and red of lip, and with eyes as softly, gently deep as are those of an antelope, Mollie Brennan was beautiful. To her worshippers Mollie Brennan was known as The Wild Rose, and the name had been given her after this fashion:

Misled by drink, a chance-blown poet once upon a time invaded the Panhandle. Beholding Mollie Brennan, he fell in love, as poets will, and sighed on her obdurate trail for a wasted twelve-month. Because she would not listen, the poet poured forth his soul in sonnets, in which vehicle of verse he identified Mollie Brennan as “The Wild Rose of the Canadian.” There were no wild roses along the Canadian, at least in any near vicinity of Mobeetie, but the love-wrung bard, more moved of the whiskey than the flora of the region, refused to be bound by that barrenness. “The Wild Rose” he made it; and, since his stanzas were granted local hearing, the Wild Rose it became, and Mollie Brennan accepted and wore the title pleasantly enough.

But the Wild Rose resolutely declined the hand of that poet; and because she would not hear him and he must tell some one, he was wont, after the fifth cup, to sob forth his soul and its defeat to the frequenters of the Lady Gay saloon. The defeat gave general satisfaction, for Mobeetie distrusted if it did not disapprove of poets, and in that harsh hour the Panhandle thought better of a Sharp’s rifle than of a sonnet. The poet, in a lucid moment, perceived as much, and, every hope of conquering the callous fancy of the Wild Rose having died, he got aboard the

stage-coach for Dodge, bearing with him a bottle and a broken heart. His going was regretted at the Lady Gay, but the Wild Rose felt relieved.

Sergeant King was so early in his coming to Mobeetie as to be almost entitled to fame as one of its founders. Nor did the fact go without a value, since nothing but that residential antiquity had saved him from being warned to quit the town a dozen times.

Mobeetie confessed to no love for Sergeant King. He was dark of brow, with cruel mouth and furtive secret eye. He had been run out of Abilene, as the upshot of an enterprise wherein he combined a six-shooter with a deck of cards – the latter most improperly marked – and which resulted in the demise of a gentleman then and there playing draw-poker against him. Also, he was that creature – most detested and soonest to die in the West – a blusterer and a bully; and when a bit unbuckled of rum he would boast of the blood he had spilled.

This latter relaxation is exceeding bad form. Mobeetie could have overlooked the marked cards, since it is understood in the West that every gentleman, in what games of chance engage his interest, must be equal to his own protection or suffer those forfeits which nature everywhere imposes upon ignorance gone astray; it might have condoned the homicide, because, technically, it was a killing rather than a murder, and the departed wore his hardware at the time; even those hang-dog facial marks of an innate treachery would have passed unchallenged, for who may help his looks? but that braggart trick of, orally,

reviewing what scalps he had taken, and exulting thereat, set public sentiment flowing against Sergeant King to such a height of disfavour that no one wanted his company and but few his gold. This last should be the measure of an utter public disregard for, however blackly hated your outlaw villain may be, his gold, as a rule, partakes in no wise of his unpopularity. For what says Vespasian? "The smell of all money is sweet."

Following her inadvertent conquest of the poet, and his broken-hearted dismissal to Dodge, Sergeant King was that one who gave to the Wild Rose what he would have called his heart. The gift bred an alarm in her bosom beyond any induced by the rhyming passion of the sonneteer. Whereas the poet had only annoyed her, she drew back frightened in the base instance of Sergeant King. He saw and understood, and the bitterness which lay like poison at the bottom of his evil heart was stirred.

Every resident of Mobeetie, in an hour devoid of convention, was the acquaintance, if not the friend, of every other resident of that metropolis by dint of a citizenship common to both, and Sergeant King was therefore an acquaintance of the Wild Rose. However, what few words he addressed to her never went beyond the commonplace; warned as by intuition of her aversion, he offered no syllable of love. But his eyes, black, and burning with a hungry fire – half-hidden, half-bursting into flame – made no secret of those sentiments that had swept down Sergeant King; the Wild Rose could feel their glances play about her like a tongue of fire. There it stopped; if he possessed a hope of

winning her, he never made it manifest – coming near her only with his eyes!

You are not to suppose that the Wild Rose went untouched of love. When a maiden refuses one man, it is a reason for believing she has given herself to some one else. Mobeetie had grown up a brisk three hours' canter from the 'Dobe Walls, and Mr. Masterson was frequently about its causeways. Buffalo hunting would wax monotonous betimes, and in what moments it palled upon him Mr. Masterson unbent in visits to Mobeetie. Thus the Wild Rose caught frequent glimpses of him, and the heart which had refused the poet, and was closed fast and fear-locked against Sergeant King, went following Mr. Masterson with its love. The Wild Rose learned to know the very jingle of his spurs, and their melody about the board sidewalks of Mobeetie would bring her face to the pane.

Once, the Wild Rose met Mr. Masterson as he emerged from the Santa Ana restaurant, to which place of refection he had been drawn in favour of flapjacks, and the blush that spread redly over her cheek would have told tales to one more gifted of self-conceit. The tender truth missed fire; Mr. Masterson, if he nursed opinions on the point at all, held by a theory that love ought to be confined to the East as a region endowed of what leisure was demanded by its pursuit. When the Wild Rose swept him softly, and then let fall those lids in fear lest the modest hazel depths give up their blissful secret, his mind was on Cheyennes, and how far his raid on Bear Shield's ponies one Christmas Eve

might have been a source of the recent uprising of that peevish people. He escaped news of the sweet story told by those deep fringed eyes, and the Wild Rose had the romance to herself.

