



THE RED MUSTANG

by W. O. STODDARD

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THE RED MUSTANG

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NOW FOR SANTA LUCIA!
"NOW FOR SANTA LUCIA!"

THE RED MUSTANG

BY

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

Author of "THE TALKING LEAVES"

ILLUSTRATED

Publisher's Mark

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THE RED MUSTANG



THE RED MUSTANG:

A STORY OF THE MEXICAN BORDER.



CHAPTER I.

THE HORSE AND HIS RIDER.

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

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

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

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

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

Cattle and horses enough were in sight, as he turned from one point of the

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

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

A low whinny and something like a suppressed curvet was Dick's reply, and it was followed by a sharp exclamation.

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

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

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

"What's the matter, Sam?"

"Indians, Cal, Indians!"

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

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

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

"Mebbe a mile 'n a half. Mebbe not so much. Mebbe some more. All of 'em, except the braves that took after me, went for hosses and fresh beef, or seemed to. Guess we'll have time."

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

drove?"

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

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

"Sam, did you say you killed one?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, the redskins?" said Sam, with a tremendous crack of the long whip. "Nobody can guess how many. They seemed to swarm all around. 'Paches, of course, but it's a curiosity where they came from. We must work, now. Further to the left, Cal. That's it. They're started. What are those mules halting for!"

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

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

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

"There come the redskins!" shouted Cal, at that moment, and then he seemed

to almost hold his breath.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On, on, on, went that tumultuous race, and the line of forest was very near now. It was a sort of natural barrier, stretching across the plain as if put there to check the sweep of "norther" storms and prairie fires, and any sort of stampedes. The middle of it was a winding ravine or slough, and at some seasons it was a river, instead of a string of ponds for buffalo wallows. All the wild or tame quadrupeds on that plain knew the value of Slater's Branch, and some of them, and all of the men, knew that it never quite went dry, and that its faculty to become a river could be exercised at any time on short notice, when the snow in the mountains melted rapidly or when a cloud-burst came on this side of the Sierra.

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

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

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

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

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

Cal was conscious of understanding the feelings of young braves who needed an old chief to hold them back. He knew that it would be almost a disappointment if he and Sam should succeed in saving the horses without any shooting. He had no desire to hurt anybody or to be hurt, but then the idea of a skirmish and a victory and all that sort of glory made him think of all the Indian battles he had ever read about.

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

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

"There, Cal. Glad we're here—"

Sam Herrick said that as he reined in his horse and sprang to the ground. Cal followed his example, and one glance around him made him draw a breath of

relief. There were great oaks, in all directions. Several of the largest had fallen before the hands of time and some strong wind, and he and Sam had ridden in behind them, followed by a gust of angry whooping.

"Take your tree, Cal," said Sam, as he raised his repeater and sent a warning shot in the direction of the whoops. "Now, my boy, if you was one of them 'Paches, how'd you feel about riding into short range of two good rifles, knowing what lead'll do for a careless Indian?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'd never answer to your father for letting you run any risk, Cal. You're perfectly safe here, but it might be an awful race to Saint Lucy."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They saw Sam before he saw them; for, in spite of his customary watchfulness, he had been taking things lazily. They had no idea of a grand prize

so near at hand, and the news brought back by their scouts who first made the discovery came as a thrilling surprise to the entire band. All the voices of all the dusky men, women, boys, and girls, exclaimed "Ugh!"

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

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

His only course was to dash away at the best speed of his horse, and the squad that followed him had cared very little whether or not they should catch him, except to prevent him from carrying news of their arrival. Their miserable used-up ponies had been no match for the racer he was riding, but the whole band seemed likely to be better mounted, speedily, than it ever had been before.

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

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

with, and by the fear that the solitary cowboy might get away and bring a lot of angry palefaces to take that magnificent plunder away from them. All of that wide plain had once been Apache land, with its buffalo, its deer, and its other game, and whatever might now be found upon it by a band who considered themselves very good Indians, was fair game for them. They believed themselves to have been plundered by the whites, and to be now obtaining something like a part payment for their lost rights. Sam Herrick, standing behind the fallen trees, rifle in hand, was obstinately interfering with their effort to secure a much larger and better payment of the same old debt.



CHAPTER II.

HOW CAL EVANS RODE FOR HELP.

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

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

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

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

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

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

swinging, elastic bounds of the red mustang?

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

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

At that very moment the brave cowboy was watching the course of events almost breathlessly, but the only token of excitement was a glitter in his black eyes, until he exclaimed, "Colorado! Cal's safe! The critters have done it. They've done me a good turn, too, if I can manage to keep out of their way."

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

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

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

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

The gray he singled out was caught and saddled and bridled, but no ordinary groom could have performed that feat. Neither could any timid horseman have compelled the gray to give up the disposition he had for dancing horse-waltzes and polkas among the trees. Sam did it, and forced him to go ahead with not more than three or four gaits at once.

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

chance is a heap better than it was."

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

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

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

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

Cal's thoughts took terrible shapes as he galloped onward, borrowing horrors from all he had ever heard of the deeds of pitiless savages. More than once a fierce kind of shout burst from him, but he had no need for urging Dick. The red mustang's racing-blood was up, as if he knew that he were riding a great match against danger and death. He responded to his master with a short, excited whinny, and seemed to lengthen the splendid stride that swept the miles away. He had been set free to run his best and wildest, with only a light weight to carry, and the distance vanished behind him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Was he hurt?" asked Mrs. Evans.

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

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

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

"Where's he gone?" asked Cal.

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

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

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

"And leave you and Vic here? Never!"

"You must not pause one minute. Not even to eat. Victoria and I and the servants can bar the stockade and the house, but no Indians will come. If there is really any danger, the sooner the cavalry get here the better. Do you think you've tired Dick?"

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

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

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

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

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

He was ready to mount.

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

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

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



CHAPTER III.

THE BAND OF KAH-GO-MISH.

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

The Spanish-Mexican hidalgo who had selected Santa Lucia had shown excellent judgment, although even in that day he probably had more or less trouble with his red neighbors. The present owners and occupants of the ranch had had none at all until the very hour when Sam Herrick found the prairie around him swarming with them.

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

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

There was pride in every tone and movement of Kah-go-mish, for he had performed a great exploit, and he and his band were no longer in poverty. There were many signs, however, that they had not been prosperous upon the Reservation, although the chief still wore the very high silk hat which had there

been given him. He had tied a green veil around it to set off its beauty and his own. His only other garments were the well-worn buckskin leggings which covered him from the waist to the knee, and a pair of long red stockings through which he had thrust his arms to the shoulder. Openings in the soles let out the hands, with which he gesticulated in explanation of orders which were promptly obeyed.

About thirty warriors, now well mounted and all pretty well armed, whirled away northerly, with Kah-go-mish at their head, and their purpose did not require any explanation.

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

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

The boy on the other pony—Well, he wore another pair of second-hand trousers. They had been planned for a man and were large in the waist, requiring a belt, but had been altered to the complete style by cutting them off just below

the knee. The pony he rode was one of the nearly worn-out fellows that had travelled all the way across the mountains from the Reservation. He and Cal Evans had been within a few miles of each other that morning. Both were uncommonly vigorous young fellows, of whom their parents had a right to be proud, but it was not easy to discover many points of resemblance between them. There did not seem to be the least probability that they would ever be much thrown into each other's society; but then no young fellow of fourteen knows precisely who his future friends are to be, or where he is to meet them.



CHAPTER IV.

THE GARRISON OF SANTA LUCIA.

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

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

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

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

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

"Si, señor," responded the other.

The first was a brawny, freckled old fellow, with nothing to mark him for notice but a jaunty sort of roll and swagger, even in the saddle. The second speaker was an American, of the race that fought with Hernando Cortes for the road to the City of Mexico. He may or may not have been a full-blooded Tlascalan, but there was a fierce, tigerish expression on his face as he glanced at the dead pony. His white teeth showed, also, in a way to indicate the state of his mind towards the tribe the pony's owner belonged to, but the words he uttered carried a surprise with them. Who would have thought that so sweet and musical a voice could come from such a thunder-cloud face?

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

"Somebody coming," suddenly exclaimed the remaining horseman.

"Reckon it must be Sam."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Did they follow you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Evans studied the gate for a moment.

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

In half a minute more they were standing in the courtyard of the adobe,

explaining the terrors of the situation to a group of five startled and frightened women. Seven in all, they were the only garrison of Santa Lucia, and Kah-gomish and his warriors were coming to surprise it. How long could they hold out?



CHAPTER V.

CAL AND THE CAVALRY AND THE RED MUSTANG.

"Sixty miles to Fort Craig!"

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

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

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

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

He felt that he was doing his duty. He was, at all events, obeying his mother. He was a boy who wished to be in two places, but his mind grew calmer with the regular beat of Dick's hoofs. A sharp appetite came, too, and put him in mind of his haversack. He ate as best he could, and the next stream of water he came to invited him to dismount and get some, and to let Dick do the same and rest a little. It was very hard work to stand still and eat cold meat and bread, and pat Dick and think about Santa Lucia.

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

Noon came and went, as the long miles went by. Groves, tree-lined sloughs, gangs of deer to the right and left, hardly attracted a glance from the sore-hearted young messenger. Mountain-tops, easterly, that had been cloudy in the morning,

were showing more distinctly against the sky, when Cal at last pulled the red mustang suddenly in.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I know how you feel," said the kindly veteran at last. "There'll be a good moon, and you know the way. I'll let you have one of our led horses. You mustn't ride to death that red beauty of yours. We'll bring him on. Tell your father we shall start at sunrise, and that I've sent word to the fort."

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

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

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

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

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

The black galloped steadily. He was a good horse, but he lacked the easy swing of the red mustang, and there was more weariness in riding him. He was allowed to rest, at intervals, and Cal tried hard not to ask too much of him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER VI.

THE PERIL OF SANTA LUCIA.

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

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

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

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

Dick had travelled fast and far since sunrise of that day. Cal had given him a friendly rubbing down after supper, and he felt pretty well. One admiring cavalryman had given him a full army ration of corn, and another had brought him some nice pieces of hard-tack, while several more had said things about his shape and color and the miles he had travelled, all in a way to rouse the jealousy of a sensitive mule. After the men went away, Dick considered himself entitled to lie down and did so, but the mule did not. There was moonlight enough to kick by, and it was not long before the red mustang was suddenly stirred up. He was not hurt, for that first kick had been seemingly experimental, as if the mule were getting the exact range of Dick's ribs. A low squeal expressed his satisfaction at his success, but it was followed by a disappointment, for his own lariat was several feet shorter than the brand-new one given to the red mustang, and the latter had stepped almost out of danger. It was almost, but not quite, and Dick was compelled to keep in motion to get out of harm's way. It was too bad not to have quiet, after so hard a day's work, but that mule was a bitter-hearted fellow. Dick moved along, backing away and watching, and the mule slowly, sullenly, followed him. Santa Lucia was a better place than this, Indians or no Indians. Dick had seen Cal depart, and he had felt deserted and lonely then, but his homesickness increased rapidly under the treatment he was receiving from the wickedly perverse beast he was tied up with.

Back, back, back, until both lariats were tightly wound once more around the

pin. They were shortened eight inches by that twist, and the next wind around shortened them nine inches more. The mule grew wickeder and made a dash that did not cease until three more twists had shortened the lariats. Meantime there had been all sorts of jerks and counter-jerks upon the wooden pin, and it was getting loosened in the soft ground. Winding up the lariats, the game went on until both tethers were short indeed, and that of the mule was less than three yards long. The strain of it disgusted him, and he gave a plunge and pull against it just as Dick was drawing hard in the opposite direction. Up came the pin, but once more the mule was disappointed. The next dash he made brought him and Dick to a stand, for they were on opposite sides of the trunk of an oak that caught the lariats in the middle. They could bring their heads and shoulders together, but the tree protected Dick from his enemy's heels. The tree and the knotted lariats held hard, and the red mustang could not prevent that ugly head from coming close to his own.

Would he bite?

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

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

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

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

"Wud I foight, ma'am? 'Dade'n I'll not be skelped widout foighting. I want wan of thim double goons, and the big wash toob full of b'ilin' wather and the long butcher knife and the bro'd axe. I'll make wan of thim 'Paches pale like a potaty. There's plinty of good blood in Norah McLory."

Evidently there was, but Mrs. Evans did not feel so sure of the others. Anita, Manuelita, Maria, and a very old woman spoken to as Carlotta, seemed at first

disposed to call upon an immense list of saints rather than listen to a plan which their mistress tried to explain, but Norah succeeded in shutting them up.

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

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

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

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

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

Up went Vic, her bright young face all aglow with excitement, and she carried Cal's repeating rifle with her, as well as the double field-glass with which to sweep the prairie for Indians.

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

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

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

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

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

"Four Indians, mother," shouted Vic, at last, from her station on the roof.

"Way off there, eastward. I can't see anything of father or the men."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Nothing could stop your father."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The army officer on the roof made a quick motion as if he were gathering his skirts to go down a ladder, and he disappeared, while four soldiers inside the stockade dropped their muskets also, and their commander ceased a remarkable use she was making of an old drum. The garrison of Fort Santa Lucia had been seized with a sudden panic and had disappeared, leaving the gate open for the colonel and his men to ride in and take possession.

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

Reports were quickly exchanged between the colonel and his wife.

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

"Of course," she quietly responded.

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

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

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

"Colorado!" remarked Sam. "The redskins may think they've struck Fort Craig, by mistake."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some work was done by scouting cowboys that afternoon in the vicinity of the ranch. No Indians were seen; but for all that the night which followed was not a sleep-night. The men slept fairly well, except the sentry whose turn it might be, but they were all dressed and had their weapons by them. It was nearly so with the female part of the garrison. They did not sleep at all well, but they were all dressed, and they kept more guns and swords and axes within grasping distance than did the men.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dick carried Cal!

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

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

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

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

No, Cal was not hurt, but he was a boy who had been through a tremendous amount of excitement, as well as of hard riding. Just as he was being carried through the gate he opened his eyes for a moment and saw the flag floating over Santa Lucia.

"Glad the cavalry got here," he murmured. "Captain Moore said they'd start at

sunrise." He saw his mother and Vic, and tried to say something, but he was sound asleep again before the smile on his lips could be turned into words.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER VII.

BOUND FOR THE BORDER.

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

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

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

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

warriors were guided well after giving up the ranch, and on their arrival at Slater's Branch they found the cattle in the timber. A noble herd; endless beef; but all too heavy to carry and too slow to be driven by red men who were likely to be pursued by cavalry.

Slater's Branch was crossed at once, and all the muddy margin told of the horses which had marched away. Where were they now? The puzzle deepened as the disappointed braves rode onward down the branch. Even at the ford a brace of braves dashed across for a search, but they gave it up, and came back disappointed. The escaped drove of horses had been under too much excitement to halt long anywhere, and had even enjoyed a small stampede, which carried them half-way to the ranch.

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

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

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

They ate well, nobody could have disputed that, and then they mounted and rode away in high spirits. While the people at the ranch were anxiously reasoning as to whether or not their enemies would reappear, the exultant Mescaleros were miles and miles nearer, with every hour, to the Mexican border, and to the point where they were, in due time, to meet their equally happy families. Their camp, that night, was as peaceful as if it had been a picnic, and at the earliest dawn of day they were stirring again, very much as if they had taken for granted the march of Captain Moore and the angry determination of Colonel Abe Evans. The air rang with whoops and shouts, and among them could be heard a very positive assertion concerning himself from the deep voice of Kah-go-mish.

At about the same hour, and in as perfect safety, fires were kindling and fresh

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER VIII.

GETTING READY TO CHASE KAH-GO-MISH.

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

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

"Yes, we're all safe—" she began.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ride?" he said. "Well, yes, it was a great ride, but I don't know the whole of it, myself. How's Dick?"

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

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

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

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

father after 'em."

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

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

Cal knew nothing about the teeth of the persecuting mule.

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

"I don't know," he said. "I was so tired I went to sleep more than once. Dreamed, too. It was all a good deal like a dream. Seems so yet, from the beginning. I've a kind of memory that Dick came alongside, crowding close and whinnying, and that he and the black stood still, so I could crawl on Dick's back and lie down, somehow, and sleep more comfortably. That's all I know about it, except what you've told me."

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

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

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

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

The captain and his fellow-officers had questions enough to ask, then, and

they learned all about Dick's volunteer work when they reached the ranch the next day. They knew nothing about the mule then, but at that very hour the long-eared rascal reported himself for garrison duty and rations at Fort Craig, having for the time delivered himself from the pack business and from the fatigues of a long chase after Apache horse-thieves.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No Indians there," said Vic.

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

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

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

"I've seen a great many Indians," began Vic, "but they were all friendly except

—"

"Colorado!" suddenly exclaimed Sam. "Four of 'em! Heading right for us! Don't shoot, Cal. Keep a good ready, but don't throw lead if you can help it. It beats me!"

Mrs. Evans reined her horse close along side of Vic's pony, but said nothing. Her face was pale, but that of Vic's was flushed fiery red. So was Cal's as he touched Dick with his heel and sent him forward head-and-head with Sam's gray.

Four unmistakable red warriors, armed to the teeth, were rapidly riding nearer.

"Mother," exclaimed Vic, "I'm ready."

"So am I," said Mrs. Evans, sharply. "We can both help."

Each had a revolver in her hand, and Vic afterwards remembered how glad she felt, just then, of all her target practice. Her thought was, "I can hit one, I know I can."

The leading idea in Cal's mind was that his hero-time had come, and that he alone was quite enough for four Apaches. The expression upon his face, during about two minutes, was tremendously heroic. He glanced behind him and saw just such another look upon that of Vic, but the smile his mother gave him made him feel like a whole regiment of cavalry.

"Isn't he splendid!" said Vic.

Just then the four red men halted. They were only twenty yards away, and it might be that they were getting ready to shoot. They were conferring for a brief moment.

Cal drew rein, as Sam did, at the same time, and one of the Indians rode forward holding out his right hand, palm up.

"How?" he said. "Chiricahua chief want Sam? Ugh! Heap friend."

"Colorado!" exclaimed the cowboy. "That's it, Cal. They're the friendly Chiricahua-Apache scouts the captain sent for first time you met him. They want me to go 'long and show 'em the trail. Reg'lar bloodhounds."

He turned in his saddle and shouted, "Ladies, it's all right," and in a moment more he and Cal were shaking hands with their new acquaintances.

"What hideous-looking men they are!" exclaimed Vic, for at that moment they were smiling, and the one holding Cal's hand was saying, "Ugh! Boy, heap ride. Heap good pony. Ride big sleep. 'Pache 'calp him; he no wake up. Lose hair all

same."

That was evidently meant for a good-humored joke. Mrs. Evans and Vic had to shake hands with them next, and then rode away with Cal towards Santa Lucia, while Sam and the wild-looking scouts set out for an examination of all the traces left behind by Kah-go-mish and his warriors.

"The two bands, Chiricahuas and Mescaleros, are almost like different tribes," was the explanation Vic received from her mother.



CHAPTER IX.

THE HACIENDA OF SANTA LUCIA.

Early in the afternoon of the fourth day after the red mustang and the regular-army black brought Cal home to Santa Lucia, the ranch wore a very peaceful appearance. No cavalry were camped near it. There was not now any American flag floating from the staff on the roof of the hacienda, and there was not wind enough to have made one float if it had been there.

No cattle were grazing within sight of anybody standing at the stockade gate. That was closed and barred in an unusually inhospitable manner, and no wayfarer could ride in without first explaining himself. There was reason in it, for Santa Lucia now contained only one man to strengthen the brave female garrison which had held it against the intended surprise-party of Kah-go-mish. More men would be there at sunset, on the return of the herders, and no Indians were believed to be within a very long distance.

A wide awning had been stretched out from the veranda, and there were two or three chairs under the awning, but they were empty.

Norah McLory and a couple of the Mexican women were busy with some tubs in the courtyard. The windows looking into it were not narrow slits like those outside. They were wide enough, had swinging sashes in them, and they gave the old adobe less the appearance of being either a fort or a prison. Most of them were curtained, and the curtains of a pair opposite the open side of the square were very handsome. Just beyond one of these curtains stood Mrs. Evans, with her arms around her daughter. If anything were troubling Vic's mind, the face she was looking into must have had comfort in it. Mrs. Evans was one of those women who are remarkable, and have no need of proving it to make people believe it. She was of medium height and not at all robust in appearance, although in excellent health. There was hardly a tinge of gray in her auburn hair, her cheeks were smooth, her brown eyes were bright and pleasant, and her voice was full and musical. Those who had heard it once wished to hear it again, even if they wondered what there was in it that made them go and do just as she told them. It was a grand thing for a young cowboy, like Cal Evans, to have such a mother away out there upon the plains, and was equally good for Vic, especially at such a time as had now come.

The room itself was as nearly like a large parlor in an Eastern mansion as such a room in such a building could be made. Colonel Evans had refused to count up how many head of cattle the furniture had cost him, including the piano and the wagoning of it from Santa Fé.

Mrs. Evans had not stopped there, for her china and other elegances enabled her to set a well-furnished table, and her kitchen garden in one corner of the stockade, with her hen-coops, provided something better than the beef and bacon and corn-bread supplied to hungry people at most New Mexican ranches.

More than one Indian chief to whom Mrs. Evans had given a dinner had declared it "good medicine," not understanding that his own race was passing away because the chickens and the potato-patches were coming.

Army-men, officers and soldiers, had ridden away from Santa Lucia, remarking of Cal's mother: "Very uncommon woman. But how did she get those things to grow 'way down here?"

Mexican herders in the colonel's employ had also discussed the matter, and had decided that no melon or bean or hill of corn or other vegetable dared refuse to grow after getting orders from the "Señora."

Perhaps the most remarkable thing, after all, was the fact that such a lady, with all her refinement and cultivation, should say that she preferred a ranch life at Santa Lucia to any other kind of life anywhere.

She was saying so now to Victoria. Vic would have been a smaller pattern of her mother, but for a tinge of red in her hair and something saucy about her nose and mouth. That is, on ordinary occasions, but not just now, for she was looking blue enough.

"Mother," she said, "father never gets hurt, but Cal is so young. The Indians, mother, and there may be fighting. I almost hate this country. I'd rather be where no savages can come."

"They will never come, Vic."

"They did come, this time! I saw them from the roof. Some of them come along here every now and then."

"Peaceably, my dear. It's a wonder to me that they touched anything of ours. If everybody had dealt with them as your father has there would not be any fighting."

"He went away angry enough," said Vic.

"Not angry enough to hurt any Indian without necessity. If there should be any fighting—"

"Seems to me I can't think he could kill anybody, or be killed; but Cal is so young!"

"Victoria," said her mother, almost laughing, "Cal is a smaller mark than your father, and not half so likely to get hit. I hope they will bring the horses back with them."

"You are a wonderful woman, mother. Were you ever really afraid of anything?"

Mrs. Evans thought for a moment, and then replied, "Yes, Vic, the other day. I was afraid we'd not get our soldier scarecrows ready before the Apaches came. Then, too, they might have met your father. I thought of that, but I wasn't really afraid that they had. I think I was made to live here."

That was the truth of the matter, and she soon convinced Victoria that the time to be nervous had not yet arrived. It was true that Colonel Evans and Cal and a dozen cowboys had gone with Captain Moore and the cavalry to trail the thieving Mescaleros and bring back the horses, but the Indians had three days the start, and were not likely to be caught up with at once.

"There may not be any fighting, even then," said Mrs. Evans; but Victoria did not find any use for her piano that day.



CHAPTER X.

THE TARGET ON THE ROCK.

It was the very hour when Mrs. Evans and Vic were talking, at Santa Lucia, about the cavalry and cowboy expedition which had gone in search of the Apaches. Many a long mile to the southward of the old hacienda the sun shone hotly down upon the rugged slope of a spur of a range of mountains. At the bottom of the slope ran a wide trail which had been used by wagons, and was almost like a road. Along its narrow pathway of sand and shale rode a straggling cavalcade of extraordinary-looking horsemen. About half of them carried lances and wore a showy green and yellow uniform. All had firearms in abundance, and most of them had long sabres rattling at their sides. There seemed to be a profusion of silver ornaments, even on men as well as upon bridles and saddles, but there were also a number of badly battered sombreros and ragged serapes. What is a sombrero? It is any sort of very wide-brimmed, low-crowned hat, and can be made to carry much tinsel and feathers. As for a serape, one can be made out of any blanket by cutting a hole in the middle of it, so that it will hang gracefully around the man or woman whose head has been pushed through the hole. It was not easy to say whether the gay officer commanding the gaudy lancers, or the remarkably tattered peon who led the last string of pack-mules, at the rear, was really the most picturesque Mexican of that cavalcade.

On the slope above them, less than three hundred yards from the trail, a great boulder of gray granite stood out prominently from the bushes and the smaller lumps of rock around it.

On the boulder, at its very edge, stood the figure of a man who was even more noteworthy than were the officer and the peon. His arms were folded, so that two red stocking-legs spanned his broad chest; his silk hat, with a green-veil streamer, was cocked on one side defiantly; his attitude was that of a man who did not fear all Mexico, and the loudly uttered words he sent down at the horsemen were: "Kah-go-mish is a great chief!"

Whether or not they believed him, and although he had given them no apparent cause for considering him an enemy, horseman after horseman lifted carbine or revolver and blazed away at the Mescalero leader. Bullet after bullet buzzed in among the bushes and rocks above and behind him, but not a muscle

of his tall form flinched.

All practised riflemen know that a mark posted as he was is difficult to hit, even at short range and in shadow, and that the difficulty magnifies with distance and a sunny glare.

There stood Kah-go-mish, and while report after report rang out in the narrow valley, and called forth echoes from among the crags, he exhausted all he knew of Spanish and was compelled to help it with his native Apache dialect, and even then seemed unable to express his opinion of the marksmen. He had much to say concerning his own great and good qualities and those of his people, but declared that all the unpleasant reptiles and insects and quadrupeds he could name were serving as Mexicans that afternoon. He shouted to them that they did not even know how to shoot. If they had been Gringos (Yankees) of the lowest order, he said he might be in danger from their bullets, but, as it was, the man they aimed at was safer than any other man within range.

The Mexican caballeros may or may not have been able to understand any part of that hailstorm of hard words, but Kah-go-mish had an audience and was not wasting his eloquence. He and his boulder seemed to be alone, jutting out from the slope, but that was an optical illusion. That knob of granite stood upon the outer rim of a wide, ragged, bushy ledge, and at no great distance there began a shadowy growth of forest. The broken level behind Kah-go-mish was peopled by scores of braves and squaws and younger people, proving that the two sections of his band had reunited. Dogs ran hither and thither, while ponies and horses could be seen among the trees. One dog in particular did his futile best to climb the boulder, and then sat down under a furze bush and yelped with all his might at the cavalcade, as if in sympathy with the chief of his band of Apaches.

At the right of the granite boulder, and several paces from the edge or the ledge, were some huge fragments of red basalt rock. In front of these crouched a group which gazed at Kah-go-mish with unmistakable pride. In the middle sat Wah-wah-o-be, bonnet and all. Against her, on the right, was curled the form of the young lady in the wonderful red dress, and she looked almost pretty as her black eyes flashed with admiration of her father's magnificent heroism and oratory. At the left of Wah-wah-o-be, the boy in the Reservation trousers stood sturdily erect, but nothing could make him handsome or take from his broad, dark face the look of half-anxious dulness which belonged there. His beady eyes glittered, and he showed his white teeth, now and then, but his very smile was dull. He leaned back against the rock, and just then a something came whizzing past his head, and there was a slightly stinging sensation in his left ear. He did

not wince, but he lifted his hand quickly to his ear, and there sprang to his lips an involuntary imitation of the sound made by the ragged ounce ball of lead when it struck the crumbling basalt.

"Z-st-ping!" he said, and the sound was caught up by other voices.

"Ping—ping—ping," ran from lip to lip, and some laughed merrily, for all had heard the whiz and thud of the deadly missiles which were coming up from the valley, although they and Wah-wah-o-be had deemed themselves entirely sheltered.

Kah-go-mish had at that moment turned for a glance at his family, and he uttered a loud whoop, as if of pleasure. At the same breath he came down from his rock with a great, staglike bound, and stood among them.

"Wah-wah-o-be, look!" he said. "Ugh!"

He had no need to point, for she was already aware that the ragged edge of the bit of lead had made a deep scratch in her son's ear. She was both very proud and very angry.

"Ping!" she exclaimed, as if the sound had acquired a new meaning.

"Ugh!" said Kah-go-mish. "Ping!"

As for the boy himself, the dulness almost vanished from his face in his exultation at having been so nearly hit, actually grazed, by a rifle-ball. His sister came around to stare at the scratch, and then his own quick eyes caught something.

"Tah-nu-nu!" he said, and pointed at the wide fold of her red calico. It was torn. A Mexican bullet had found its way through the furze bushes, and Tah-nu-nu had been almost as much in peril, the moment she stood erect, as her brother had been.

Wah-wah-o-be's wrath boiled over. The Apaches pay more of respect to their squaws than do some other tribes, and the chief's wife was a woman who was likely to demand all that belonged to her.

Kah-go-mish had stood upon the rock to be fired at by the rancheros for the glory of it, and was almost too proud of so great an exploit to lose his temper at once. He was beginning to say something about Mexican marksmanship when he was interrupted by Wah-wah-o-be. She had feelings of her own, if he had not. She pointed at her son's ear, and again she said "Ping!"

The bullet might have wantonly murdered any member of her family, or any of her neighbors. She made rapid remarks about it, of such a nature that Kah-go-mish felt a change going on in his mind. Other ears had heard, and the voices of braves and squaws seemed to agree with that of Wah-wah-o-be. All had fallen back from the dangerous margin, and it would have looked a little like a council if a squaw had not been the speaker. There was very little red upon the ear of Ping, but it served her as a representative of all the wrongs ever done to the Apaches by the white men, including that of cooping them in upon the Reservation, where she had obtained her bonnet, and where they had all but starved for lack of game.

The blood of Kah-go-mish reached the right heat at last, and his hand arose to his mouth to help out the largest, longest, fiercest war-whoop he knew anything about.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!"

He said this as he strode away towards the trees, waving back all the rest with his hands. Warriors and squaws, boys and girls, they at once seemed to arrange themselves for a good look at whatever their great man might be about to do.

He was gone but a few minutes, and returned, leading a mean-looking, undersized, disreputable pony, upon whose head he had placed a miserable, worn-out bridle.

He did not utter a word to Wah-wah-o-be, but upon the ground before her he deposited a handsome rifle, a bow and arrows, and a lance. He took from his belt the revolver and laid it beside the other weapons, and upon them all he placed the green-veil-plumed silk hat and the red stocking-legs. He ostentatiously called attention to the fact that he retained nothing but his heavy bowie-knife. Armed with only that weapon, and mounted upon his worst pony, he, the great chief, the hero, was about to depart upon a war-path against the coyotes, the buzzards, the tarantulas, the red ants, the lost dogs—namely, the Mexicans of Chihuahua, or any other Mexicans. He would make them pay bitterly for having wasted so much ammunition that day.

The announcement of the chief's purpose was received with whoops and yells of approbation. Wah-wah-o-be seemed to overlook any possible peril of losing her husband altogether. She may have been hardened by a long habit of seeing him come home safe.

Kah-go-mish gave some rapid orders to one brave after another, mounted his pony while others were gathering their own, and then he rode straight into the

side of the mountain, followed by his whole band—horses, dogs, and all. That is, it would have so appeared to any white man standing at the foot of the granite boulder, but it was only a good illustration of the magical arts by which the Indian medicine-men make it so difficult for green white men in blue uniforms to catch red runaways. Uniformity of color in quartz and granite, or other ledges, provides for a part of the mystery. Shrubs and trees and distances help, and so, often, does their absence. A great break in the side of that spur of the Sierra was as invisible from the pass as if it had been hidden by snow or midnight. It was a chasm which led in two directions from that point. Kah-go-mish waved his hand authoritatively and wheeled his pony to the left, to the southward, towards Mexico. His warriors and his family, and all other members of the band, dogs included, turned northward, to the right, carrying with them positive assurances as to the place, and very nearly as to the time, when they might again hope to see and admire their leader.

During his absence the command fell to a short, broad-shouldered warrior, who walked dreadfully intoed, and who seemed to stand very much in awe of Wah-wah-o-be. She, on the other hand, was evidently well satisfied with the course which affairs were taking. She had picked up the weapons so heroically laid upon the ground by her husband, and she had helped Tah-nu-nu and Ping to gather the ponies of the family. She had said a great many things while doing so, for one point in her superiority to other squaws was the capacity of her tongue for expressing her ideas.

The whole band had an almost prosperous appearance, very different from that which it had worn just before it began to swarm around Sam Herrick and the drove of horses. Lodge-poles had been cut, now that there were ponies to drag them. Hardly anybody was on foot, except a few braves whose half-trained, spirited horses were likely to require leading over narrow and pokerish mountain-passes.

Kah-go-mish rode on alone in one direction and the band went in the other, and both were shortly buried in the deep, cool gloom of the shadowy chasms.



CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY OF A LOG

The red mustang was in excellent health, and he was also in high spirits. So was his master, and they were nearly agreed upon another point. Dick evidently believed that any trail whatever ought to be followed at full speed, and Cal fretted continually over the steady plodding commanded by Captain Moore. Cal was glad that in his first Indian campaign he was to have so much first-class help, including the four Chiricahua-Apache scouts. He had confidence in his father and in the captain, as men of experience in such matters, but at last he could hardly help mentioning to Sam Herrick the joint criticism made by himself and Dick. "Why, Sam," he remarked, "the red-skins have three days the start of us, and Captain Moore isn't in any kind of hurry. They must be gaining on us."

"That's not of much account, Cal," said Sam, "so long as their trail stays in this country. They're camped at the end of it to-night. So they will be every night till they get to the far end of it, and there we'll find 'em, unless they cross over into Mexico."

"And if they do that?" asked Cal.

"Mexico's a hot place for Indians just now," replied Sam. "Troops moving; militia called out. These fellows couldn't stay there."

The far end of an Indian trail is sometimes a curious thing to hunt for, as Sam went on to explain. It may get lost in the sand, or among the mountains, or in the snow, or somebody may hide it or steal it, or a heavy rain may wash it all out.

"Well," said Cal, "one thing's sure. If we should come near 'em, and have to chase 'em, the horses won't be too travel-tired for good running."

"Exactly so," said Sam. "That's what the captain's up to."

The cavalry and cowboy camp, that night, was as safe as Santa Lucia, but there was something like a disturbance in another place.

The party of rancheros and Chiricahua militia who had blazed away at Kah-go-mish may have been a kind of scouting-party. They had escaped destruction by not following him up the slope, and they afterwards had not many miles to ride before they reached a camp to which they evidently belonged. One small

corner of that camp had an appearance of good order, where an experienced officer of the Mexican army was in command of a few disciplined soldiers. All the remainder of it seemed to bear the likeness of a grand military picnic, where all the men who had tickets were free to have a good time in any manner they might please. Very soon after supper most of them pleased to lie down and go to sleep, while others sat up to smoke and play cards.

Of course there could not be any danger threatening a force of over four hundred men, all so warlike, so soldierly, so completely ready to whip any tribe of mere red Indians. Besides, no important band of hostiles was known or believed to be in that vicinity. There might have been a better watch kept that night, nevertheless, especially at the corral where all their horses were picketed.

This had been made along the bank of the deep, still stream which supplied the camp with ice-water from the Sierra Madre. Nobody ever heard of any fellow taking a swim in such cold water as that was. It was cold enough to chill the bones of a mountain trout. Of course no one did undertake to swim in it, but, at about midnight, a log came floating down. There was a large knot on one side of the log. The current or something carried it against the bank, right in the middle of the corral, and either there were two logs, or that log divided, for one log floated off down stream, while the other log crept out on shore, stood erect, and walked stealthily around among the horses. The knot was carried on the upper end of this log, and the other went off without any.

Very quickly were four of the best horses fixed with four of the best saddles and bridles from among the long rows at the edge of the corral. The log did it, and added holsters with revolvers in them and two bundles of fine lances and some good American carbines, and two full straddle packs of cartridges. The sentries of the corral were all stationed away outside of the place where that peculiar log was at work. All but two of them were asleep, as the guardians of so strong and warlike a camp had a right to be.

Now the log crept around until it found a path leading out southerly, past a sentry who was sleeping very soundly indeed. Then it went back into the corral and led out the four saddled and bridled horses, with four others following that wore only halters, but carried securely strapped burdens, selected and fitted by the log.

There was a brilliant moonlight, so that there was no danger whatever to the camp from Indians, and the log led the horses on until it became wise to go ahead and see if there had been any picket posted at the place and distance at

which one might have been expected.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the log, as it went back for the horses. "Mexican! No blue-coat!"

That was a compliment to such men as Captain Moore, but then the log was doing what no kind of fellow would have undertaken with "blue-coats." It now mounted one of the horses and led on up the stream, to a place it seemed to know about, where the water was wide and shallow and could be easily forded. On crossing it the log was still at no great distance from the camp, but upon higher ground. Looking down, it could have a good view of the smouldering camp-fires and the sleeping Mexicans, for tents there were not.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!" exclaimed the knot at the top of the log, exultingly. "Ugh! Got heap hoss, heap saddle, heap gun, heap all plunder. Ugh! Mexican shoot at him on rock. Wonder how feel now, pretty soon. Ugh!"

An irrepressible whoop of triumph burst from him.

"Ugh! Bad medicine," he said. "Great chief let mouth go off like boy."

He had not lost his wits, however, and he followed that whoop with a dozen more, a whole series of fierce, ear-splitting screeches, while he rapidly emptied the nine chambers of the captured carbine and the six of a revolver. He aimed at the camp-fires and with tip-top success, testified to by sudden showers of sparks and brands which flew around among the startled sleepers.

Great was the uproar in that astonished camp. Seven gallant fellows who had bugles began to blow for dear life the moment they were upon their feet. Every officer began to shout orders as soon as he was awake, and some seemed to begin even earlier. They exhibited tremendous presence of mind, but no soldier received the same order from any two of them. Within a minute, at least a hundred men were at their posts of danger behind something or other, while three hundred more were making a blind rush for the corral. The sentries had all fired their pieces at once, and now there began a general popping of guns and pistols at the awful shadows beyond the little river.

Kah-go-mish could hardly have wished for anything better. He wheeled and rode rapidly away, followed by the string of horses which he had regarded as the fee due to him for being made a target of.

He had not been killed, then, no thanks to the Mexicans, and he had not killed anybody now, deeming it imprudent to take any scalps under the circumstances. He had again, however, proved his claim to be considered an extraordinary

collector of enemy's horses, and that is a high fame to win among the wild tribes of the southwest. As for the righteousness of what he had done, in his own eyes, he was a commanding officer of Mescalero Apaches, and his people were at war with Mexico, as the rancheros and militia had declared so recklessly. He made war in a manner every inch as civilized as their own, and thought well of himself for so doing. He said so, quite a number of times, that night, as he rode on deeper and deeper into the rugged passes of the Sierras. About daylight he came to an open, shaded spot, by a spring, where there was grass for his prizes, and where he could build a fire and then find out what there might be for breakfast in a very fat haversack which hung from one of the saddles.

As for the Mexican cavalry, of all sorts, they behaved well, and the officer in supreme command at last succeeded in substituting his own orders for those of his hasty subordinates. He stationed a strong force at the ford, to prevent the supposed tribe of red men which had assailed his camp from crossing the river. He threw out scouting-parties, encouraged his men by voice and example, urging them to do their duty, prove their attachment to their flag, and to die rather than surrender. He was answered by enthusiastic cheers, and, when morning came, he readily obtained from among them a body of brave volunteers who followed him across the ford to search the dangerous underbrush on the hill from which the hostile barbarians had fired upon the camp. The more they searched the better they felt, and at last they found a trace of the enemy. They captured a pony, bridle and all. It was the sad-looking beast selected by Kah-go-mish as the most nearly worthless of all that he had brought with him from the Reservation.

Eight militiamen, one of them a bugler, already knew that the enemy had penetrated the corral, and had gotten away again, but here was a sort of a mount for one of them. Well, it was a capture, anyhow, and a proof of victory, and was spoken of as "ponies" in the official report of the manner in which that night-attack had been baffled by the Chiricahua militia.



CHAPTER XII.

PING AND THE COUGAR.

When Kah-go-mish set out upon his war-path, he went by ways which no white man's foot had ever trod. His family and followers began to perform the same feat in another direction.

Tah-nu-nu very nearly spoiled a name which was beginning to grow upon her brother. It was too long for common use, and it meant: "The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead." Wah-wah-o-be, every now and then, strung all the syllables together, and the whole was like one of those mountain-passes, wider here and narrower there, but rugged all the way. Tah-nu-nu cut it short and called him Ping.

Wah-wah-o-be's tongue and the use she made of it helped such a trail as that amazingly. She had endless tales to tell concerning what her husband had done and was yet to do, and of the great deeds of her nation, and of the evil deeds and purposes of all pale-faces.

The questions asked by Ping and Tah-nu-nu were also endless. His proved that he knew some things already and that he had learned a part of them while the band had been upon the Reservation. Those of the little Apache girl proved for her as much and more. She must have thinking and imagining, and her eyes frequently took on a soft and dreamy look which did not come at all in those of her mother or her brother.

There were not many safer places in all the Sierras than was the little valley in which the band of Kah-go-mish encamped, an hour or so before the shadows became darkness among the chasms and gorges.

Ping ate a hearty supper, but he was in trouble. Other boys and girls, and some of the squaws, had taken a notion of turning their heads on one side and saying "Ping" when they met him, just as if they believed that he had winced from the touch of the bullet. He knew that he had not done so, but the taunt stirred up within him a very hot desire to do something heroic, like standing still to be shot at. He felt that it was an awful injustice to ridicule him for the very ear he was so proud of. The sting to his vanity kept him in motion after supper, and he strolled all over the valley. No lodges had been pitched, and the horses were scattered

around, feeding, under the watchful care of several braves whose turn it was to serve as "dog-soldiers," or camp police.

The moonlight was brilliant, but Ping had no idea whether or not the mountain scenery it lighted up was grand. He did know that it was just the night for his father to do great deeds in, or for any wild animal to prowl around after its prey. The cries of several had been heard during the afternoon march and since the band halted.

Wah-wah-o-be had told him and Tah-nu-nu that these Mexican mountains fairly swarmed with Manitous and magicians, most of whom were favorable to the Apaches, but that all of them were more or less to be feared. For all that Ping knew, some of these unseen beings might be wandering up and down in that moonshine within arrow-shot of him. He felt safe in the camp, but nothing would have induced him to venture out among them. He knew very well that any Indian who got himself killed in the dark did not go to the Happy Hunting-Grounds, but had an awful time of it somewhere. As for the wild animals, he had a settled determination to kill a grizzly bear, some day, and to have his claws for a collar of honor to wear upon great occasions. He proposed to become a mighty hunter and warrior, but just now he felt sleepy, and he went back and lay down at the foot of a pine-tree, not far from the rest of his family.

Ping's eyes closed, but another pair did not. Tah-nu-nu's remained open in spite of her. She had heard more stories than Ping had, and while each tale had kept its old shape in his mind it had turned into twenty new forms in her own.

That is one difficulty about having an imagination, and Tah-nu-nu's had been getting more and more excited ever since the Mexican bullet tore her beautiful red dress. She kept thinking, too, of her heroic father and of the great things he would have to tell when he should get back from his war-path.