And yet, while her soul's cry went unheard by Mr. Masterson, it was not to die unnoted. Jealousy is more alert than love, and Sergeant King, lounging in the doorway of the Lady Gay, surprised the look of the Wild Rose, and read its truth. The knowledge shone in upon him with a red hatefulness that was as a ray from the pit. The love which had fled from him would follow another – unsought and uninvited!

Like an icicle the thought pierced through and through the soul of Sergeant King. Wanting the touch of a jealous spur, he might have loved on for unresentful years, passively enduring the coldness which was his reward. But that Mr. Masterson should have the Wild Rose aroused in him a mindless fury that was like unto the blind anger of an animal. Even his vanity arose to edge the sense of loss and sharpen him for retaliation.

At the rough seminary wherein Sergeant King had been reared blood was taught as that one reprisal worth the while of a man, and death and vengeance were set side by side as synonyms. To determine on the taking off of Mr. Masterson was the one thing natural. It called for no motion of the intelligence; the resolution leaped instantly into being as the fruit of what he saw and what he felt. His enemy must die, and the sole question that invited pause was: How might that enemy be blotted out with least risk to himself? He retired into an uttermost corner of the Lady Gay

to consider and lay out his dark campaign.

Such as Sergeant King are unequal to sure bloodshed unless their nerves are stiffened by alcohol, and he caused a bottle to be brought to his elbow to assist his cogitations. He put away glass after glass, for – as those mule-skinners freighting between Mobeetie and Dodge would have phrased it – he “wasn’t able to start such a load as Bat Masterson on a cold collar.”

While Sergeant King was thus employed in bringing about that needed temperature, as though Fate were delivering his victim into his clutch, Mr. Masterson with Mr. Dixon came into the Lady Gay. The two sat at a table just across from Sergeant King.

It was a big day for the Lady Gay; the tides of custom had risen to unusual heights. There were a busy dozen about the faro table, which stood at the end of the bar; an equal number bent noisily over monte, the latter diversion being dealt by a careworn Mexican, who looked as though luck were against him. In the far end a sedate poker game prevailed.

To every man his interest; with two-score folk in the Lady Gay, no one observed the sombre Sergeant King, brooding schemes of blood. A Mexican lost his last *peso* at monte, and drew out of the eager fringe about the table. Sergeant King called him with a motion of his hand. The Mexican approached, received the whispered directions, took the gold piece tendered, and disappeared. By the time Sergeant King had taken another drink the Mexican led up his pony, saddled and bridled, to the door of the Lady Gay and stood holding it by the bits, awaiting

the murderous convenience of its owner. Plainly Sergeant King was opening a gate for final flight.

There be many species of courage; there are day courage and night courage, water courage and land courage, gun courage and knife courage, with forty further courages beside. And, when you have settled its sort, there remains the matter of comparison. There is a courage born of caution; it is fed and led by caution, and runs by its side like a calf by the side of the mother-cow. There is another courage, whitely desperate, which owns no element of prudence, and against which no odds prevail.

Once in the Panhandle – he may be there to-day – there lived a personage of cows whose name was Old Tom Harris. I have referred to this worthy man before. He numbered but thirty years, and the epithet of “Old” was a title of endearment which his mates of rope and running-iron had conferred upon him to mark their admiration of his arctic dauntlessness of heart. Mr. Willingham, sheriff, having official reason so to do, aimed his six-shooter at Old Tom Harris when the latter’s back was turned. Then he called upon him to hold up his hands. Old Tom Harris came ’round on his heel, but he did not throw up his hands. Looking into the point-blank mouth of the Willingham pistol, he pulled his own. Then he laid it, muzzle for muzzle, with the opposing piece of ordnance, and defied Mr. Willingham to begin his blazing work.

“You haven’t the sand to shoot!” said Old Tom Harris.

And Mr. Willingham hadn’t.

It might bear suggestion that the courage of Sergeant King was caution-born. With seven chances in his favour where his enemy possessed but three he would offer battle. With chances even he would be more discreet. Mr. Masterson's courage was of the Old Tom Harris stamp.

The Mexican stood at the door of the Lady Gay, holding the pony of Sergeant King. Suddenly, above the hubbub of the games, arose the voice of that unworthy.

"Thar's a hoss thief here I'd like to kill!"

In the hush that followed every eye went nervously seeking the speaker. He stood erect, his six-shooter in his right hand and hanging by his side.

It would have been wiser, from the standpoint of his enterprise, you will say, had Sergeant King gone instantly and wordlessly to work; you will condemn the oratory as marking a lack of military intelligence.

There was a reason for the rhetoric of Sergeant King. The rules to govern Western gun-play do not permit the shooting of one's enemy in the back. It is one's notifying duty to arouse him. Once he be on his guard, and reaching for his artillery, one is licensed to begin his downfall. A violation of these laws leads to a vigilance committee, a rope, and a nearest tree.

Sergeant King was aware of these courtesies of the gun and what public resentment would attend their violation. Wherefore, and that the proprieties related might be appeased, he shouted:

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