Tah-nu-nu lacked only a few years of being a grown-up squaw, and Wah-wah-o-be often braided her hair for her, like that of a young pale-face lady at the Reservation headquarters. Some day a great brave was to come and pay many ponies for her, and she would then rule his lodge for him and scold eloquently, like her mother. She had, therefore, a long list of matters to dream about as she lay awake among the bushes where Wah-wah-o-be and several other squaws had spread their blankets. It was at some distance from the fires which the "dog-soldiers" kept slowly burning. Not far away, on the left, were the tall pines under one of which Ping had curled down, while outside of all was a bare ledge of rock, littered with boulders and fragments.

There were streaks and patches of shining white quartz here and there. Tah-nu-nu had never heard of such a thing as beauty, any more than Ping, but she felt its power as he did not. She arose and stole softly out to look at the marvellous picture made by that ledge in the moonlight. She looked and looked, but she had no Apache word for what she saw. It was all utterly still during many minutes, and then Tah-nu-nu was sure she saw something moving around at the farther border of the ledge. Her first impulse was to go out and see what it was, but her next thought was of her bow and arrows and of Ping.

"Ugh!" said Ping, as she shook his arm, and he sprang to his feet.

"Hist!" she said. "Come! Look!"

He strung his bow and fastened his quiver of arrows to his belt, while she whispered an exclamation. Then he went to where the family packs had been thrown down and brought back a weapon at which Tah-nu-nu nodded approval.

Days before that a careless pony had stepped upon and broken one of the best lances of Kah-go-mish. The blade was as keen as ever, and there were six feet of shaft remaining, below the crosspiece, so that it made a pretty dangerous-looking pike, although it was no longer a lance.

Ping followed Tah-nu-nu, and not a word was uttered until they were out upon the ledge. Some prowling wolf might be there, attracted by the odor of cooked meat and fish, or even some more important animal, for bears also have noses. Ping would not have given a useless alarm for anything. That would have brought upon him sharper ridicule than had the scratch on his ear. He had no idea that any human enemy could be near that lonely camp, and wild animals, he knew, were sure to keep at a distance from camp-fires. That was true, but then Wah-wah-o-be and her friends were not camp-fires, and were not near to any. They were asleep away out on that side of the camp, and it was so safe that it had no sentry, and the eyes of Tah-nu-nu had been of so much the greater value.

She and Ping were stealing out upon the broken ledge, and he had an arrow upon the string, but she had not, as yet.

"Ugh!" he said, as he crouched low and drew his arrow to the head.

Tah-nu-nu uttered a sharp cry. It was the Apache word for "cougar!"

Ping's bowstring twanged, and then he bounded to the right as if he were dodging something. So he was, for the whole camp heard the snarling roar with which a great "mountain lion" came rushing through the air and crashed down a bush close to the children of Kah-go-mish and Wah-wah-o-be.

SHE AND PING WERE STEALING OUT UPON THE BROKEN
LEDGE.

SHE AND PING WERE STEALING OUT UPON THE BROKEN
LEDGE.

Ping's arrow had been well aimed, for it was buried in the breast of the cougar. Another went into his side, as he came down, and that was from the hand of a girl-archer. Tah-nu-nu had worked like a flash, and her arrow operated as a sting, for the wounded beast made yet another tremendous bound.

All the squaws were on their feet, and Wah-wah-o-be could not have told why she picked up her blanket as she arose. She was worthy to be the wife of a chief, however, for when the cougar alighted almost in front of her, she promptly threw the blanket over him. Another and another blanket followed, while he rolled upon the ground, mad with pain and rage, tearing the unexpected bedclothes and snarling ferociously.

There had come into the dull mind of The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead a great memory of a story he had heard of a warrior who faced a cougar single-handed. With it came another, of a chief standing alone upon a rock while a hundred enemies fired at him.

"I am the son of Kah-go-mish!" he shouted, exultingly, and before the fierce wild beast could free himself, there was Ping in front of him, spear in hand.

Any experienced cougar-hunter would have been inclined to say, "Good-bye, Ping," but the Apache boy was not thinking of the risk he was running. He knew what to do, and he put all the strength of his tough young body into the thrust with which he sent his weapon, low down, inside the animal's shoulder. The sharp blade went in, up to the crosspiece, just as the bow of Tah-nu-nu twanged again, and there were piercing shrieks on all sides. The loudest came from Wah-wah-o-be, as the cougar made a convulsive effort to reach his rash assailant, for over and over went Ping in spite of all his bracing.

He would have fared worse if the butt of the spear-shaft had not caught a better brace against the ground, so that the cougar did not fall upon him.

The blade had done its work. There were two or three more long rips made in Wah-wah-o-be's woollen treasure and then the cougar lay still.

Ping was beyond all ridicule now, for he had proved himself a young brave.

Wah-wah-o-be was so proud of him that she had not a word of grief to utter over the mess of woollen ribbons which was all that remained of her best Reservation blanket.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETURN OF KAH-GO-MISH.

There were no alarms of cougars nor of any human wild people around the Santa Lucia ranch. Even the dogs could hardly get up an excuse for healthy barking after dark.

Just in the dawn of that next morning, however, the cowboy on guard at the stockade gate was taken by surprise. Nobody rode up to the wooden barrier, but his quick ears caught a stealthy footstep behind him, and he turned sharply around with his hand on the lock of his rifle.

Did she mean to murder him?

There she stood, Norah McLory, with a double-barrelled gun in one hand and a cleaver in the other, and a red shawl pinned all around her. She made a very striking picture, and the look on her face was very much as if she were ready to strike.

"What's up, Norah?" exclaimed the cowboy.

"Faith an' I'm oop mesilf," said she. "I couldn't slape for thinking of thim red villains."

"No redskins 'round here," almost yawned the weary sentry.

"Ye don't know that," said Norah, "and I wanted to see was you watchin'. We moight all be murdered in bed."

"The dogs'd take care o' that," said he, "and, oh, but I'm hungry."

"I'll have you the cup of hot coffee right soon," said Norah, "and you needn't tell the byes I watched ye."

That was a bargain, but before the coffee boiled there was proof of other wakefulness besides Norah's. Mrs. Evans and Vic were out to look at the garden and to feed the chickens and to talk about what might be going on in the far-away camp which contained the red mustang.

After breakfast the cowboys went to their duties. So did Norah and the Mexican servants. Vic and her mother took a brisk horseback ride, and came back to their home.

"Everything is too quiet, mother," said Vic, impatiently. "There isn't anything going on! I want to see somebody! I want to see something! I hate this waiting."

"I'm afraid it will be days and days before we can hear from your father or Cal," said Mrs. Evans, "but I hope it will be good news when it comes."

The entire garrison of Santa Lucia, ladies, servants, and cowboys, talked of the men on the trail of Kah-go-mish, and wondered where and under what circumstances their camp might be getting breakfast.

Cal Evans himself, although he awoke in the camp they were talking about, did not clearly know where it was, and while he was grooming the red mustang he said as much to Sam Herrick.

"Colorado!" remarked Sam; "you're just like everybody else. I believe those Chiricahuas have lost the trail, or else they don't mean we shall find the Mescaleros."

"What's going to be done?" asked Cal.

"Your father and Captain Moore mean to push right on," said Sam. "They've got some plan or other. Tell you what, though, if I was an Apache chief, and if I'd gobbled a drove of horses, as they did, I'd take my chances over in Mexico. I wouldn't come loafing out hereaway, to be followed by cavalry and caught napping. There's a plain of awfully dry gravel a little west of where we are now."

Cal finished Dick, and then he carried his questions to his father.

"Sam's right," said the colonel. "He's an old hand at trailing. We believe the redskins have crossed the line."

"Into Mexico? Shall we miss 'em?"

"No, Cal, I think not. Captain Moore knows something of what the Mexicans are doing. The Apaches won't be comfortable there. What we're guessing at is the place where they're likely to come out again. We're pretty sure we know about where it's got to be."

He might have been less positive if he could have seen how very comfortable the band of Kah-go-mish looked in their camp among the Mexican mountains at that very hour.

It was a safe place, but it was not one to remain in for any great length of time, for the horses had already eaten up nearly all the grass. Some of the braves had gone out after game successfully, while others had brought in fish, so that the

human beings had food enough, but the quadrupeds would soon wear out the pasturage of so small a valley.

Ping's cougar was regarded as capital game, the best kind of meat in the world to Indian tastes, as far as he would go.

The discovery had already been made that more plentiful grass could not safely be sought for under the Mexican flag. Too many lancers and rancheros were out on the war-path, and the thoughts of all the band were turning towards some better refuge north of the United States line. Everybody was contented for the day, however, or until about the middle of the afternoon. Even Wah-wah-o-be was astonished then, and Ping for a moment forgot his cougar. The little valley rang with a great whoop, which came from its southerly end. Every brave within hearing did his best to answer that whoop, and the whole camp was at once in a state of excitement, for it was the voice of the returning Kah-go-mish, and it was thrilling with triumph.

Here he came, not astride of the doleful pony that had carried him away, but riding an elegantly caparisoned steed. Some other horses followed him. He had gone out almost weaponless, and he was now overloaded with weapons. He had gone bareheaded, and now he wore a gorgeously gold-laced and yellow-plumed cocked hat, recently the special pride of a major of Mexican militia. Even the Reservation chimney-pot silk beauty, green veil and all, was altogether nothing compared with this.

Kah-go-mish had not exactly played Cortes, and conquered Mexico, but what he had done was very nearly the same to Wah-wah-o-be, Tah-nu-nu, and The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead.

It was a great time, but the chief had the plans of a general in his head. No Mexican force would follow him into the Sierra, but one might try to head him off on the other side, and take away his horses, and it was time to be moving.

The band broke camp at once, to push on through the rugged mountain-paths as long as there might be daylight enough to go by. That was why the darkness, when it came, found them scattered all along the bottom of a tremendous gorge, walled in by vast perpendicular faces of quartz and granite rock. Even Ping thought it wonderful, when the straggling camp-fires were kindled, that their light did not stream half-way up those walls, and left the rest in shadow until the moon rose high enough to show them.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE FOUNTAIN IN THE DESERT.

On the morning of the second day after Ping and Tah-nu-nu and the blankets proved to be too much "bad medicine" for one poor cougar, the sun arose hotly over one of the dreariest bits of scenery in southern New Mexico. It was the gravel desert described to Cal Evans by Sam Herrick. No mountains were visible on the south or east, and the ranges of tall peaks westerly and northerly were a very long day's journey from the most interesting spot in that entire plain. Everywhere else even the cactus-plants and scrubby mesquit-trees and stiff-fingered sage-brushes were scarce, as if they did not care to struggle for a living in so mean a country. Here, on the contrary, there was a dense chaparral of every kind of growth, excepting tall trees, that is common to that climate, and spreading for miles and miles. In many places the chaparral was so high and so thick that a man on horseback could have been hidden in it from another man at a short distance.

If any man had ridden into it, however, perhaps his first declaration might have been, "All this thorn and famine shrubbery was laid out by a lot of crazy spiders."

Innumerable paths led through it, crossing or running into each other in a manner to have perplexed a carpet-weaver or a military map-maker, and everybody knows what tangled patterns they can make. The spiders had not done it, but the larger kinds of four-footed wild animals. They had worked at those paths for ages, treading them down all the while, and preventing any vegetable growth from choking them up.

There was really no tangle, at least none that could perplex the clear mind of a bison or an antelope, and all the threads of that spider-web had more or less reference to a common centre towards which the main lines tended.

The dry and thirsty bushes on the outer circumference of the chaparral should not have settled where they did. They ought rather to have learned a lesson from the bisons, and have gone in farther. The wide main pathways ran into each other, and all the smaller pathways melted into them, until only twenty or thirty ends of paths led into a great open space, in the middle of which was the one thing needed by all that vast plain, with its dreary gravel and sand and alkali.

Water?

Yes, water as clear as crystal, and that seemed to be colder than ice.

The thirsty animals who were from year to year to traverse that plain had been provided for as if they had been so many sparrows, and the cactus-plants as if they had been lilies of the field.

The greater part of the open space was occupied by a seamed and broken face of quartz rock, nowhere rising more than a few feet above the general level. Scores and scores of miles away, among the unknown recesses of the Sierra, westward, was a lake, a reservoir, into which the everlasting snows continually melted. At some point of that reservoir a channel had been opened through and under the cloven strata of the rock, making a natural aqueduct. Cold and clear ran the snow-water, never failing in its wonderful supply, until it burst up into the burning sunshine in the very middle of the desert, of the chaparral, and of the spider-web of paths. It danced and gurgled, this morning, right under the timid noses of a gang of antelopes who had trotted in there by the shortest lane, not missing their way for a yard.

A motherly old sage-hen watched them from under a bush upon one side of the open, while in the opposite scrubs a large jackass rabbit sat, with lifted forefeet and with ears thrust forward, his face wearing such a look of surprised disapproval as only a rabbit can put on.

One antelope held his head up and listened while the rest were drinking. He turned his head and looked around him, and in every direction he could see an extraordinary collection of white or whitening bones, large and small. Perhaps, year after year, many over-thirsty animals had rushed hastily in and drank too much of that snow-water. At all events, they had ended their days there. The antelope, or anybody else, could also have said to himself, "Tomato-cans? Empty sardine-boxes? Bottles? Old wheels? I wonder how many and what kind of white men or Indians have camped around Fonda des Arenas?" If he had been an American antelope, however, he would have said Cold Spring, and not Fountain of the Sands.

The antelopes were divided as to their nationality, and changed their citizenship several times, for, right through the middle of the spring and along the little rill by which it ran across the rock lay the boundary line between the United States and Mexico. Some curious chisel-marks in one place had meanings with reference to the boundary, and so it must have been there; but even the keen eyes of two buzzard eagles, soaring overhead, could not have seen

the line itself.

Suddenly the antelope chief gave a bleat and a bound, and in a twinkling he and his little band disappeared in the southern chaparral. Every one of them had fled into Mexico.

Only ears as sensitive as their own could have heard any warning in what seemed the almost painful silence of that solitude, but they were right in running away. Not many minutes elapsed before several of the paths opening towards the spring were occupied by stealthy human forms on foot, peering around as if to make sure that no other human beings had arrived before them. They answered one another with low calls which sounded like suppressed barks of a prairie-wolf, and these were repeated in the chaparral behind them.

Then a tall, broad, dignified man, in a red flannel waist-cloth and a gorgeous cocked hat, and with red stocking-legs on his arms, strode out towards the bubbling fountain with the air of a ruler taking possession.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!" he remarked, emphatically. "Cheat pale-face a heap. Ugh!"

If other remarks made by himself and by a dusky throng, now pouring out of the chaparral, could have been interpreted, it would have been understood that a plan of Kah-go-mish for escaping from some pursuit or other had thus far worked well, but that the danger was by no means at an end.

Wah-wah-o-be was one of those who shook their heads about it very wisely. She said very little, and neither Ping nor Tah-nu-nu was with her. If she knew where they were she did not even mention that fact.

There was plenty of room for the whole band of Kah-go-mish, horses and all. They had travelled since the dawn of day, or before, and although it was still quite early they were hungry and thirsty.

There was the spring for thirst, and fires were kindled. These were as quickly put out, after breakfast had been cooked and eaten, and when the sun had dried the waters thrown upon the embers no newcomer could have guessed how long it might be since the last coal died.

"Leave heap sign," said Kah-go-mish. "Paleface know great chief been here. Not know where gone. Ugh!"

Sign enough was made, for now the band moved away westerly by a path of the chaparral. Broad and plain was the trail left behind and it was all on Mexican

sand. It went right along until it reached and crossed another wide path at right angles. Here most of the band turned to the left, under orders, but the rest, a lot of warriors, went on, making false trail as if for a purpose, half a mile farther, to a wide, empty patch of hard gravel. No two of the warriors left that patch together, and the trail died there. Of the band which turned to the left, at the crossing, the squaw part pushed on while some cunning old braves worked like beavers to scratch out every trace that they or theirs had entered that left-hand path at all.

It was all a very artistic piece of Indian dodging, and when it was completed the entire band of Kah-go-mish was encamped in a secluded nook of the chaparral about a mile and a half from the spring. So far as any tracks they had made were concerned, they would have been about as hard to find as the sage-hen, who had now returned to her place under the bush by the spring, and had distinguished company to help her watch it.

A sage-hen crouching low in sand and shadowed by wait-a-bit thorn twigs is pretty well hidden. So is a great Apache chief when he has left his cocked hat and his horse a mile and a half away and is lying at full length, in a rabbit path, a few yards behind the sage-hen.

Kah-go-mish had his own military reasons for hurrying back to play spy, and his face wore an expression of mingled cunning, patience, and self-satisfaction. Something like a crisis had evidently arrived in his affairs, and he was meeting it as became a Mescalero-Apache statesman of genius. He and the sage-hen lay still for a while, but it was not long before there was another arrival at the spring.

No sound escaped the lips of Kah-go-mish, but the expression of his face changed suddenly.

Perhaps the new arrival had been long in convincing himself that he could safely venture to the spring, but he now left his pony at the edge of the quartz level and walked on to the water's edge. He was not a white man. He was one of the Indians who had said "How" to Vic and Mrs. Evans, and the sight of him seemed to arouse all the wolf in Kah-go-mish. The eyes of the Mescalero leader glistened like those of a serpent as he thrust his rifle forward. There was a sharp report and Kah-go-mish bounded from his cover, knife in hand, for the Chiricahua scout lay lifeless upon the rock.

"To-da-te-ca-to-da no more be heap eyes for blue coat," said the ferociously wrathful chieftain, and a moment later, as he again disappeared in the chaparral, he added, bitterly: "Heap sign now. Ugh. Pale-face find him. Bad Indian! Ugh!"



CHAPTER XV.

LOST IN THE CHAPARRAL.

Kah-go-mish and all the other members of his band except two had been entirely absorbed in the marching and counter-marching required to make other people lose track of them. Meantime the two exceptions had been threading the blind paths of the chaparral more rapidly and a great deal more anxiously.

Neither of the ponies which carried Ping and Tah-nu-nu was hampered by any saddle, and both were somewhat wild, but they were not wild enough to have an antelope's learning as to the streets and lanes of that bushy wilderness. Their young riders were just as ignorant. After the fight with the cougar, Ping remembered that when Tah-nu-nu sent her last arrow into the side of the great cat she had seemed to him to be about twice her ordinary size. Her bow had twanged at the moment when he had himself felt like a very small boy indeed, about to be stepped upon by the worst claws in the world. She, at that moment, had thought of her brother as a young warrior and a hero. Now, however, they were even, for they both had lost their way; and she spoke of him as a mere boy, while he described her as a little squaw, from whom, of course, any great amount of wisdom was hardly to be expected. Whether they rode fast or slow, up one path or down another, seemed to make little difference. They were in a complete puzzle, and there were a number of square miles of it.

At last an avenue of more than ordinary width seemed to offer a promise that it might lead somewhere in particular, instead of everywhere in general, and Ping remarked: "Ugh! Heap trail," as he rode into it.

"Buffalo trail," added Tah-nu-nu, satirically, and she was right, but it was the best highway they had yet discovered.

On they rode, for a while, making fewer turns and windings, until they came to a problem which halted them. The wide path split into two that were equally wide, and made a good place for a lost Apache boy and girl to argue a knotty question. Tah-nu-nu favored the right-hand road while Ping preferred the left, and neither of them could give a good reason for any choice.

After Ping killed the cougar, the heart of it had been given him for breakfast and the tongue for dinner, but, whatever else he had gained by eating them, he

had not acquired that animal's natural-born bush wisdom. He may at some time have eaten an antelope's ear, however, for he now put up his hand as if another bullet had whizzed past him.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Hear pony! Tah-nu-nu, come!"

They wheeled their own ponies behind the nearest thick bushes and dismounted. The newcomer might be a friend, but he was just as likely to be an enemy. Ping got an arrow ready, and felt very much like a young cougar waiting for an opportunity to spring.

They had only a minute to wait, and then another exceedingly puzzled young person drew his rein at the point where the wide path divided. Ping's eyes opened wide and they glittered enviously. Never before had he seen so dashing-looking a young paleface, nor any kind of boy mounted upon such a beauty of a horse. Oh, how the son of Kah-go-mish did long to become the owner of that red mustang.

"Dick," said the boy in the saddle, very much as if he had been talking to another human being, "did you know that you and I had lost our way? How do you suppose we shall ever get out of this scrape? It's a bad one."

Dick neighed discontentedly, and pawed the sand, for he was thirsty, but he made no other answer. He was as ignorant as was his master concerning those roads and of what was at that moment taking place among the bushes.

The Mescalero branch of the great Apache nation, while at war with Mexico, was at peace with the United States, although it was by means of a treaty which had been badly cracked, if not broken, upon both sides. As for The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead, however, he felt in all his veins that he was at war with the entire white race, and that he wanted that red mustang.

His arrow was on the string, and he was lifting his bow, when Tah-nu-nu caught him firmly by the arm.

"Ugh!" she whispered. "Kah-go-mish say no kill. No fight blue-coat. No take 'calp. Ping no shoot."

The too eager young warrior struggled a little, but Tah-nu-nu was determined. Then he seemed to assent, and she let go of his arm while they both listened to something more that the white boy said. They could not quite understand the words, but they could read the decision he came to.

"Dick," he remarked, "here goes. We'll take to the right, if it leads us to

China."

With the guiding motion of his hand the red mustang sprang forward. Just as he did so, a fiercely driven arrow whizzed by the head of his master. It only missed its mark by a few inches, and they had been gained for Cal by the quick hand of Tah-nu-nu.

"Indians!" was the exclamation that sprang to Cal's lips. "An ambush."

He rode on rapidly a little distance, and then he pulled in his pony, adding: "Things are getting pretty bad for us, Dick."

"Ugh!" Ping had said, as Cal disappeared. "Tah-nu-nu make him lose arrow. Lose pony. Heap squaw!"

"Kah-go-mish say, good!" she sharply responded. "Heap mad for kill."

She had saved the life of the young pale-face stranger, and she felt sure of her father's approval. She had heard him give his warriors rigid orders against unnecessary bloodshed. He had specified blue-coats and cowboys with thoughtful care for the future of his band, if not for the treaty, but he had said nothing at all about Chiricahua scouts.

Ping was compelled to yield the point, but it was plain to both of them that if there were more pale-faces to the right, for that one to follow after, their own course must be to the left. Down that path they rode, accordingly, and they were going right and wrong at the same time.

Cal Evans, on the other hand, was going altogether in the wrong path, and was doing it pretty rapidly. It occurred to him that buffaloes marching two abreast must have laid out that bush-bordered lane, but then other lanes as wide ran into it or crossed it. He at last brought Dick down to an easy canter and tried to study the situation carefully. He had heard of experienced plainsmen who had lost themselves in chaparral. They had wandered around aimlessly, for days and days, crossing their own trails again and again. At last they had lost hope and had lain down and died of hunger and thirst at only short distances from friends who were hunting for them.

Cal's heart beat hard as he recalled those terrible stories. The sun seemed to be growing hotter overhead. The wind had almost died out, and the air was like that of a furnace. He was painfully thirsty, and he knew that Dick had had no water since daylight, and then not a full supply, for the expedition had been in the desert since the previous afternoon. They had all travelled rapidly, too, in the hope of reaching Cold Spring early.

"What will father say," thought Cal, "when he finds out that I'm missing? What would mother and Vic say, if they knew? I only rode ahead a little way, and I can't guess how I came to lose track of them all."

No man who gets lost can ever tell exactly how he managed to do it.

Very mocking were the curves of that seeming road to nowhere, and many were the narrower lanes that entered it as if they also wanted to go there. Cal could hardly have guessed how many sultry miles he travelled before he came suddenly upon a wider, sandier path, bordered by taller bushes, that struck straight across the other.

"It's time for us to try something new, Dick," he said, but he said it dolefully, as he turned to the left and pushed down the unknown avenue. It had its curves, like the other, and it was wider here and narrower there, and it led him on for a full hour. He had long since almost forgotten about the whizzing arrow, in his deep anxiety, and he knew that there could not be ambushes everywhere.

At the end of the long hour he and Dick stood stock-still. They were on a slight elevation from which a considerable sweep of the chaparral could be overlooked. It was a dreary, dreary prospect, and it seemed to be interminable. Cal stared wistfully in all directions, but north and south and east and west appeared to be alike without hope. Into that lonely path no other human being was likely to come. Dick and Cal were like flies, caught in the vast web. In spite of the glowing sunshine, all things seemed to be growing very dark indeed, and they even grew darker when his feverish imagination wandered away to Santa Lucia.

"It's a fact, Dick," he said, huskily, "you and I are lost."



CHAPTER XVI.

AN INVASION OF TWO REPUBLICS.

Kah-go-mish was a great chief, and had employed all the cunning in him in his arrangements for eluding his pursuers. It now remained to be seen whether or not he had made blunders.

The Chiricahua scout lay on the white quartz only a few yards from the water's edge. The sage-hen sat under the bush. The Apache leader lay once more in his rabbit-path behind her, having regained it by a long circuit through the chaparral.

The two buzzards overhead were floating somewhat lower, and they could see all over the tangled maze of scrubby growth and buffalo-paths.

From the southward came a soft, warm wind, carrying with it sounds which brought a quick, vindictive gleam into the eyes of Kah-go-mish. First came the faint, distant music of a bugle, as if to inform both friends and enemies that a cavalry column was picking its way through the spider-web. A little later shouts could be heard, and then the rattle of sabres and the neighing of horses. Nearer and nearer drew the assurance that quite a lot of fellows of some sort were at hand, and all the while the buzzards overhead, and they only, were aware that a very different-looking set were approaching from another direction.

This second party was also armed and mounted, but it plodded on in silence and not rapidly. They seemed disposed to feel their way with some care, although not at all in doubt as to the path they were following. Part of these silent horsemen were all the way from Fort Craig, hunting some Mescaleros who had left their Reservation, and the rest of them were from Santa Lucia ranch and its neighborhood, and had come for some stolen horses. Just now many of them seemed disposed to discuss the military tactics of Mexican commanders.

"All the Indians in the chaparral have had good bugle-warning, Sam," said Colonel Evans to the cowboy nearest.

"Colorado!" said Sam. "Reckon they have. But then no redskins nor anybody else 'd stop here long. We know one thing, though."

"What's that, Sam?"

"Well, if our redskins are here away, they've been raced out of Mexico. We'll get 'em on American side."

That appeared to be the opinion of Captain Moore, but the entire party had a hot, thirsty, jaded look, as of men and horses who had made a long push across a desert and wanted rest and water.

"We'll try and reach the spring first," said the captain, "and claim our first choice of a camping-ground."

That was why neither of the two bodies of cavalry got there first, and why Kah-go-mish and the sage-hen heard, pretty soon, an American cavalry bugle from the east answering the Mexican music from the south.

Then the buzzards overhead saw men in uniform and other men in no uniform ride out of the chaparral, from opposite sides, into the great rocky open around the spring.

Just before that Kah-go-mish had seen three Chiricahuas steal out from the cover. They had scouted all around it, and one of them had passed very near the lurking Mescalero. He had been in no danger, for Kah-go-mish had heard the bugles and knew that he must lie still. All three were now grouped around their lost comrade on the rock.

"Ugh!" they said, as they looked at him. "Kah-go-mish."

Captain Moore had been informed of the name of the chief whose band had wandered from the Reservation, and now the Chiricahuas were in no doubt as to whose work lay before them. It was part of an old personal feud, they said, and had nothing to do with pale-faces or stolen horses.

Straight to the margin of the spring rode Captain Moore and the Mexican commander, each followed by several other riders, while behind them their men filed out of the chaparral.

The meeting of the two officers was ceremoniously polite, and was followed by rapid explanations that left them in little doubt but that they were pursuing the same enemy.

"Señor," said Captain Moore, with a smile, at last, as he looked around, "your forces have invaded the territory of the United States."

"Señor Capitan," smiled the Mexican, with a low bow, "part of the troops under your command have broken the treaty and are now in Mexico."

"I propose, then, Colonel Romero," said the captain, "that we compromise the matter. My command is almost thirsty enough to drink up the American half of this spring. How are your own?"

"Dry as the sand," would have been a fair interpretation of the polite Mexican's reply, and orders were given on both sides which provided for the thirsty men and animals without delay.

There were pleasant-voiced introductions among the gentlemen, and the blue-coats and cowboys mingled freely with the lancers and rancheros. If Kah-go-mish did not know it before, he now learned that these Mexicans, of whom there were nearly two hundred, were not the same force that he had collected his target-fee from.

A sort of mutual council of war of all the officers and Colonel Evans was held over the body of the dead Chiricahua scout.

"It may indicate the presence of only one warrior," said Captain Moore, "or it may mean that the whole band is near—"

At that moment a loud whoop sounded from the chaparral, westerly. It was followed by the hasty return of one of the Chiricahuas to announce that he had found the trail of the Apaches and that it led towards the south, into Mexico.

"You can follow them, then, and I cannot," said Captain Moore to Colonel Romero. "I should like to consult with Colonel Evans as to my own course."

He looked around as if searching for the owner of Santa Lucia, who had been at his elbow, but had suddenly seemed to vanish.

KAH-GO-MISH

"UGH!" THEY SAID, AS THEY LOOKED AT HIM. "KAH-GO-MISH"

"Si, Señor Capitan," replied Colonel Romero. "We will follow the trail at once, and I am glad that all the glory is to be ours. We shall, at all events, be in a good camping-ground by sunset."

"Your whole command is with you?" asked the captain.

"Except a pack-train and spare horses," replied Colonel Romero. "We pushed ahead a little, and they took it easily. They are only a few miles behind and will soon catch up with us."

He said more, and he had a good voice. He accompanied his very distinct utterances with gestures, not dreaming that the sage-hen or any other improper listener was near enough to learn too much.

Even in his rabbit-patch, however, Kah-go-mish could not entirely restrain his thoughts.

"Ugh!" he muttered. "Heap pony. Heap mule."

Horses and men had quenched their thirst and both sides were eating luncheon. The two commanders separated, and Captain Moore turned away. As he did so a large man stood before him with flushed, excited face.

"Captain Moore, Cal is lost! Lost in the chaparral!"

That was why he had stepped away so suddenly, for Sam Herrick had first beckoned to him, and then had led him aside to say that Cal had not come in with the rest. He had hunted for him all around, but not one of the men had seen him for an hour and a half. The colonel himself had at once made rapid inquiries, and now he had brought the news to Captain Moore, in such a state of mind that he could not think.

"Cal!" exclaimed the captain. "Lost! Oh, no. Don't be so agitated. You can find him."

The colonel tried to speak, but his voice refused to do its duty.

"Herrick, Sam," said the captain, quietly, "those Greasers have more bugles than they need. Buy a couple. I'll lend you mine. Stop. I'll speak to Colonel Romero about it."

"Bugles?" said Colonel Evans.

"Why, yes," said the captain, "if Cal is tangled in the chaparral he must have something to guide him. I must push on, along the boundary line, to see what luck I can have with the Mescaleros. Colonel Romero and his men will follow their direct trail, and so they won't find them; but we both make it safer for you. Patrol back, blowing all sorts of noise, and Cal's pretty sure to ride right up to one bugle or another. Scatter 'em wide."

"Thank you. Thank you, captain," said the colonel. "Sam, get all the bugles you can. Give a horse for a bugle. Give anything!"

The captain at once rode into Mexico for a talk with Colonel Romero. There was, indeed, an over-supply of musical instruments in that command, and its

gallant colonel sympathized impressively with the feelings of Cal's father and friends. So did two militiamen who were happy enough to own unnecessary bugles. Sam Herrick did not give a horse for either, but one battered, crooked tube of sheet brass brought enough money to replace it with a new one at least half silver.

Captain Moore hardly needed to explain so simple a plan. He had tried it twice, he said, for stray men of his own, and in each case they had ridden safely in. Neither he nor Colonel Evans guessed that Cal had already ridden away beyond the stretch of chaparral in which they proposed to toot for him.



CHAPTER XVII.

HOW PING AND TAH-NU-NU GOT TO THE SPRING.

Colonel Romero and his gay lancers and his picturesque ranchero militia rode away along the well-marked trail so carefully left for them by the Apaches. It led manifestly into their own republic, and there seemed to be no danger whatever of their losing it. They had two bugles less than when they entered the chaparral, but they made noise enough to notify any red men lurking in the bushes ahead of them that they were coming. The one special precaution which they continually took was against possible ambuscades. They were determined not to be taken by surprise, and their wary scouts routed out a considerable number of jackass rabbits and sage-hens. Beyond these they met with no excitement whatever until they came to the barren gravel patch, beyond which the Apache trail did not go.

Here a halt was called—necessarily. The pride of a Mexican army officer, and of a round score of them, was in the way of going back to Cold Spring to tell some Americans of a kind of defeat. It was talked over, and a decision was wisely reached. The Apaches, it was concluded, had not gone down into the earth nor up into the air. They had scattered through different paths of the chaparral, to come together again at some point farther on—probably at the outer edge of it. Kah-go-mish would have fully approved of that piece of sagacity, for it sent the Mexican part of the forces pursuing him a number of miles farther into Mexico. As for that cunning Apache himself, he seemed a model of human patience. The sage-hen had at last deserted him. She had seen the Mexicans depart, and that was enough for her. Perhaps she knew of other old chaparral ladies like herself to whom she wished to tell the latest news.

At all events she scurried suddenly away and left Kah-go-mish trying to understand the next military operation going on at the spring.

Of course the slaughtered Chiricahua scout was carried into the bushes and buried. Then the blue-coats and their commander rode away upon a path which promised to keep them most of the time within the United States. After that the cowboy part of the American expedition gathered at the spring, and evidently held a sort of council. It was of importance to Apache plans to get an idea of what theirs might be, and the watcher in the rabbit-path lay very still. He saw

man after man take a bugle and blow on it, as if trying to see how loud a noise he could make. He did not know Joaquin by name, but gave him the prize, decidedly, in his own mind.

While all this was going on, it might have been as well for the family peace of the chief if he could have been attending to the welfare of his two promising children.

Ping and Tah-nu-nu rode on, with something like hope and confidence, for a while after their glimpse of the red mustang and his rider. Every now and then The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead had something to say about the wonderful pony he had seen, and it was plain that he did not quite agree with Tah-nu-nu as to the wickedness of sending the arrow after Cal.

His band had left the Reservation and had escaped from all peril of becoming civilized, and some day or other he felt sure of going upon the war-path against the pale-faces with the hope of killing them all. In the meantime they were coming to take away his father's horses, and he believed himself at war with them.

He grew moody and silent, and it was partly because he and his pony were uncommonly thirsty. He did not say so, for he was a young warrior who had already slain a cougar and had eaten the cougar's heart, well roasted, and it did not become him to show any signs of fatigue or suffering. The path they followed was a strip of yielding sand, up to a point where Ping pulled in his pony with a jerk. Another path, as wide, ran into it right there, bringing "bad medicine."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Ping. "Pale-face! Blue-coat!"

"Ugh!" was the only response of Tah-nu-nu, as she leaned over and looked down at the plain marks left behind by the hoofs of iron-shod horses.

There were many of them, and they all went in one direction.

"Heap blue-coat!" exclaimed Ping, again and again; and it seemed as if the troubles of Tah-nu-nu and himself had been multiplied.

The trail of their enemies led to some place in particular beyond a doubt, but that must be the very place to which no Apache boy and girl wished to go. They must try another path.

Slowly, watchfully, they followed the cavalry trail for a moderate distance until another hopeful outlet presented itself. They were agreed this time, and

rode on side by side, wondering more and more where could be the hiding-place of their own people.

They had not by any means wandered so far out of the right track as had Cal Evans, but, after their first mistake had been discovered, had seemed to find a curious kind of instinct of their own guiding them—just a little like that which might have led a pair of unwise young antelopes. They were born children of the plains, and Cal was not. Even now their general idea of the direction to be taken led them towards the central point which should have been their aim.

Perhaps it would be more correct to say that it should not have been their aim under the circumstances, for it was the very point to which the other winding pathway, the cavalry trail, also tended after making a wide sweep.

There was no one to give them any information, but again and again they halted to consider the matter and to rest their thirsty ponies. It was slow travelling and every way unpleasant to a pair of young people who had set out that morning with a merry assurance that the great chief, the father of whom they were so proud, had outwitted the Mexicans and was about to outwit the blue-coats and the cowboys.

He, lying in his rabbit-path, was now very nearly ready to declare to himself what was the best thing for a great Mescalero Apache to do next, when he was called upon to witness an extraordinary performance. The bugle-practice had closed many minutes; the last horse had eaten his rations and had been watered. The last cowboy had sprung to the saddle; squads had been counted off; directions had been given by Colonel Evans, and each small party was about to enter the chaparral by a different path.

The spring was deserted, and its flashing ripples, with the white rock around them, could be seen at a distance by any rider coming along one of the straighter avenues. Two who came along saw it, and each uttered a glad, thirsty cry. A sort of despair left them so instantly that they did not pause for thought or consultation. Boy and girl together, they lashed their ponies and dashed recklessly forward. Their shouts had been heard.

"There's Cal!" exclaimed one cowboy.

"He's coming," said another.

A third had his hat off and was just on the point of hurrahing when the deep voice of Colonel Evans, in a distinct though suppressed tone, warned them.

"Silence, all! It isn't his voice. Wait."

They waited, and it was barely a full minute before Kah-go-mish saw Ping and Tah-nu-nu halt their ponies at the spring.

"Ping!" screamed Tah-nu-nu.

"Ugh!" said he. "Cowboy!"

On all sides appeared the mysteriously unexpected horsemen, swiftly closing around them. It was of no use to run or to resist. The chief's daughter and The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead were prisoners in the hands of the very men who had come to steal from their father all the good horses he had gathered upon Slater's Branch.



CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW DICK PLAYED SENTINEL.

That had been a warm and also a very busy day at Santa Lucia Ranch. It began, like other days, with an early breakfast for all who awoke under the roof of the hacienda, and everybody had conjectures to make, of course, as to the whereabouts and doings of Cal and his father and the Apache-hunting expedition.

Mrs. Evans and Vic did not care for a horseback ride. In fact, Vic said she did not care much for anything. About the middle of the forenoon, however, two hammocks that swung under the awning in front of the veranda became suddenly empty.

There came a great shouting and whip-cracking out upon the prairie. It sounded along the well-marked old wagon-road which came down from the north. Whole army trains had travelled that road from time to time, and now a great tilted wagon, drawn by six mules and followed by four more, came rolling smoothly in the deep old ruts.

There was a cowboy ready to open the gate and let in the wagon. News of its coming was already in the house, and every soul hurried out to welcome it.

"Sure, and it's glad I am that it's come," said Norah McLory. "There wasn't coffee to last the wake, let alone sugar."

The beauty of that wagon was all in its cargo. It belonged to Colonel Evans, and it brought supplies all the way down from Santa Fé. The unloading and investigation of the things under the ample tilt was an affair of fun and excitement and surprises worth a whole week of shopping in the city.

Full orders had been sent by that six-mule express, for such a trip was costly and could not be afforded too frequently; but even Mrs. Evans had not been permitted to examine all the lists of goods before they went, and Vic knew almost nothing about them. It was, therefore, something like a tremendous Christmas morning coming in June.

The groceries, both as to assortment and quantity, delighted the very heart of Norah McLory. There were cloths and clothing for all the needs of Santa Lucia.

One whole packing-case was marked as belonging especially to Mrs. Evans, but it might almost as well have been directed to Vic. The next was smaller and had no name upon it, but when it was opened it compelled Vic to exclaim, again and again: "How I do wish Cal were here! What won't he say when he gets home!"

However that might be, Cal heard Ping's arrow whiz past him just a little before Vic laid down his new breech-loading double-barrelled shotgun and began to admire his neckties, his pocket-knife, compass, and a lot of other treasures.

The miscellaneous cargo of the tilted wagon had cost the price obtained for a goodly number of horned cattle. The value of two fine mules had been expended upon another kind of supplies.

There was no post-office at or near Santa Lucia, and letters found their way there as best they might, at long intervals. Newspapers came in like manner, if they came at all, but now the tilt of that wagon had covered a very large amount of news. Some of it was beginning to get a little old in the rest of the world, for there were several files of well-known Eastern weekly journals, three months in length. Illustrated journals were there, and magazines, for young and old. The remainder of those mules had gone for books. One serious element of the loneliness Vic had complained of in her ranch life vanished at once.

"I've loads of good company now," she said, after dinner, as she began at last to swing in one of the hammocks.

A stack of printed matter lay on the ground beside her, and the thin, wide pamphlet in her hand emphasized her declaration: "I always want to see all the pictures first."

Mrs. Evans was in the other hammock. She had finished some letters before dinner, and now she was at work with the newspapers, trying to find out what great things had happened in the world since it had been heard from at Santa Lucia.

The day died slowly away, as it always will in June. The pictures were looked at, the news was read, the books were turned over, and if the day had not been so very warm more might have been done with the other contents of the tilted wagon. Even Norah McLory put away the liberal provision made for her department, and sat down to think of it.

"They'll not milt away," she said, "but that's more'n I can prove about mesilf. Injins is fond of sugar, and there's two barrels of it here now. Oh, the villains."

Vic stood out beyond the awning and watched the sun go down over the cloudlike tops of the western mountains.

"What are you thinking of, Vic?" asked her mother, from under the awning.

"Why, mother, Cal and father are somewhere away out there. They're pretty near the Sierra, maybe. I was wondering in what sort of a camp Cal had eaten his supper."

Cal was not in any camp, and he had not eaten any supper. He did not ride Dick uselessly the remainder of that hot afternoon. At first he took long rests, and then he dismounted altogether and walked. The red mustang needed no leading, but seemed to feel better when his human company was close beside him, with a hand upon the bridle. He was evidently suffering from thirst rather than from fatigue, and so was his master. Every now and then any path they happened to be in led out into barren reaches of sand and gravel, on any side of which they were at liberty to choose among several avenues, and this was one of the treacherous puzzles of the chaparral. Cal did not know that the red men who had threaded that maze before him had left marks of their own upon the trunks of the mesquit scrubs. He could not have read, if he had known, for he was worse off than a foreigner in a strange, great city.

Twice he saw a wolf go trotting across the vista ahead of him, and once a gang of antelopes dashed away as he came in sight. Somewhere in that terrible tangle there must be human beings, red and white, he knew, and he would almost have welcomed the sight of an Indian when he saw the sun go down.

The moon did not rise, at once, and it was very dark and gloomy, as well as oppressively warm, in the chaparral. Heat came up from the sun-baked sand, and more heat seemed to creep out from among the bushes.

It was a time for Cal to look away down inside of himself and to call out all the courage there was in him.

"I can stand it another day, I know I can," he said to himself, "and I've got it to do. I won't wear out Dick. We must rest all night. It won't be a long night. Soon as it's light we must be moving. It'll be cooler then."

The spot that was somehow selected for his lonely bivouac was near the point where two broad paths crossed each other. Cal could not guess where they came from nor where they went to, nor which of them it would be best for him to travel by in the morning.

He fastened Dick's lariat to a bush, but there was no grass for the faithful

mustang to pick upon. He stood in the path a very picture of patience, except that now and then he expressed a little thirsty discontent by a dejected pawing of the hot sand.

Cal had a blanket strapped behind the saddle, and he now spread it and lay down. He even went to sleep, and how long he had slumbered he did not know, when he was awakened by Dick's face close to his own, and a whimpering, low neigh. The red mustang was acting as a sentinel, and had heard something.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Cal, as he sprang to his feet, but the answer came in an unexpected manner.

There was a tramping sound along the other path, and then Cal heard voices. The moon was up, now, and its light fell upon what seemed an endless procession of horses and mules. There were mounted men among them, and Cal knew who they were.

"That's so," he muttered. "Those are the very Apaches we are after. Where can they be going at this time of night?"



CHAPTER XIX.

BAD NEWS FOR WAH-WAH-O-BE.

Kah-go-mish was an Apache, but he was also a father. He lay in his rabbit-path, under the bushes, and saw the surrender of his children. Up he came upon all fours, glaring ferociously upon their captors. For a moment his whole body seemed to swell and quiver with wrath. Then he lay down again, and he even smiled with pride over the excellent behavior of Ping and Tah-nu-nu.

Sam Herrick held out his hand to The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead with a very friendly "How!"

"Ugh! Cowboy!" said Ping. "How!"

Tah-nu-nu, on the other hand, remained primly silent, and did not reply in any manner when one after the other of the pale-face braves around her asked what her name was and where she came from and where she was going.

Ping was first questioned in English, but all of that tongue that he had picked up upon the Reservation seemed to have gone from him. Then Colonel Evans tried him in Spanish, and he looked as if he had never in all his life heard a Mexican speak, for the substance of the inquiry in both languages was, "Where is Kah-go-mish? Where is your band?"

Tah-nu-nu said something to him in Apache at that moment, and a Chiricahua, whom she had not seen, standing behind her, interpreted it to Colonel Evans.

"That's it, is it?" exclaimed Cal's father. "She says that they mustn't let us know that the band is in the chaparral. Now I know better what to do."

The glances bestowed upon the Chiricahua by Ping and Tah-nu-nu were not arrows, or they would have killed him.

"Boys," said the colonel, "treat them first-rate, but they mustn't get away. Now let's go after Cal."

Kah-go-mish saw his children supplied with water, fed well, laughed with, questioned, every way well-treated, and then he saw them mounted upon fresh ponies.

"Ugh!" he muttered. "Pale-face chief heap big man. Got heart. Good. No hurt

him. Kill Mexican. No kill cowboy."

He lingered a little longer, for he wondered what those pale-faces were up to. They rode away in squads, by different paths, and at regular intervals he heard them blowing tremendously upon their bugles. They fired shots, too, now and then, and the sounds receded farther and farther into the chaparral. It was altogether a very remarkable proceeding, such as the chief had never before heard of. He said to himself that there must be some kind of "medicine" in it. He had no fear of any bodily harm to his children, but their capture by the cowboys had suddenly put a new element into all the plans he had made. He still had the Santa Lucia horses, but the men from that ranch and its vicinity had Ping and Tah-nu-nu.

Kah-go-mish did not go out to examine a lot of miscellaneous camp-property left lying around loose near the spring. He did not wish to share the fate he had meted out to the imprudent Chiricahua scout. He suspected that a squad of cowboys, guarding the extra horses, was lurking near by, under cover of the bushes, and that their rifles protected the coffee-pots and kettles. He had, also, a pretty clear idea that all the cowboys would soon return, and probably the blue-coats also, but he believed himself rid of Colonel Romero's Mexicans. "Ugh!" he exclaimed, at last. "Kah-go-mish is a great chief. Know what do, if know where Mexicans gone."

Back he crept through the bushes until he deemed it safe for him to stand erect, and then he went farther at a rapid rate, considering the heat of the weather. He was bent upon an important purpose that called for all sorts of activity.

"Where Mexicans gone?" was a question over which there had been several badly puzzled arguments already.

Colonel Romero had led his men away along the trail so carefully prepared for him by the Apaches. He had had no suspicion that the trampled sand, so well marked by dragged lodge-poles, was all a trap. His best scouts had fallen into it completely, and the whole command had been entirely satisfied until they came to the patch of gravel where the trail vanished. Even after that they pushed along until they came out at the southwestern border of the chaparral. This was precisely what Kah-go-mish had hoped they would do, and right before them lay the other part of his cunningly set trap. It was an ancient trail, which was well known by Colonel Romero and by some of his more experienced Indian-fighters. It led deeper into their own country, and it also led to good grass and water, to be

reached by riding on until dark.

A brief council was held, but the arguments seemed to be nearly all upon one side. It was set forth that the Apaches must have taken that road because they could not remain in the chaparral to die of thirst and hunger or to be struck by the American cavalry and the cowboys. The Mexican horses and men must have water, and so they must go forward, and that was their only road. As to their train of pack-mules and spare horses, it was safe, they said. It would reach Cold Spring, and would find the Americans there. It would get directions from them, and could not lose its way.

All the remaining Mexican bugles sounded the advance, and the command moved away along the trail. A solitary Apache boy, a head taller than Ping, lurking near among some very thick bushes, saw them go. As soon as they were well away he was on the back of his pony, at full gallop, and evidently was in no doubt whatever as to the right path for him to take. He reached the camp of his people just in time to report to the returning Kah-go-mish that the trap set for the Mexicans had been a complete success.

The chief had sent away that part of his many perils, but he had rapid orders to give now. He had also a very difficult report to make to Wah-wah-o-be, and she listened to most of it with her blanket over her head.

Kah-go-mish told her how well Ping and Tah-nu-nu had been treated, but she was inconsolable at first.

The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead, the young chief who had killed a cougar, and who was yet to surpass the fame of his great father, was a prisoner in the hands of the wicked pale-faces. So was the beautiful Tah-nu-nu, the most promising young squaw of the entire Apache nation. Wah-wah-o-be fully appreciated her children. She knew all their good qualities, and she mentioned most of them then and there. What if both Ping and his sister were to be carried away to some distant place among the great lodges and the terrible magicians of the pale-faces, and compelled to become themselves pale-faces? To be turned into something different from their noble father and mother? Such things had been done, and she had heard of them.

The light of her life seemed to have departed, and Wah-wah-o-be cared very little what further disasters might now come to her. She even valued all the horses of the band at only a fraction of what they had seemed to be worth that morning.

The blanket came down at last, for Kah-go-mish had given all his directions to

his warriors, and there was work proposed which seemed to stir them to a high pitch of enthusiasm. Wah-wah-o-be had her duties also to attend to, and she knew that they must all get out of the chaparral. She saw her heroic husband ride away, followed by nearly all the best braves of the band. Then she and all who were left had some rapid packing to do, that every mule and pony might be ready for a sudden start whenever the war-party should return. It was understood that Kah-go-mish had outwitted the Mexicans, the blue-coats, and the cowboys, and that he was about to do something very remarkable. What, thought Wah-wah-o-be, if he should also succeed in winning back Ping and Tah-nu-nu?

He did not seem to go after them at once. He led his warriors, as nearly directly as the crooked paths permitted, to the very trail by which they had entered the chaparral. It was an especially wide and well-marked north-and-south path to Cold Spring for anybody coming from Mexico. Half a mile or more from the spring, among the bushes along the trail, Kah-go-mish carefully hid his dismounted warriors. All their horses were well away behind them, and they themselves seemed to be an exceedingly cheerful, hopeful, and self-satisfied lot of red men. If there was one thing more than another that was exactly suited to them, it was an ambush with a dead certainty of surprising somebody.



CHAPTER XX.

HOW CAL STARTED FOR MEXICO.

Wah-wah-o-be and Kah-go-mish had an advantage over Colonel Evans, for they knew what had become of Ping and Tah-nu-nu while his uncertainty about Cal grew darker and darker. He and the cowboys faithfully and warily threaded the part of the chaparral through which they had marched in the earlier hours of that eventful day. The buglers blew regularly, taking care not to get out of hearing of each other, but the firing ceased after it was discovered that a clear bugle-note could be heard farther than could the report of a gun.

As Ping and Tah-nu-nu rode slowly along, they began to comprehend the remarkable proceedings which had so completely puzzled their father, lying under the bushes. Each had one arm connected by a lariat with the arm of a cowboy, but they were not far from one another. They asked no questions and had refused to answer any, but they now and then exchanged a few words in their own tongue when the Chiricahuas were out of hearing.

On went the fruitless search, and at last the two young Apaches were led to a place where two paths ran into one. They knew the spot, for Ping had lost an arrow there. He remembered, too, how he had lost it, and so he said nothing, but Tah-nu-nu had nothing upon her conscience, and she turned to her brother to say, "Ugh! Heap pony!"

"Ah ha! You saw him, did you?" said the sharp-eyed cowboy she was tied to, and he at once shouted to Colonel Evans, who was riding a little ahead of them.

"What is it, Bill?"

"Why, colonel, these two young redskins saw him pass, right here. The gal let it out and the boy doesn't deny it."

The secret was out. Ping himself gave up and was willing to use any English or Spanish words he knew in telling that he had seen "Heap red pony" gallop away by the path which led to the right.

"That's the red mustang," said the colonel, sadly. "Cal's away beyond the spring, long ago. No use to hunt hereaway any more. Call in the boys. We must try the western chaparral. Maybe he will fall in with the cavalry."

He did not say why he shuddered, but the thought he did not utter put the Apaches in place of the cavalry. Hot, weary, and disappointed, he rode back to the spring and there were Captain Moore and his tired-out veterans. They had ridden far enough to satisfy themselves that the Apaches had not at once returned to the United States, and they had neither a right nor a wish to follow any trail into Mexico.

"Captain," said Colonel Evans, "I wish we were on good terms with the Mescaleros. They'd be worth all the white men to hunt for Cal."

"Tell you what I believe, though," said Sam Herrick, "them 'Paches didn't go out of this 'ere chaparral. We're bound to hear from 'em again. I've heard of Kah-go-mish before."

At the mention of the chief's name Tah-nu-nu looked at her brother, for he was straightening up proudly.

"Kah-go-mish great chief! Ugh!" he said, with great emphasis, and then his vanity got the better of him, for he patted himself upon the breast, adding all the Apache syllables of "The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead" and ended with "Son of Kah-go-mish."

He did not feel called upon to say that Tah-nu-nu was a daughter, but her face told enough.

"That's it," exclaimed Sam Herrick. "We've caught exactly the right ones. I wish their dad knew we had 'em. Just as I said, though, we're bound to hear more from Kah-go-mish."

So they did, but in a somewhat unexpected manner. Away out near the southern border of the chaparral a string of pack-mules and led horses came plodding lazily along, late that afternoon, guided by a dozen rancheros. They were in no danger, for their own cavalry had swept the way before them. They were in no hurry, for they were mentally sure of encamping at Cold Spring and of meeting Colonel Romero there. The trail before them was abundantly plain. No quadruped would or could wander from the train, and two of the rancheros rode ahead, more were scattered in the middle, and a pair who seemed almost asleep brought up the rear.

A more helpless military procession never marched anywhere.

The two rancheros in front and the pair in the rear suddenly waked up to find themselves accompanied by a dozen or more of Indian warriors, all apparently in a friendly and agreeable frame of mind. Not a whoop was uttered, not a shot was

fired, and it almost looked as if no harm were intended. The forward rancheros were greeted by a tall chief in a cocked hat, with red stocking-legs upon his arms. It was a striking uniform for even an Apache commanding officer.

"How!" he said, as he held out his hand. "Kah-go-mish is a great chief. Mexican good fellow. Bring heap pony, heap mule, heap plunder. Give all to poor Indian. Ugh!"

The warriors at the rear smiled and said, "How," but then they took away the lances and other weapons of the train-guards, as fast as they could get at them. Resistance was out of the question, of course, and Kah-go-mish had good reasons for not wishing any bloodshed. It might have interfered with his wonderful plan.

The entire train was quickly under the care of the Mescaleros, and every animal in it was turned around, with his head in a southerly direction. The unlucky rancheros were collected, on foot, in the very path they had expected to follow on horseback. They were then addressed, in tolerably good Mexican Spanish, by the chief himself. He told them how great a man he was, and gave them a vivid picture, a series of animal and insect illustrations, of his opinion of all pale-faces, all Mexicans, and all Chiricahuas. He told them they would find some blue-coats at the spring, and some Gringo cowboys. The chief of the Gringos was a great man. He had given some horses to the great chief Kah-go-mish. All of those horses were to be given back to him, but the chief could not bring them now. There were too many bad blue-coats in the chaparral. The great chief had given his two children in exchange for the horses, and wanted to trade back again. He would do so, but not now. He was on his way to Mexico, to carry back the pack-mules and horses he had just received from the rancheros. The Mexicans might want them. He hoped the rancheros would succeed in catching up with the cavalry. They all looked like good runners.

It was a great speech, and much of it was cheerfully satirical. Part of it meant that Kah-go-mish knew very well that Captain Moore and Colonel Evans would deem it their duty to rescue the pack-train if an opportunity were given them, and that he must get as far away as he could before the news of his exploit reached them.

It was only an hour before sunset when the plundered rancheros were set free to find their way to Cold Spring, for they had not so very far to go, and Kah-go-mish was cautious. As soon as they were out of sight he and his warriors and their prize were in motion. It was very needful that they should reach grass and

water before morning.

So far the deep plan of the Indian leader had worked remarkably well, even the changes called for by the capture of Ping and Tah-nu-nu being as yet in the future. This first success had been indicated by Colonel Romero himself, when he told Captain Moore about the pack-train. The old sage-hen had been listening at the same time, but she had not profited to any known extent. She lacked the ears and the genius of Kah-go-mish, and perhaps she was not at war with Mexico.

In due season, among the webby paths of the chaparral, the two sections of the Apache band came together. Cold Spring, the blue-coats, and the cowboys were far away; the Mexican cavalry were farther; it was entirely safe for everybody to whoop, and whoop they did. Once more had the chief they were all proud of proved himself one of the greatest men of the Apache nation.

Wah-wah-o-be had even a more hopeful feeling concerning Ping and Tah-nu-nu when she saw the Mexican pack-mules and the long string of horses, but she and all the rest were quickly in motion, for they knew that ten miles of desert lay between them and the nearest grass and water to the southward. More than one path led from the camping-place to the edge of the chaparral, and the Apaches used several in order to get out quickly. Suddenly, as they pressed forward, a loud whoop of exultation that arose upon one of those lanes was heard by the red wayfarers in all the others. It sounded about two minutes after the red mustang sentinel awoke his master.

Cal Evans, weary, thirsty, astonished, and wondering what might be best for him to do, stood in the shadows, watching the wonderful moonlight procession. There was not anything left for him to do. Another part of the procession came trampling along behind him, and a loud neigh from Dick told him that it was coming. His heart beat very hard for a moment, and then the whoop of triumph which went to the ears of Kah-go-mish and the rest of the band announced that Cal and the red mustang were prisoners of the Mescalero Apaches.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE MANITOU OF COLD SPRING.

"Sorry about Cal," said Captain Moore, after he and Colonel Evans had exchanged reports. "We must all get out early in the morning and scour the western chaparral. We shall find him."

It was getting too late for any more searching that day. The shadows were lengthening in the chaparral. Besides, both men and animals were in need of rest.

Every cowboy and cavalryman felt and spoke strongly about Cal, but the best that could be obtained from a Chiricahua was, "Ugh! 'Pache get boy."

That was an idea in other minds, for even Ping told Tah-nu-nu: "Heap pony find Kah-go-mish."

"Kah-go-mish no kill," she said.

Ping was all but dreaming of the red mustang. Never before had he looked upon an animal which so fully came up to his idea of what a horse should be. That is, a horse for a young Apache of about his size, and the son of a great chief.

Tah-nu-nu was not thinking of horses. She and her brother had been kindly treated. It was plain that they were not to be cruelly killed; at least not right away, for they had been fed abundantly. They were now provided with blankets, and the white chief of the cowboys even went further. He was an old Indian trader, and he had not gone out upon such an expedition unprepared to negotiate as well as to fight. The first essential of any talk with red men is presents, and there were curious things in a pack carried by one of the mules. From this collection Cal's father now selected two little round mirrors, set in white metal, as pretty as silver, and two startling red-white-and-blue yard-wide handkerchiefs. The mirrors he hung around the necks of his captives, and they puzzled themselves for half an hour over what they should do with the brilliant pieces of cotton cloth. Tah-nu-nu found out, for she tied hers around her head, and Ping followed her example.

They had been allowed to sit down by the spring, closely watched and guarded by one of the Chiricahuas. They proudly refused to speak a word to him,

although Ping's pride was gratified now with any talk offered him by the mighty blue-coats or the cowboy warriors of the pale-faces.

The Chiricahua, however, was quite an old man, and he managed to break through the barrier of Ping's reserve.

"Ugh!" he said, pointing to the surveyor's chisel-marks upon the face of the rock before them, which told of the boundary line between the two republics. "Bad medicine. Drive away Apache manitou."

Wah-wah-o-be herself could not have more cunningly stirred a chord of Indian curiosity. Tah-nu-nu was a young squaw, and remained silent, as became her, but she stared at the tokens of pale-face magic. Ping did the same for a moment.

"Ugh!" he said. "Bad medicine for Mescalero. Good for Chiricahua."

"No, no good," said the old man, with strong emphasis, pointing to some dark-red stains upon the rock. "Chiricahua die there. Heap fool. Not watch for bad manitou."

"Ugh!" replied Ping, and then for the first time he learned of the deed his father had done there that very morning.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!" he said, swelling with pride, but the old Chiricahua shook his head.

"Chief heap fool," he said. "Kill Indian. Get kill himself some day."

He had more to say about the spring. It had once been good medicine for all Indians, especially for all the branches of the great Apache nation. The Mexicans, whom he described in terms as picturesque as those employed by Kah-go-mish, had come first. They had drunk of the spring, but their medicine had been weak and had failed. The manitou of the Apaches had not been driven away. Long afterwards had come the Northern pale-faces, among whom were men with red beards, like that of Captain Moore, and whose warriors wore blue coats. They had great guns, and their medicine was powerful. They had forced the Mexicans to divide the spring with them, and had cut a mark in the rock, so that the manitou of the Apaches could not stay there.

"Ever since that time," said the old Chiricahua, "the Apache bands could visit the spring and drink, but it was not well for them to camp there. They were safer anywhere out in the chaparral."

He had evidently taken a deep interest in his own narration, and had been listened to attentively by Ping and Tah-nu-nu. They had believed every word,

and wanted to hear more, although the darkness was beginning to settle over the camp, and all the sentries and pickets had been posted, but just at this moment a shout was heard, and then another, among the southerly bushes.

There were sharp questions and answers in Spanish and English, while all the men in camp sprang to their feet. So did the old Chiricahua and Ping and Tah-nu-nu, and in a moment more they saw a dozen unarmed men, on foot, file dejectedly out into the light of the camp-fires.

They were the rancheros who had been in charge of the Mexican spare horses and pack-mules.

Captain Moore, his officers, Colonel Evans, and several cowboys listened to the remarkable story, helped out as it was by many questions.

"Good thing we caught those youngsters," said Captain Moore. "You did well not to fight, and you are lucky to have been allowed to keep your scalps. We'll take care of you till morning."

He gave orders about that, and then he turned to Colonel Evans.

"No need for you to hunt for your horses any farther," he said. "They are somewhere in Mexico. You may get back most of them, I think, for Kah-go-mish has about as many as he knows what to do with."

"Horses!" exclaimed Colonel Evans. "I'm not thinking about horses."

"Cal is not in their hands," said the captain. "We must hunt for him. I think, too, that we shall find him. It is not my duty to cross the boundary line after Colonel Romero's lost mules."

"Of course not. Nor for mine either. Kah-go-mish is evidently not the kind of red-skin to be easily caught by anybody."

"Perfect old fox!" said the captain, with strong emphasis. "But then he has the boundary line to help him."

It was a curious fact, but the three Chiricahua scouts considered themselves entirely at liberty to feel elated at the victory obtained by Apaches of another band over the traditional Mexican enemies of their race.

"Ugh!" said the old brave to Ping and Tah-nu-nu. "The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead is the son of a great chief."



CHAPTER XXII.

ACROSS THE DESERT BY NIGHT.

The evening which passed under such remarkable circumstances in the neighborhood of Cold Spring was uncommonly long and busy at the Santa Lucia ranch.

Tallow was abundant where so many cattle were raised and slaughtered every season, and Mrs. Evans prided herself upon her skill in the manufacture of candles. Whatever other comforts of life in the settlements were lacking in the old hacienda, there was always plenty of illumination after nightfall. There was usually but a short time for candle-light in June, for people who arose so soon after daylight were accustomed to go to bed early. On this particular evening, however, the parlor wore a very brilliant appearance for two hours longer than ordinary.

The first look at the precious things brought by the tilted wagon had been only a look, and every article had to undergo another inspection.

All were dropped at last, or, rather, there they lay, except such things as were under Norah McLory's care, all scattered around the room.

"I can't help it," said Mrs. Evans; "I feel uneasy about Cal."

"So do I, mother," said Vic, leaning back, upon the sofa; "but you never said as much before."

"Somehow I didn't feel so, Vic; but it seems to me—Well, I do wish he could be here, looking over his new books, instead of away out there."

"We sha'n't hear from him for ever so long," said Vic. "All sorts of things might happen and we not know it."

Somehow or other, as the talk drifted on, the varied assortment with which the floor and chairs were littered lost its charm. Mrs. Evans even got to telling stories of other times when her husband had been away from her. She had more than once been compelled to wait long for news of him, and had heard tidings of danger before anything better came. He had fought his way out of perilous circumstances, and her eyes kindled, now and then, as she related how. Wah-wah-o-be herself was not prouder of the deeds of Kah-go-mish.

Vic listened, but her imagination was a little out of joint, for she found herself unconsciously putting Cal in his father's place. She knew very well that he could not pick up one Indian and knock over another with him, as Colonel Abe Evans had done upon an occasion described by her mother. She had altogether more confidence in the heels of the red mustang, and she said so.

"I hope he will bring Dick back safe and sound," she said. "He's almost one of the family."

"Cal would be dreadfully sorry to lose him," said Mrs. Evans. "Come, Vic, I don't want to talk any more."

Neither of them was in good condition for going to sleep, nevertheless, and it may be that their eyes were hardly closed when those of Cal were opened at the summons of Dick to watch the moonlight procession in the chaparral.

The warrior who first laid a hand upon the rein of the red mustang did so with a loud whoop. Cal summoned all his presence of mind and held out his right hand.

"How," he said, "good friend."

"Ugh!" responded the savage. "Heap boy."

No violence was offered, for none seemed to be called for, and it is a mistake to suppose that all the instincts and customs of the red men are in favor of slaughter. Just now, moreover, the clansmen of Kah-go-mish were under orders of mercy, and Cal was led on at once to the presence of the chief. Dick was led with him, and the two friends stood side by side in front of the distinguished Mescalero. He had kept on his cocked hat, and Cal thought he had never before seen so remarkable a figure, especially by moonlight.

One of Cal's accomplishments, a matter of course to a boy with Mexican servants in his own house, was a good acquaintance with Spanish, and it helped out the chief's English in the questions and answers which followed.

Great was the delight of Kah-go-mish. He and the cowboy commander were now even. Each had a son of the other as a sort of security, and all the horses gathered upon Slater's Branch seemed more likely to remain Apache property.

The bugling and random firing among the bushes that day was all explained now, and the great plan of Kah-go-mish looked very well indeed. It was needful, however, to put a goodly distance between him and the blue-coats, for whose conduct he had no security whatever.

Cal's weapons were taken from him, and he was ordered to mount and ride. He at once explained that neither he nor Dick had tasted water since morning, that the red mustang was worth several common horses, and that he must now be too tired to carry a rider. As for himself, he had slept, was rested, and was ready to travel.

Water was scarce in the band of Kah-go-mish at that time, but several gourds half full were obtained by the chief. He proposed to treat his prisoner pretty well, and was willing to save so very good a pony.

Cal could hardly swallow when the water was brought to him. Not only his mouth was parched and his throat husky, but his very heart was sick.

He had heard of the terrific things done by Apaches to their prisoners, and he had no confidence at all in the present appearance of good-will. He had not been told of Ping and Tah-nu-nu in his own camp, or he might have felt better. As it was, he drank a little, and then turned his attention to the red mustang. Only a small part of what Dick was ready for could be given him, and he was glad enough when his downcast master divided water-rations with him. He felt better, and whinnied eagerly for more. He pawed the ground and looked around to see if anything like grass or corn was also forthcoming. Nothing of the kind came, but a Mexican pony was led up, Cal's saddle and bridle were transferred to him, and Dick was hitched to a long lariat by which several other quadrupeds were being led. The last he saw of Cal that night was when the latter rode forward, side by side with a very lean-looking brave who carried a long lance, and who had warned Cal that it would be used at once upon any attempt to escape. Before long the entire cavalcade was out of the chaparral, and Cal noted that the north star was directly behind him.

"Down into Mexico," he said to himself. "It will be long enough before I see Santa Lucia again."

It was cooler travelling by night than by day, but the hard-baked soil sent up an uncomfortable amount of heat, and it was only now and then that even a cactus or a sage-bush was seen along the dreary way. One of the captured Mexican horses gave out and was left for the buzzards. An hour later an old pony which had travelled all the way from the Mescalero Reservation was unable to go any farther, and he too lay down.

Cal thought of Dick, and Dick may have been, thinking of him, but the red mustang was really in need of nothing but grass and water. He had no idea whatever of giving up, and there were no mules tied to his lariat to worry him.

Another hour went by, and the alkaline sand and gravel of the desert became strewn with rocks, among which the long cavalcade slowly wound its way. There was no straggling, for even the animals seemed anxious to get out of that gloomy region. The moon was low towards the horizon, when it suddenly occurred to Cal that during ten or fifteen minutes he had seen a greater number of scrubby bushes.

"More chaparral coming?" he thought. "Hope there's a spring in it, somewhere. Never was so awfully thirsty in all my life."

He could hardly have said as much aloud, for his voice seemed to have dried up. He was hungry, too, for he had not been able to eat much of the bit of cold, half-cooked beef brought to him by Wah-wah-o-be before the train left the Cold Spring chaparral.

Trees! Yes, right and left of them, and they were a pleasant sight to see. How could the red men have found any place in particular, by night, across that trackless plain?

They could not, and they had not, for it had been no part of the plan of Kah-go-mish to leave a trail behind him, or to travel by any old road.

Grass? There was almost a thrill at Cal's heart. A temporary halt was making, and he saw a pony nibble something at the wayside. It must be that the southern edge of the desert had been reached at last.

The halt had been made for purposes of exploration. Trees and grass in that region were unmistakable signs of water, under the ground or above it. Cal sat still upon the pony and the warrior at his side was as motionless as a statue. All around them was deep and sombre shadow, but the air was cooler, and a breeze began to come out of the darkness before them.

Minutes passed, and then a clear, twice-repeated whoop came to their ears.

"Ugh!" said the lean Apache, with evident satisfaction. "Heap water. Boy drink plenty now. Sun come, tie up boy and make fire on him. How boy like fire? Ugh!"

Cal could make no reply whatever, except by a shudder, and they once more rode forward.



CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE RANCH AND IN THE CHAPARRAL.

There was a very excellent reason why the old Spanish-Mexican settler had chosen that exact spot for the Santa Lucia ranch. It was the little spring which bubbled up in the middle of the courtyard around three sides of which the adobe was constructed. It had been dug out to a depth of several feet and walled in. It had never been known to fail, and it always had enough water left, after supplying the household, to furnish a tiny rill which ran away at one side of the gate in the palisades of the fourth side. This rill was planked over until it got away from the ranch, but it ran out into the sunshine then, and travelled gayly on to the corral. Here it found a number of acres of land, surrounded by a strong wire fence. It also found a long hollow to fill up with water, so that cattle and horses corralled there had plenty to drink. Except in the winter and spring there was little ever heard of that rill beyond the corral, and, if shrubbery had at any time grown upon its margin, it had long since been browsed away, for there was none there now.

Beyond the corral were great reaches of maize, and there had this year been no drought to hurt it. A wide patch of potatoes and some oats seemed to be the only other attempt at anything more than cattle-farming, and things generally had the bare, camplike look common to New Mexican ranches.

Shortly after breakfast, on the morning after the arrival of the tilted wagon, Mrs. Evans and Vic walked out on what appeared to be a tour of inspection. They had not slept well, and there was just a little touch of feverishness in the way they talked about Cal and his father, but they were trying hard to be cheerful.

"No, Vic," said Mrs. Evans, "it won't pay to put in any of the seeds now, but I'm glad they've come, and I don't believe they will spoil. The grape-roots and cuttings won't get here till autumn, but we'll have the vineyard planted over there."

"Is there really to be a barn, mother?" asked Vic, doubtfully, as if such an ornament as that were almost out of the question.

"Yes, my dear. Your father loses stock enough, every year, to pay for more

shelter, and for keeping hay, and for all sorts of improvements."

"To think of a vineyard and grapes!"

"And fruit-trees, Vic. The brook is to be fenced in up to the corral and lined with trees. It won't dry up so easily when it's shaded, and the corral is to be a little farther away. It all costs money, though. So does fencing."

They were dreaming dreams of the future and of what could be done to turn Santa Lucia into a sort of New Mexican Eden. The stockade itself was to be clambered over by vines, and so was the veranda, and trees were to be coaxed to grow in all directions. Bushes and plants that could stand the summer heats were to be planted all around the ranch. The old adobe itself was to be fixed up. It was a very pleasant way of spending a morning, but it had its unpleasant thought.

"Vic," said her mother, "there are a great many things that your father can't afford to do, if he is to lose all those horses."

"He has plenty left, and the cattle."

"Yes, but the Indians took away some of his best stock."

"The Indians wouldn't be so likely to come," said Vic, "if everything looked more settled."

It seemed so, and there was truth in it, only the whole truth required more houses near by, and more men to defend them.

As the talk turned towards the Apaches and their deeds, the dream of vines and shrubbery and flowers, of barns and stables, dairy, trees, and all faded away, and they walked back into the house, wondering anxiously what would be the next news from those who had gone in search of the stolen horses and the Apache horse-thieves.

Mrs. Evans and Vic were not one bit more completely in the dark, that morning, than were Colonel Romero and his lancers and his rancheros. They had succeeded, the day before, in following the ancient trail until it brought them to grass and water and a good camping-ground. It had not shown them, however, one track or trace which seemed to have been made in modern times. If Kah-gomish and his band had come that way, they had managed to conceal the fact remarkably well. Once more it was easy for the brave colonel and his officers to see their duty without any argument. They could not go any farther, if they would, until the arrival of the pack-mules and the lead horses. They could not go in any direction until they knew which way the Apaches had gone. Therefore

they must rest in that camp, and send out scouts and trailers, and wait for the loads of supplies and for information. Their puzzle was ended for that day, at least, and there were trees in abundance to lie down under and take it easy.

The men in the bivouac, at Cold Spring, were astir as soon as the daylight began to come the next morning. Colonel Evans was the first man upon his feet.

"I'll find him," he said, "if I have to search the chaparral inch by inch. Poor boy! What a day and night he must have had! No food, no water, no hope! Lost in the chaparral!"

It was a dreadful thing to think of, and the next worst idea was that he might have been killed by the Apaches. Everybody in camp took a deep interest in the proposed search, and all who were to join in it were willing to set out before the heat of the day should come. Captain Moore had a number of cautious things to say about the danger from Indians and ambuscades, but he evidently believed, after all, that Kah-go-mish had gone away.

"He won't run any useless risk of losing horses," said the captain. "I think, on the whole, we can search away."

The Mexicans who had been in charge of the lost pack-train ate their breakfasts in a hurry. The day's journey before them seemed dismal enough, for they were to cross the desert on foot to report the work of Kah-go-mish. They were given a supply of provisions, but there were no horses or arms for them.

"You won't meet any red-skins," said Sam Herrick to a very melancholy ranchero. "They've all gone the other way. You can make better time on foot than you could a-driving a pack-mule. You'll git thar. Give the colonel my compliments and tell him that old Kah-go-mish ort to just love him. I never heard of a train given away for nothing before."

The ranchero nodded a sullen agreement with Sam, but he was not likely to give the message accurately to Colonel Romero.

The poor fellows started at once, with a plain enough trail to follow, and Sam looked kindly after them.

"They're in luck," he said. "They've nothing to do but to walk. Not even a mule to lead or a fence to climb. Colorado! But didn't old Kah-go-mish make a clean sweep."

"Left their skelps on 'em," said Bill.

"That was just cunning," replied Sam. "Some redskins haven't sense enough to

let a skelp alone, but he has."

Only a little later the sentries and pickets posted by Captain Moore were all the human beings left in the camp at Cold Spring. They, too, were hidden among the bushes, and the proof that it was a camp at all consisted of three sacks of corn, a saddle, some camp-kettles and coffee-pots, and the smouldering camp-fires.

The bugles began to send their music out over the spider-web wilderness of the chaparral west of the spring, and Captain Moore declared, hopefully, that if Cal were anywhere in all that range he would be sure of hearing music before noon.

The trouble was that he was so many long, tiresome miles beyond the reach of the loudest bugle, and that he had heard music of an altogether different sort before the very earliest riser among them had opened his eyes.



CHAPTER XXIV.

CAL'S NIGHT UNDER A TREE.

The northern edge of Mexico was marked deeply by the surveyor's chisel upon the quartz rock at Cold Spring. All the country north and south of it had once been Apache land. Away back, nobody knows how long, before any Apaches had ever drank of that water, the entire region had belonged to another race of people, who disappeared, but left traces behind them, here and there. They did not leave any written history.

There are men who hold an opinion that the deserts of the southwest, such as Cal Evans made his gloomy march through that night, were not always desert. To Cal himself, as he rode along, the waste around him had seemed utterly hopeless, as if nothing good ever had been there or ever could be.

After the desert was passed, and after the whoop which announced the finding of water, he and his grim guard rode on until the forest around them became so dark that they and all others were compelled to halt. It was only for a few minutes, and then from the head of the cavalcade came back braves and squaws and boys carrying blazing torches of resinous wood. The huge tree-trunks that Cal now rode among seemed positively gigantic. No axe had been at work in that place for an age, and there was only a moderate amount of underbrush. What bushes could be seen were mostly gathered around and over the decaying trunks of fallen trees, and it was easy for the train to pick its winding way.

Before long Cal saw ahead of him great gleams of light, for the Apaches were kindling camp-fires, and there was an abundance of dry branches to make swift blazes.

The next thing of particular interest to him was a portly-looking squaw, who wore a somewhat battered straw bonnet, very much mixed up with gay ribbons. She seemed to be looking for somebody, and she carried in one hand a large water-gourd and in the other a flaming torch.

"Ugh!" she said, as she came to the side of Cal's pony. "Boy heap dry. Want water?"

"Thank you! Thank you!" exclaimed Cal, as he reached out for the gourd, and his voice sounded as if he had a bad cold in his head.

It was not a cold by any means, but a sort of fever, as if a sandy desert were beginning to form inside of him. He drank and drank again, and then passed the gourd to the lean Apache beside him.

"Ugh!" was all the immediate response to his politeness, but something said to Wah-wah-o-be in Apache brought back a rapidly spoken and seemingly resentful response. The chief's wife was plainly not at all afraid of that warrior.

"Boy eat, by and by," she said to Cal, as he handed her back the gourd, and he was encouraged to ask her a question.

"Do you know what they have done with my pony?" he said. "I want him to have some but not too much, right away."

"Ugh!" she said. "Heap pony!" for she had taken more than one look at a horse which she declared to be the right kind of a mount for The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead. Cal repeated his question in Spanish before he was understood, and Wah-wah-o-be promised care for Dick. She did not add, however, that the care was to be given on account of the absent Ping.

The red mustang had a right to consider that he had been a patient pony, under trying circumstances, but his relief came at last. A fat squaw came to him, followed by a boy a little older than Cal and not resembling him in any way, and they unhitched Dick from his place in the train. They led him on among the trees until they came to the edge of a small, slowly running stream of water, and here they let him drink about a quarter as much as Dick thought would be good for him.

"No kill him," said Wah-wah-o-be. "Pony eat a heap. Drink more then."

Dick was led on after that until he came to a grassy open, where the moonlight showed him a large number of quadrupeds of various ranks in life. All were picketed at lariat-ends, but some of them had lain down at once, while others, in better spirits, had begun to nibble the grass. Dick was also picketed, and he tried the grass for a while. Then he concluded that he had done enough for one day and night, and he, too, lay down, but he would have been all the more comfortable for a few words from his master and a good rubbing down.

Cal's uncertainty as to what was to become of him was not at all relieved by his next experiences. To be sure he was guided onward to a place under the trees, not far from one of the camp-fires, and was ordered to dismount. More water was brought to him and a liberal piece of broiled venison. He ate well, now, but all the soreness at his heart seemed to have worked out into his muscles. He was

dreadfully weary. He felt too badly to care a copper when he saw his saddle and bridle taken from the pony he had ridden. They were carried away by the fat squaw who had brought him the water. He had caught her name of Wah-wah-o-be from her own remarks, but he did not catch the other name she uttered, with a motherly chuckle, when she took possession of the saddle and bridle. It was a very long name, and was accompanied by expressions of strong admiration for the boy it belonged to. The one thing which Cal clearly comprehended was, that if he was ever to ride again he would probably mount some other steed than Dick and hold some other bridle.

His head was too weary and too busy to take much note of things around him then, but he afterwards remembered how wonderful it all looked. The scattered camp-fires were surrounded by wild, strange-looking figures, and by groups that were the wilder and the stranger the more figures there were in them. The firelight danced among the giant trees and through the long vines which clung to them or hung from their branches. The great shadows seemed to make motions to each other, now and then, and it was altogether a very remarkable picture.

Cal was beginning to feel sleepy, when out from among the shadows marched the chief in the cocked hat and red stocking-leg uniform, followed by four other dignified warriors.

"Ugh!" he said. "How boy now? Eat heap?"

"Yes, thank you," said Cal. "How?"

"Ugh! Good!" said the Apache leader, as Cal slowly arose and stood in front of him, but he did not shake the hand Cal offered him.

He turned to the other great men, and they exchanged a few sentences in their own tongue. They were hearing further explanations of the plan he had formed for the general good, and they nodded a cheerful assent when he ended with, "Kah-go-mish is a great chief."

They turned and stalked away, and with them went the lean, grim Apache who had hitherto been Cal's guard, and who had latterly seemed to be getting almost like a friendly acquaintance. His place was filled by a pair of short, bow-legged, swarthy old braves, whom Cal set down as the unpleasantest-looking Indians he had ever seen.

Very quickly the prisoner had good reasons for an every way more severe opinion of his new guards. They were under strict orders to prevent his escape, and no other especial directions had been given them. Of course they proposed

to perform their sentry duty with as little trouble and as complete security as might be. Cal was lying upon the ground, while they were busy with their knives among the nearest bushes. He hardly looked after them, for his thoughts were wandering to the camp at Cold Spring and to the faces of those who had talked so much about him, all that evening, in the parlor at Santa Lucia. He had not the remotest dream of the precise experience which was coming to him. The two ill-looking braves returned, and one of them had a handful of forked branches, trimmed and pointed. They turned Cal over upon his back and stretched out his arms. A sharp thrill went through him as he began to comprehend what they were doing. Thrill followed thrill as they drove one forked stick into the ground over each wrist, and another over each ankle.

"Ugh!" exclaimed one of them. "No get away!"

"I am staked out!" said Cal to himself, huskily. "Staked out!"

Well might the cold shivers come with that terrible thought, for he had read of that method of securing prisoners and of what sometimes followed it. Staked out in the depths of a Mexican forest!



CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE LETTER FROM MEXICO.

Ping and Tah-nu-nu had not been staked out that first night after their capture. Precisely how to keep them safely, yet humanely, had at first been a puzzle.

"If they once got away into the brush," said Sam Herrick, "you might as well hunt for a pair of sage-hens, and they'd about die before they'd be caught again. The boy's a game little critter, and the gal's got an eye like a hawk."

It was decided that they must be tied up, but it was so done as to inflict very little hardship. A thong of hide, knotted hard, so that nothing but a knife could undo the knot, connected an arm of each captive with a stout arm of a mesquit bush, close to the sharp-eyed sentinel at the head of the widest path.

There was no danger of any escape, and both Ping and his sister were wiser and tamer than Sam gave them credit for. They understood the kindness of Colonel Evans better and better every time they looked at the little mirrors or the stunning handkerchiefs. They were also aware that the Apache band had left the chaparral, for the message brought from Kah-go-mish by the Mexicans had been translated to them carefully. Their night was, therefore, not at all uncomfortable.

When the cavalry and cowboys set out to hunt for Cal in the morning, the old Chiricahua volunteered to act as guard while they were gone. It was almost as if he had taken a fancy to Ping and Tah-nu-nu, or it may have been that Sam was correct in saying, "The old wolf'd rather loaf under a bush and spin yarns than hunt through the chaparral under this kind of sunshine."

Loaf he did, in seemingly contented patience; and he had yarns to spin, as if he had been Wah-wah-o-be. Not a few of them related to old-time fights which had been fought around that very spring, in and out of the chaparral. Some of his stories were of a dreadfully blood-curdling kind, but they hardly seemed sensational to Ping and Tah-nu-nu. Perhaps the story which interested Ping most was a long one of a strong party of an unknown, nameless tribe from beyond the Eastern Sierras. They were tall braves, almost black, and they came all this distance to strike the Apaches.

The strangers camped one night at Cold Spring, and in the morning they found themselves penned in by overwhelming numbers of Apaches, who poured forth

from the chaparral by every path except one. That was a path which the Apache chiefs did not know or had overlooked. They and their warriors swarmed in upon the strangers, expecting to destroy them all, and there was a terrible battle for a little time. Then, to the astonishment of all the Apaches, the Eastern war-party grew smaller and smaller, retreating across the rock. It left the spring behind, and dwindled away, fighting hard all the while. It was dripping out, so to speak, through the path in the chaparral that nobody knew anything about. The Apache warriors fought wonderfully to prevent that escape, and hundreds hurried around through the chaparral to attack the strangers in the rear and to cut off their retreat. It was of no use at all, said the old Chiricahua.

As soon as the last of the strangers fired his last arrow from the mouth of that old buffalo-path it seemed to close up, and the Apaches could not find it. They never could, nor did they ever succeed in finding where it led to, for the strange warriors escaped entirely, just as if they had crawled into the spring. It was "very great medicine," he said, and nothing at all like it had been heard of since then. He himself knew all the paths now to be found around Cold Spring, and all of them led out into the desert.

Thanks to the Chiricahua, Ping and Tah-nu-nu had a fairly comfortable morning of it. They even grew curious, instead of frightened, concerning what was next to come to them.

The old Chiricahua did not spend all his time stretched out upon the sand. He arose and walked around as if the hot sunshine agreed with him, and exchanged remarks with the white camp-guard in their sultry covert.

Ping and Tah-nu-nu stared around the open with a deepening interest in a spot which had so wonderful a history. Across it, on the opposite side, was one dense mass of chaparral, many yards in length, through which no opening appeared. In the middle of it arose a giant cactus, with a trunk like that of a tree, and with two enormously thick, long arms reaching out near the top. One leaf pointed south and the other north, as if the cactus were a directing-post. Right there, they agreed, after some discussion, must have been the mysterious path that opened to let out the strange warriors, and then shut again.

Noon came, and the Chiricahua brought them some army bread, some fried bacon, and some coffee. They had tasted such things before, when their band was at the Reservation, and they had some for breakfast, but it was very wonderful to taste them again.

"Pale-face chief make Ping a blue-coat," said Tah-nu-nu. "Eat a heap."

"Tah-nu-nu squaw for blue-coat chief," said Ping. "Have big lodge. Cook his meat. Hoe his corn. Feed pony. Beat her with big stick. Ugh!"

They could rally one another about the prospect before them, but Ping stoutly declared that he would run away at the first opportunity. He would be a chief of his own people and not of any other. Tah-nu-nu as positively asserted her horror of ever becoming the wife of the greatest pale-face living. Not if he gave ever so many ponies for her, like a warrior of the Apaches.

Two hours later the cavalry squads and the cowboys began to straggle back to the spring. Their horses needed water and food and rest, and so did they. Hot, weary, disappointed, was the appearance of every man who came in, but none of them wore such a face as did Colonel Evans. He drank some water, but he did not eat nor did he speak to anybody.

"Ugh!" said Ping. "No find boy. Heap pony lose too. Bad medicine."

It was only a little later when something remarkable happened to a picket in a path of the southern chaparral. He stood by his horse ready to mount, as was his duty, but he was very sure that no Indians were around, and he only now and then gave a listless glance along the path. Suddenly, within twenty yards of him, an Indian stepped out of the bushes.

"Halt!" sprang to the lips of the startled soldier, but the Indian held up both hands, empty, above his head, to show that he carried no weapons.

The challenge was heard by the men around the spring, and they sprang to their feet, while others came out of the bushes. A dozen rifles were ready behind the picket as the solitary Indian came forward. He wore nothing but a waist-cloth, and from the belt of this he drew something which he held out and offered.

"Take it, Brady," said the voice of Captain Moore. "Bring him in. He's a messenger of some kind."

The cavalryman took it, but it was nothing more than a leathery cactus leaf, as wide as a stretched-out hand.

"How," said the Indian. "Kah-go-mish."

"That's it," exclaimed Sam Herrick. "I reckoned we'd hear from him. Colorado!"

The leaf was passed to Captain Moore, and the Apache brave followed him, but only as far as the end of that pathway. There he stood, and seemed almost like a wooden Indian. He saw both Ping and Tah-nu-nu, and they saw him, but if

they knew him they did not say so.

"They thought nobody saw 'em, but they were making signs," said Sam; and the old Chiricahua muttered, "Ugh! Good!" as if he had understood something.

Just at that moment Captain Moore met Colonel Evans.

"Read that," he said, as he held out the cactus leaf.

There were letters deeply scratched into the smooth, fleshy surface.

Father I'm a Prisoner to Kah-Go-Mish Staked out last night Safe now
Don't know where he means to go next He says you will hear some day

CAL

Send mother my love.

It was a wonderful cactus leaf, for it made the strong hand of Colonel Abe Evans shake so that he could hardly hold it. Every pair of eyes around Cold Spring stared at it and at him, and when they once more turned to look at the Apache brave who had brought it he was not to be seen. He had vanished as if he had been a dream.



CHAPTER XXVI.

CAL'S VISITORS AND HIS BREAKFAST.

Even when he was lost in the chaparral, and saw the sun go down without any hope of escaping from the spider-web of buffalo-paths, Cal had not felt quite so badly as he did when he found himself staked out. There he lay upon his back under the vast canopy of an ancient cypress-tree. Near him the two uncouth-looking Apaches had thrown themselves upon the grass. They seemed to be asleep pretty soon, for there was no more need of their watching the prisoner.

Get away?

He could move his hands and feet just enough to keep the blood in circulation, and that was all. He could turn his head and look at the glow of the camp-fires and at the forms of men that now and then went stalking to and fro. They were only dog-soldier Indian police in charge of the camp, for the remainder of the band was taking all the sleep it could get. Even the dogs were entirely quiet. If he looked up, there was nothing but a dense mass of foliage, but it began at a height of fifty feet or more from the ground. Great branches reached out, and from these hung long ropes of vines of some sort, here and there, to the very ground. There was no opening through which a star could be seen, and it seemed to Cal as if his last hope had departed.

The position of a staked-out man is peculiarly uncomfortable, but it is the traditional method of the red men for securing captives. The Hurons and Shawnees and Iroquois, and other eastern tribes, made a forest-jail in precisely the same way before any white men ever came among them. Cal found that it was a great affliction not to be able to turn over in bed, but that was nothing to the torment of having a mosquito on his chin, another on his nose, and ten more humming around his head on all sides, with no hand loose to slap among them. He almost ceased thinking of Indian cruelties while suffering the merciless torments of those insects. Tired as he was, he felt no longer any inclination to sleep. His eyes grew accustomed to the dimness about him and over him. As he looked up into the branches of the tree, after a while, he heard a strange, mournful cry, very much like something that he had listened to before, and then something whitish and wide-winged came sweeping down from the darkness, and his eyes followed it as it swiftly shot across the camp.

"Owl, I guess," groaned Cal. "Never saw one so large before. White owl. What a hoot he had! Oh, my nose! These are the biggest kind of mosquitoes."

So they were, and they kept their victim in continual misery. It was not long before he saw something else, not so large as the owl, fly very silently past him. It went and came several times, with a peculiarly rapid flight, and he had pretty fair glimpses of it.

"What an enormous bat!" exclaimed Cal. "They have almost everything down here. What I'm most afraid of are scorpions and centipedes and tarantulas. Such woods as these must have lots of 'em, and I couldn't get away."

They were dreadful things to think of, but Cal had not remembered all of the customary inhabitants of a Mexican forest. He was put in mind of yet one more after a while. He heard a rustling sound among the grass and leaves near him, and it made him lift his head as high as he could. Just then something else lifted its head, and Cal saw a pair of small, glittering, greenish eyes that travelled right along at a few inches above the ground. The cold sweat broke out all over him, but he held perfectly still.

"They don't bite if you don't stir or provoke them," was the thought in his mind; but that snake was not of the biting, venomous kind. It was only a constrictor, not more than seven or eight feet long, and only three inches thick at his thickest point. He was in no hurry, and it seemed to Cal as if it took him about half an hour, or half a century, he could not tell which, to crawl across the pair of legs which the Apaches had pinned down. It was really about a quarter of a minute.

Cal had no idea how hard he had been straining at his fetters, spurred by the mosquitoes. He made an unintentional jerk with his right arm as the snake disappeared, and was startled by a discovery.

"Loose?" he said to himself. "Then I can loosen it more. I won't disturb either of those fellows, but I must scratch these mosquito-bites."

A pull, another pull, and that forked stick began to come up, for one of its legs had been put down in a gopher's hole, and had no holding. Out it came, slowly, softly, and Cal's right hand was free to reach over and help his left. That stake was hard pulling, but it came up at last, and then the ankles could be set free.

"I'll drive them all down again hard," said Cal to himself, and he did so.

"Let them wonder how I got out," he added; "but there isn't any use in my trying to run away. They'd only catch me and kill me at once."

He rose to his feet, and it occurred to him that his safest place might be by one of the smouldering camp-fires. The short June night was nearly over, and the dawn was in the tree-tops when Cal walked away from the shadow of the great cypress. He had a sort of desperate feeling, and it made him singularly cool and steady. He did not meet anybody on his way. His first discovery, as he drew near the fire, was that the Apaches had found plentiful supplies in the packs of the Mexican mules. They knew how to make coffee, too, for there was a big tin coffee-pot nearly full. Cal put it upon some coals to heat, and then he saw a tin cup lying on the ground, a box of sugar, a piece of bacon, and a fragment of coarse corn-cake.

"That'll do," he said to himself. "I may as well eat."

The coffee boiled quickly, and Cal sat with a cup of it in one hand, while with the other he held a stick with a slice of bacon at the fire end of it. He did not know what was happening under the cypress.

One wrinkle-faced brave opened his beady black eyes and looked at the place where the staked-out captive had been. The mocking smile he had begun flitted away from his lips.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed as he sprang up and kicked his comrade, and in an instant more two dreadfully puzzled Apaches were examining the forked stakes which ought to have had a white boy's wrists and ankles in them. Hard driven into the ground were all four, but the white boy? Where was he?

"Heap bad medicine!" exclaimed one brave, almost despairingly.

"Boy heap gone," said the other.

They looked in all directions, but the last refuge they dreamed of was the camp-fire where Cal was sitting.



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POST-BOY THAT GOT AWAY.

Colonel Romero and most of his command spent the greater part of the day after Cal's capture in waiting for the pack-mule train. Some went out after game and did very well, and others went to hunt for signs of the Apaches of Kah-go-mish and did not do well at all. The rest, officers, cavalry, and rancheros, did nothing, and they all seemed to know how.

Right away after breakfast, and before the search for Cal began, the dozen rancheros who no longer had any pack-mules to lead left Cold Spring behind them. Out they marched, under careful directions, for the way given them by Sam Herrick and the Chiricahuas. They certainly marched well, but it was in dejected, disgusted silence. Kah-go-mish, and, after him and his Apaches, Colonel Romero and his horsemen, had trampled the old trail into a very new and plain one, easy to follow. It was well for the peace of mind of the train-guard without any train that it was so, for to be lost was for them to be starved, since they had not so much as a bow and arrows to kill a jackass rabbit. Not one of them now wore a hat, as the braves of Kah-go-mish had imitated their chief, so far as a dozen Mexican sombreros went. There was no danger, however, that the rancheros would get themselves tanned any darker. They pushed on steadily across the desert, and at about the time when the dispirited Americans who searched for Cal in the bushes gave it up and returned to Cold Spring there was a great shout in the camp of Colonel Romero. All the waiting for pack-mules and supplies was over, but the muleteers had arrived, disarmed, hatless, and on foot.

The colonel and every other soul in the camp said as much as they knew how to say concerning the cunning, daring, impudence, and wickedness of all Apaches, and particularly of Kah-go-mish.

The message of the chief to the colonel was pretty fully given, leaving out some of the animals, birds, and insects he had put into it, and a council of war was called to consider the matter.

The council was unanimous. Without the supplies that had been lost it was out of the question to chase Apaches. Without a good guess as to precisely where Kah-go-mish had gone, they knew that he was away beyond the desert somewhere, either in Mexico or the United States, and they might as well give

him up. It was therefore decided that all possible hunting and fishing should be done at once, and that the entire command must find its way to the nearest Mexican settlements as fast as it could go.

So far as Colonel Romero's Mexicans were concerned Kah-go-mish already felt pretty safe, but he was by no means sure what other forces of the same nation might or might not be out in search of him.

As for the blue-coats and cowboys, the chief knew something about a boundary line. There was one around the Mescalero Reservation, and he had broken it, but he was sure that pale-faces never did such "bad medicine." He was safe from the Americans until he should see fit to re-enter the United States. That is, however, that he was proud to feel and say that so great a chief as himself could not long be entirely safe anywhere. Too many army-men wanted to see him.

In the camp at Cold Spring, Colonel Evans and all his friends felt that they would give a great deal to know the exact circumstances under which Cal had written his cactus-leaf letter. It passed from hand to hand, for every man to take a look at it. The cavalry company was short of officers, not having brought along even one lieutenant. The orderly sergeant, therefore, was the man next in rank to the captain, but there was another sergeant and two corporals, and they each had much more to say than could rightly have been said by mere private soldiers.

All agreed that it was a remarkable letter; all were glad to hear that Cal was safe, and all were glad that there was to be no more need of bushwhacking and bugle-work in the hot chaparral.

The cowboys had opinions of their own, and most of them looked a little blue.

"Staked out!" exclaimed Sam Herrick. "Colorado! To think of Cal Evans staked out!"

"Wall, now, they let him up again," said Bill. "Looks as if they didn't allow to torter him, leastwise not right away. What a lot of wooden-heads we were, though, to let that there 'Pache that brought the leaf slip out of reach the way he did."

"The cavalry had him," said Sam. "I took my eyes off him just a second, and when I looked again he wasn't thar."

The cactus leaf came back to Colonel Evans, and once more he studied every dent and scratch upon it. The writing looked as if it had been done with the point of a knife. There could be no doubt but what it was Cal's work.

"You'll see him again," said Captain Moore, encouragingly.

"It'll be about the time that Kah-go-mish sees his own children, I reckon," replied the colonel. "They're a sort of security, but something might happen to him in spite of their being here."

"Indians are uncertain; that's a fact," said the captain, "but you must keep up your spirits. Do you believe in Providence, colonel? I do."

"Do I?" said Cal's father. "Of course I do. Why?"

"Well, isn't it curious that Cal hasn't been hurt, through all this, up to the time when he wrote that letter? Wasn't he taken care of?" asked the captain.

"He got lost in the chaparral, didn't he? Isn't he a prisoner now?"

"They found him, and it may be a good thing that they did. Hold on a bit. Anyhow we'll keep a tight grip on those two young redskins."

"Ping," said the colonel. "That's a queer name for an Indian boy. Tah-nu-nu isn't so bad for a young squaw. We'll camp here to-night?"

"Of course," said the captain, "but we'll make an early start in the morning, and go back close along the boundary line. There's good grass beyond the desert; wouldn't mind forgetting the line for a few miles if we came near enough to any Apaches. Sorry I didn't get another talk with the chief's messenger. It beats me how he slipped away."

The wild-looking-Mescalero postman who brought the cactus-leaf letter may have had another errand on his hands. When he halted at the head of the path, in full view of everybody, he did not look as if he meant to go away without an answer, and he did not. He obtained one from Ping and Tah-nu-nu, to carry to their father and mother. The Chiricahuas saw it given, and afterwards reported that the signs exchanged told that all were well, and that the young folk would soon be at liberty. Some other messages came and went, through hands and feet and features, and then the postman sank down into a sitting posture at the edge of the chaparral. That was where Captain Moore now remembered seeing the last of him.

The excitement over the cactus leaf absorbed all minds for a minute or so, then, and the Apache warrior went under a bush as if he had been a sage-hen. Once beyond it he was hidden, but he went snake-fashion some distance farther. As soon as he deemed it safe to stand erect he did so.

"Ugh!" he remarked. "Pa-de-to-pah-kah-tse-caugh-to-kah-no-tan heap great

brave. Heap get away."

That was evidently his longest name, and he was a pretty tall Indian, and had a right to compliment himself just then. The men who hurried out after him, when they found that he was gone, went back again with a mental assurance that he was somewhere in the chaparral, but that only he himself knew precisely where. While they were hunting, he was walking rapidly through the cross-paths of the spider-web. He came to a place where one of the horses won by his band near Slater's Branch was tied to a bush. He was saddled and bridled, and he carried also one of the small water-barrels found among the equipments of the Mexican pack-mules. The warrior picked up his weapons from the sand near the horse, drank some water, complimented himself again, and went off on foot to complete his day's business. He drew stealthily nearer and nearer to the cavalry and cowboy camp at Cold Spring, and now, while Captain Moore and Colonel Evans were expressing so much regret that the postman of Kah-go-mish was beyond their reach, a pair of eyes under a thorn-bush, within a hundred yards, watched their every movement and took note of whatever was going on around the spring.

The lurking Apache could see much, but he could hear little. Least of all could even his quick ears catch the suppressed whisper of Colonel Evans when at last he lay down upon his blanket for a few hours of rest.

"Cal," he said, "if I don't take you home with me, what shall I say to your mother?"



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE STICKS.

Cal Evans, sitting by the fire and toasting his bacon in the camp of the Apaches, knew nothing of what was to happen that day in all those other places. He was ignorant of what had already occurred, except to himself. His strongest feeling, at that moment, was grief for what he knew must be the anxiety of his father, and for what he feared that his mother would suffer when his father should get home without him. He had passed a wonderful night, and it seemed to have made an older boy of him.

The dawn was brightening fast when he took his first cup of coffee. He was very hungry, and he picked up a piece of corn bread to eat with it. The fact that it was stale, and that it had been upon the ground, did not make any difference to a fellow who had been staked out, and who was very likely to be upon his back again very soon, or tied to a torture-post.

As for his two guards, he did not know nor care that they had aroused several other braves, and that all of them were rummaging the forest, near the cypress, in search of any trail he might have left behind him. Each brave in turn had re-examined the forked stakes and had expressed his wonder. According to them, Cal was "Heap snake" and "Heap bad medicine." They were at work upon their mystery, and he upon a piece of toasted bacon, when he heard an almost musical "Ugh," behind him, followed by other grunts, in which there was no music whatever.

The first sound came from a woman's voice, and, when he turned around, there stood Wah-wah-o-be. She had risen early in order that the chief's breakfast might be ready for him upon his return from his morning look at the corral. The other exclamations were uttered by three dog-soldiers, whose patrol duty had brought them to that camp-fire.

"How," said Cal, holding out his hand. "Good squaw. Give boy water."

Then he remembered that she had answered him very well in Spanish, and he said something in that tongue about the coffee and bacon, and told the three dog-soldiers that they were very fine-looking fellows.

It was not impudence, and it was not cunning, for it was nothing more nor less

than desperation, but he could not have acted more wisely. While he was exchanging morning greetings with the dusky policemen, yet another brave came hurriedly up, and, the moment he saw Cal, he uttered an astonished whoop. He was one of the pair set to watch him, and he had come in great trepidation to announce the escape of the prisoner. Under other circumstances he might have even used violence, but a captive was safe in the hands of the dog-soldiers, and he did but stare in Cal's face as if in doubt as to his being there.

Cal's mocking coolness was not at all exhausted, for he felt too badly to be afraid. He held out his hand.

"How," he said. "Good-looking Indian. Drive heap stick."

"Ugh!" said the puzzled savage. "How boy get away?"

"Leave stick there," said Cal. "Pull off arm. Put hand on again. Cut off foot. Put on again. Want coffee."

He explained more fully, by signs, that he had taken himself to pieces to get out of his wooden fetters, and had put himself together again to come and eat his breakfast.

Almost all Indians have a vein of satirical fun in them, and Cal's explanation was thoroughly appreciated by his hearers, excepting the wrinkled-faced warrior who was made to look like a cheated watchman. Wah-wah-o-be laughed aloud, and a deep, sonorous voice behind them joined her in what was half-way between a chuckle and a cough.

"Ugh!" it added. "Heap boy. Son of long paleface chief. How boy like stake out? Kah-go-mish!"

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief," said Cal. "Steal heap pony. Hear a great deal about him. Bad Indian."

He had touched, half bitterly, the right chord—the Apache leader's intense vanity about his fame. Wah-wah-o-be was also pleased to hear that the pale-faces talked about Kah-go-mish.

Before the chief could unbend for any more conversation, however, his duty required that he should investigate the affair of the forked stakes. They were a mystery even to him for a moment. He reprimanded the two guards severely for using them at all. They were needless. They had been carelessly put down. The braves who had done it were mere squaws, and did not know how to drive a stake. He was stooping over one of the fetters when he said that, and the truth

flashed upon him. Cal had driven it down hard, and it was plain that no human ankle had ever been under that fork. The chief's derision of the unlucky guards broke out afresh, but he expressed great admiration for the skill and conduct of the young pale-face brave, the worthy son of the long, broad-shouldered chief of the Santa Lucia cowboys.

Wah-wah-o-be had no need to explain to the dog-soldiers that Cal was to be permitted to finish his breakfast in peace. They were decidedly inclined to favor a youngster who had performed a feat so remarkable, and whose courage was evidently equal to his cunning.

Other Indians and other squaws came and went, and boys and girls, although the larger part of the band was inclined to sleep a little late that morning.

Kah-go-mish came back from his inspection of the stakes, and he came with another part of his plan ready for action. He now felt pretty sure of getting back Ping and Tah-nu-nu without giving up too many horses, and he had decided upon a safe method for opening negotiations with the pale-faces. Nothing whatever could be done successfully as long as the blue-coats were in the way. He had dealt with army officers before, and their methods had been unpleasant. They had always persisted in speaking of captured horses as stolen property, and they were in a sort of league with the Mexicans as to such matters. His first business was to get beyond their reach, after letting them know that he held a hostage for their present good behavior. He ate his breakfast while he was thinking over the matter, and then he summoned one of his most cunning warriors and told him to bring his swiftest horse and a cactus-leaf.

Cal's heart jumped for joy when he found that he was to write to his father, even with such materials. He took the leaf and he used his knife for a pen. He saw the Apache messenger spring upon his horse and ride away, and it seemed to him that one of the heaviest parts of his burden had been taken off.

Kah-go-mish took pains to explain to his prisoner that if he should run away to the northward he would die of thirst in the desert, and if to the southward, he would only lose himself among forests and mountains.

"Stake him out again?" said Cal. "Pull up stakes and come for coffee."

Once more the grim Apache smiled not unkindly, and there was less danger of any sort of handcuffs or shackles.

As soon as the entire band had eaten its morning meal, Cal had something worth looking at. The packs taken from the Mexican army mules had not been

searched, up to that hour, except for present supplies. It was now needful to ascertain exactly what they contained, and they were all brought out and laid upon the ground in order. It was speedily evident that a company of Mexican cavalry, with a reinforcement of mounted militia, required few luxuries, but meant to have enough of such as it wanted.

CAL USED HIS KNIFE FOR A PEN.

CAL TOOK THE LEAF, AND USED HIS KNIFE FOR A PEN.

Corn-meal for tortillas, or Mexican cakes, was plentiful, and the Apache squaws knew what to do with it. So was bacon. There was an abundance of coffee and a fair supply of sugar. There were several small bales of tobacco in the leaf, for cigaritas, and some in manufactured shape. There were whole mule-loads of blankets, for possible use in mountain camps. There was ammunition, as if Colonel Romero had expected much fighting. Miscellaneous plunder filled out the list, and the band of the great Kah-go-mish considered itself very rich indeed.



CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE FIRE?

The needs of human beings are very much the same the world over, but they are satisfied in different ways. The tilted wagon from Santa Fé brought to Santa Lucia coffee and sugar of a better quality than the Apaches found in the packs of the Mexican army mules, but it was sugar and coffee after all. The magazines and papers had been full of news and information for Vic and her mother, and the escaped train-guard brought very interesting matter to Colonel Romero. Letters came with the wagon, but not one so interesting as was the epistle which Cal had written upon the cactus-leaf. No story of any sort, in any of the books or pamphlets which Vic turned over so eagerly, was likely to be more absorbingly interesting to her or to any other reader than were to Ping and Tah-nu-nu the tales told by the old Chiricahua under the shadow of the mesquit bushes near the Manitou Water. He told more, that evening. Some of them were about himself and some were about things that he had seen among the blue-coats at the forts where he had been. They were in a good frame of mind for listening, since the sign-language letter brought to them by the messenger of Kah-go-mish. They knew from him that their band was to leave no trail behind it, and that the son of the long chief of the cowboys was as much a prisoner as they were. If they did not give up the idea of trying to make their own escape, they felt more contented, and could joke and laugh about their captivity.

"Ping pale-face by and by," said Tah-nu-nu, almost merrily. "Heap blue-coat chief. Kah-go-mish make Cal big Apache brave."

Her quick ears had caught his name, but Ping more frequently spoke of him as "Heap pony."

Before the arrival of that quiet evening hour, Cal had added somewhat to his rapidly growing list of new experiences. He felt better after writing the cactus-leaf letter, and he ate a fair second breakfast, cooked for him by Wah-wah-o-be. He made her acquaintance very fast, but Kah-go-mish had his hands full of duties belonging to his pack-mule cargo, and he did not come again.

Quite a different sort of fellow did come, for the wrinkled-faced old warrior was ready to burst with curiosity as to how Cal had managed to get out of his forked-stake prison. With Wah-wah-o-be's help he managed to say so, and Cal

volunteered to show him. Several other braves went with them to the foot of the giant cypress, and in a minute or so more that Apache was described by all the voices around him as "The-old-man-who-put-a-peg-into-a-gopher-hole." He already had a fine long warrior name of his own, or the new one would have stuck to him for the remainder of his life. As it was, he evidently regarded Cal with more than a little admiration.

"What do now?" he said. "No more get away?"

"More eat, by and by," said Cal. "See red pony, now. Medicine pony."

There was no reason why the prisoner, under a sufficient guard, should not be permitted such a privilege, and the wrinkled-faced brave nodded. He dropped his long Apache names, however, both of them, and used one which Cal discovered had been given him at the Mescalero Reservation.

"Crooked Nose go," he said. "Pull Stick see medicine pony."

The now numerous drove of quadrupeds belonging to the prosperous and wealthy band of Kah-go-mish were no longer picketed. Free of lariats, but attended by watchful red drovers, they had been conducted to a strip of natural prairie at some distance from the rear of the camp where Cal had eaten his breakfast.

They were of all sorts, good, bad and middling, horses, ponies, and mules; and Cal was able to pick out, as he went along, quite a number that had come all the way from the bank of Slater's Branch. He was looking around him for one horse that was worth more than all the rest, in his opinion, when a loud neigh sounded from behind some bushes near him.

Very much to the surprise of Crooked Nose, the handsomest mustang he had ever seen came out with a vigorous bound, a cavort, and a throwing up of heels, and dashed straight towards Pull Stick, as he had several times called Cal Evans.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Heap pony!"

"Hurrah, Dick!" shouted Cal, and he threw his arms around the neck of the red mustang.

One of the dog-soldier keepers of the horses came riding towards them at that moment, however, and Crooked Nose touched Cal on the shoulder.

"Pull Stick come. Pony stay."

He added a string of Apache words that Cal could make nothing of, but that

described Dick as being now the property of The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead. He conversed for a minute or two with the mounted Apache, and the latter pointed sternly towards the camp. There was no such thing as disputing with a Mescalero policeman, and Dick himself received a sharp blow from the loose end of a lariat when he attempted to follow the only master he recognized as having any right to him.

Cal was glad to find that his four-footed friend was in good condition, after his pretty severe share in the adventures which began in the chaparral. Still, it was an uncomfortable thing to think of, that the red mustang was likely to end his days as an Apache pony instead of as the pet of all the household at Santa Lucia.

The camp was regained, and Cal at once took note of changes. The fires had been kindled the previous evening, in a straggling line along the bank or a small stream of water. Tangled bushes marked the course of the stream, and great trees leaned over it, dropping the swinging ropes of vines from their branches to its very surface. The more distant fires had been entirely hidden, except for the glare they made.

The band had bivouacked that first night, but now there were lodges going up, and Cal knew what that meant.

"They mean to stay here," he said to himself. "I might as well be in jail."

It was nearly so. The neighboring wilderness had been found to be full of game, and the plan of Kah-go-mish called for liberal supplies of fresh meat, in addition to what he had found upon Colonel Romero's pack-mules. He felt sure that any Mexican force hunting after him would look almost anywhere else, and none was likely to come for a long time. He and his band were happy; they were safe; they could have a good time until continued happiness and safety might require another move.

Cal and Crooked Nose were met by a summons to come before the chief, and went to find him waiting their arrival.

"Pull Stick here! Ugh!" said Crooked Nose.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!" remarked the Apache commander dignifiedly, but he had more to say. He repeated to Cal his previous counsel against an attempt to escape, but after that he raked out some hot coals from the smouldering camp-fire near him.

"Boy see?" he said, as he pointed at the red warning. "How boy like? Ugh!"

Cal shuddered and nodded, but he could not find a word to say in reply.

"Look!" said the chief again, pointing to the ground a few paces away, and Cal looked.

There lay the forked sticks which he had escaped from that very morning, and the meaning of Kah-go-mish was very plain indeed.

"Boy, son of pale-face chief," he said. "No heap fool. Go. Ugh."

"Pull Stick come," said Crooked Nose, in a not unfriendly manner, and Cal walked away with him, to be more minutely informed that he could do about as he pleased, until further orders, unless he chose to do something like trying to escape, which would make it proper for his excellent Apache friends to stake him out again, and "make heap fire all over Pull Stick."



CHAPTER XXX.

THE MANITOU WATER.

That second afternoon, after the arrival of the tilted wagon at Santa Lucia, was dull enough, in spite of the ample supply of news and literature. All the news from all the world seemed worthless without news from Cal and his father. All the stories ever told were uninteresting until they should come home and tell the story of their expedition after Kah-go-mish and his Apaches. It had been so all day. The projected improvements, in and around the old hacienda, had somehow lost their attraction, and were discussed no more. In fact every time one of them had been referred to it had compelled somebody to mention the absent man or boy who was likely to have an opinion to be consulted concerning it. Vic and her mother went out on horseback in the morning, and they made an uncommonly long ride of it, for they went to Slater's Branch and back, galloping almost all the way home, and putting each other in mind of Cal's dash upon the back of the red mustang to warn them that the Indians were coming.

Duller and duller, yet more unquiet had the day grown after dinner, and now the shadows were growing longer, and they seemed to bring more anxiety with them.

"Mother," said Vic at last, "I've been trying my best not to think of Cal or of father, and I can't."

"It's the best thing we could do," almost sighed Mrs. Evans.

"They may be fighting!" said Vic.

"Most likely they're going into camp somewhere, all tired out," said her mother.

"Oh, I do hope," said Vic, "they are on their way home. I can't read, and I won't."

So all the printed things were put aside, and it may be that some of Vic's thinking made pictures for her a little like the reality that was enacting at Cold Spring and in the Mexican forest. No imagination of hers could have drawn anything quite equal to either of them.

Something almost as well worth making a picture of was taking place a

number of long miles farther westward. Away up among the crags and forests of the Sierra, but below the snow-range at that season, there lay all day in the sunshine a very tranquil little lake. All around the lake were the steep sides of mountains, and at no point was there any visible outlet. Streams of various sizes ran into it, and one of them came plunging over the edge of a perpendicular rock, in a foamy, feathery waterfall. There was plenty of room in the valley for the lake to grow larger in, but the trees at its margin seemed to say that this was its customary size. On the northern side the sloping steep went up, up, up, until all its rocks became hidden under a covering of snow.

Just above the snow-line the June sun had been working hard, day after day, melting snow for the lake, until it had undermined a vast icy mass several acres in extent. Nobody could guess how many winters had been required to make that heap of frost so deep and hard, or how many summers had made everything ready for that hot day to finish the work.

Just before sunset a moaning sound came down the mountain and filled the valley. Then something like thunder, or the report of a cannon, echoed among the crags.

The avalanche had broken its bonds! Down it came, slowly at first, then more swiftly, and the tall pines were snapped off and swept away, and great boulders were caught up and carried with it. Down, down, down it came, and at last, with a great surging plunge, it went head foremost into the lake. Crash! splash! dash! the flying sheets of water reached the tree-tops on the margin. The avalanche found deep water, for it almost disappeared, but it made the lake several feet deeper, and then its own fragments came up from their dive to be floated around and to be dashed against the shore by the waves.

It did not take a great while for the surface of the lake to become calm again, with the snow-cakes and the ice-cakes almost motionless in the fading light. Not any human eye had seen the avalanche fall, or had noted its grandeur or any of its consequences.

All things were peaceful at Cold Spring. Everybody had eaten supper long before sunset, and was glad of feeling sure that only the coming night was to be spent in a spot where nothing more civilized than a jackass rabbit seemed to have any permanent business.

Colonel Evans had said all he had to say about Cal, and he stood near the spring, making vague speculations as to how and when he should get into better communication with Kah-go-mish. Near him, sitting upon a ledge, were Ping

and Tah-nu-nu, and the old Chiricahua, who seemed to be telling his young friends something more about the bubbling water, when Captain Moore strolled up to within a few paces.

"Do you see that, colonel?" he said. "I know sign language well enough if I can't understand the words. There's no wonder they're superstitious about Fonda des Arenas."

"Cold Spring?" replied the colonel. "What do they say about it?"

"Ask the scout. He says it's Manitou Water in the old tongue. I can't work the Apache syllables."

Neither could Colonel Evans, when the Chiricahua repeated them. He was even eager to tell more, and what he did tell was curious, if true. Just before the great and noble Chiricahuas and Apaches came to own that country, he said, there had been a hill there, a sort of mountain with forests, and there was no desert there, and no chaparral. The Chiricahuas would have preferred a hill and trees and grass, but the old manitou who had lived there had to go away, and everything sunk down to a level. The trees died and rotted away, and all was dry and desolate, until one terribly hot day when a band of Apaches reached the rocky level, almost dying of thirst. Their ponies were unable to go any farther, and they had given up all hope. They sat around upon the rock, and their ponies lay down. All night long they sat there, and then, just as the sun was rising, they saw something white spring into the air in the middle of the wide rock. A new manitou had arrived, friendly to the Apaches. He brought the Manitou Water, and it had run continually to the present time. Generally it was quiet, but if the manitou heard good news, the water would sometimes jump away up, as it did when it first came.

"Very pretty story," began Captain Moore, but at that moment the air suddenly was filled with excited exclamations.

The old Chiricahua uttered a loud whoop as he sprang to his feet.

"Ugh!" he said. "Heap manitou!"

He added a few rapid sentences in his own tongue, while Ping and Tah-nu-nu darted away to the edge of the chaparral and stood there, clinging to each other as if in terror.

"Colorado!" shouted Sam Herrick. "What on earth's got into Cold Spring?"

The colonel and the captain also retreated rapidly, shivering from the shock of

a sudden cold bath, for they both were wet to the skin.

Twenty feet high sprang the water, with a sharp hiss and a report like a pistol-shot. The first leap subsided, but was instantly followed by another and another, each less lofty than the one before it. Then the stream became fairly steady, but with about three times its customary supply, so that quite a rill of water ran away across the quartz, to be absorbed by the thirsty sand and gravel among the bushes.

Neither Ping nor Tah-nu-nu nor the Chiricahuas could be induced to come near the fountain again, but all the white men gathered around it and made guesses as to what had made it jump.

"Something volcanic," said the captain.

"Been an earthquake somewhere, it may be," said the colonel.

All that evening there was more or less discussion of the remarkable performance of Cold Spring, and everybody missed the right guess. It was only a splash caused by the avalanche when it plunged into the mountain reservoir which supplied the chaparral and the sage-hens and the jackass rabbits and the other wild animals there with water. Nothing could well be more simple, and there was no soundness whatever in the grave remark made to Ping and Tah-nu-nu by the old Chiricahua.

"Ugh!" he said. "Manitou Water heap good medicine. Good Apache manitou. Kah-go-mish get away now. Keep all pony."



CHAPTER XXXI.

PULL STICK AND THE HURRICANE.

Ping and Tah-nu-nu had had no good reason for complaining of their captivity. They had been well fed, they had each a magnificent handkerchief and a looking-glass medal, they had heard any number of new stories from the old Chiricahua, and they had seen how high the old manitou could make the spring jump when he heard good news. They were almost conscience-smitten to find how friendly were their feelings towards all those wicked cowboys and blue-coats, but they were sure that they could get over it all and be good Apaches again as soon as they should get out of that camp.

One thought came, every now and then, to trouble Tah-nu-nu. Colonel Evans had said that he meant to take Ping home with him and make a farmer of him, and Tah-nu-nu's mind drew a humiliating picture of The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead come down to work in a cornfield with a hoe.

She spoke about it to Ping, and he replied with some awful reminders of stories he had heard of the cruel manner in which little Indian girls were sometimes treated by hardhearted pale-face squaws. She might have felt worse but for a memory she had of a beautiful ribbon given her by a white lady at the Reservation headquarters.

Both of them knew that the cowboys and the blue-coats intended to march away early the next morning, and it added more than a little to their respect for the Apache manitou who managed the Cold Spring water-works. They believed that the great jump of the fountain had produced such an effect upon the pale-faces that their chiefs had determined to give up the pursuit of Kah-go-mish. The old Chiricahua was still detailed to watch the movements of the chief's children, but they were not tied up that night.

Neither had Cal been all day in the camp where he had been staked out the night before. He had seemed to listen so attentively to the stern warnings given him against any attempt at running away, and he had shown such good sense that very morning, that he was allowed to walk around as he pleased. He did so, and he succeeded in putting on an air of easy unconcern, although he knew that his movements were all closely noted by the keenest kind of human eyes. He could hardly for a moment be beyond the range of those of the dog-soldier police, but

their watch was blindness itself compared to that of the squaws and the young people.

The boys, of all sizes, avoided coming too near him, but it was not long before he made up his mind that every large tuft of weeds around that camp contained a Mescalero in his teens or under them. Little six-year-olders stepped away from behind trees, or sauntered out of bushes, or seemed to have errands which led them right past him. All of his own faculties were in a state of strained wakefulness, and he did not allow such things to escape him.

"I'll see the whole camp, anyhow," he said to himself, somewhat late in the day, after he had become accustomed to the queer sort of freedom given him. "I won't give them any excuse for piling fire upon me, but I want to know all about this place."

The stream along which the camp lay was hardly more than two yards wide in many places, but it ran slowly and seemed to be deep. There were places clear of bushes, here and there, where it could be seen, and it had a black look, from the density of the shadows which lay upon it. It was good water, pretty cool, and the Apaches had taken some fine fish out of it, but there was something remarkable in the fact that it ran in a straight line.

Cal walked slowly on, glancing at lodge after lodge. Most of them were pretty well peopled, and one that was not so had a guard before it, for it contained the treasures of the Mexican pack-mule train. There was not an Apache in the band wicked enough to have stolen anything out of that storehouse lodge, and the solitary dog-soldier who lounged in front of it was not there as a protection against human thieves. He was to keep out dogs, snakes, and any other kind of "bad medicine" that might attempt an investigation of the good things the loss of which Colonel Romero's cavalry were at that time growling about. He probably had other duties, but none of them related to Pull Stick, and Cal sauntered on, barely catching a glimpse of a pair of Apache boys who were doing the same among the trees on the other side of the brook.

He had never seen finer trees, nor had he ever before noticed precisely such a run of water, for just a little distance beyond the last of the widely separated lodges he came to a point where the stream turned off at right angles.

"It never did that of its own accord," suddenly flashed into the mind of Cal, and he added, aloud: "Some time or other it was dug out!"

"Ugh!" exclaimed a voice behind him. "What Pull Stick see?"

Cal pointed to the water and tried to explain himself, startled as he was a little by finding Crooked Nose so near him.

The deeply wrinkled, forbidding face of the Apache brave put on a look of very dark solemnity as he lifted a hand and pointed at something about a hundred yards beyond the turn in the stream.

"Ugh!" he said. "Pull Stick good eye."

The first thing that caught Cal's attention was an enormous dead tree, whose gaunt, leafless arms reached grimly out above a great mound that it leaned over. He looked again, following the line of the water, and saw something else that was remarkable. The small rill which fed that long, deep, shadowed channel fell into it out of a massive stone tank. The masonry was overgrown with vegetation everywhere except at the place where the rill poured out.

At some unknown day, away back in the past, when not one of those old trees had been more than a sapling, some people had been civilized enough and prosperous enough to construct that granite reservoir.

Cal stared intently, for the shadows were beginning to deepen, and he knew that he would be interfered with if he went too far in his first ramble. The stone tank did not contain all the masonry over which the dead tree was leaning. The mound itself arose four-square.

"It's one of those Mexican pyramids," exclaimed Cal. "I've read about them. Didn't know that any of them were ever found away up here."

He may or may not have been correct about that, but in a moment more he turned to Crooked Stick.

"Sun go down?" he asked.

"Ugh! No. Pull Stick get heap water."

The deepening of the shadows had not been altogether because that notable day of Cal's life had nearly gone. It was rather because black masses of thunderclouds had suddenly arrived, and had hidden all the sky above that part of the ancient Aztec forest.

Swiftly enough came a darkness that walked in among the tree-trunks and covered them so that they could not be seen at twenty feet away.

A vivid gleam of quivering lightning made everything stand out clearly for a second. Then came a deafening roll of thunder, and that was followed by another

burst of sound that Cal did not recognize. He did not even know the Apache word for cougar, which sprang to the lips of Crooked Nose. The beast which had uttered the terrified roar, however, came leaping past with tremendous bounds, as if the thunderbolt had fallen near him and he hoped to get away from it. Cal stood still, mainly because no time was given him for doing anything else, but the cougar almost brushed his shoulder as it sprang by him.

"Ugh!" said Crooked Nose. "Pull Stick great brave by and by. Good!"

Flash after flash, almost incessantly, followed the tremulous glare of lightning, and peal on peal followed the thunder, during a full minute, before any rain fell. Then it seemed to Cal as if one awful flash went through everything around him, bringing its rattling volume of deafening thunder with it. He was half-blinded, half-stunned, for a moment.

"That flash must have struck close by," he exclaimed.

So it had, for the next gleam showed him the gigantic trunk of the withered tree splintered through near the earth, its whitened stem, with its drapery of vines, toppling over to come down with a great crash upon the mound above which it so long had stood sentinel.

The next instant all was densely dark, for the rain came down in sheets, and all other sounds except that of the thunder were drowned in the roar of a great wind. Cal Evans had come into that forest to witness a hurricane.



CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER A FALLEN TREE.

Cal had been all day in a chaparral without water, and he knew by experience how very dry an alkali desert could be, whether under a hot sun or a brilliant moon. He had seen sudden storms before, for he was a ranch-boy, and there are wonders of electricity and rain at times upon the plains. Up to the moment when the hurricane struck the tree-tops, however, he had never fully understood what could be done by wind and water and thunder and lightning, at their very best working strength, working together. No wonder a poor cougar should be in a hurry to get under safe cover if he had any clear idea that all this was coming.

As for the trees, the healthy ones stood up to it admirably. They had all been through hurricanes time and again, and were, moreover, something of a protection to each other. Any tree whose strength had at all been sapped by internal decay, however, or which had failed to send out roots in due proportion to its height, was in more or less danger. Every now and then the crash of some old forest prince made Cal look up at the trees near him to see how they were doing. Crooked Nose crouched upon the ground in silence, not looking at anything. The trunk behind which they were partly sheltered was apparently worthy of especial confidence, it was so very thick and seemed so completely beyond the power of any wind to break.

"If any tree can stand it, this will," said Cal to Crooked Nose.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian. "Heap wind. Heap bad manitou."

The trunk of that tree fully justified Cal's confidence. It did not snap. At that very moment, however, there was a strong hand of the hurricane upon its broad top, and the general uproar was increased by a groaning, tearing sound.

"It's coming! it's coming!" shouted Cal, as he made a great spring into the gloom at its left, but Crooked Nose only lay flat upon the ground.

Ripping, tearing, splitting the earth on the windward side of the tree, and breaking off, with reports like pistol-shots, the roots of the giant growth gave way. Down, down, down came the grand old oak, crashing through branches and smaller trees in the way. It left a great hollow where its roots had been, but Cal need not have stirred one inch. If he had been twenty feet high he could have

walked under that fallen trunk without touching it.

"Safest place there is," he said to Crooked Nose. "Hear that?"

"Ugh!" replied he. "Bad medicine!"

Bad for something, perhaps, for it was the squall of an enormous cat in fright and trouble. It seemed as if the hurricane must have come for that particular tree, since it began at once to die away after the crash. The thunder ceased and the flashes grew fainter, while the small remains of daylight came back and made the dripping forest visible. The spirits of Crooked Nose did not at once return. He glanced at the mound, where the lightning-splintered wreck of the dead tree had fallen. He looked up at the oak-trunk over him, and he shivered as if from cold.

Once more the cry of the cat in trouble sounded just across the brook. The carbine carried by Crooked Nose lay upon the ground, and Cal picked it up. It was loaded, and its owner did not make the least objection when Cal took the weapon, sprang across the narrow channel, and began to search for that angry cry.

Yet again it sounded, and now it plainly came from among the branches of the fallen tree.

"That's so," said Cal. "Must be the same fellow. Hid in these bushes and got pinned down."

The frightened cougar had not thought of a trap, when he cowered in a little hollow behind a rotten log. It had not been set for him by either the oak or the hurricane, but it caught him, for a fork of one of the heavier limbs came down over that very hollow.

Cal thought he had never seen any real scratching done until that moment. The earth and leaves and sticks and bits of bark flew fast, as the powerful claws tore a passage out of that captivity.

"He's fighting to get away," said Cal.

"So'd I, if I saw any use in it. I could escape, too, in such a storm as this. If another should come, I'll try and be ready. His head and shoulders are free—there he comes!"

Crack! and the report of the rifle was answered by a loud whoop from Crooked Nose.

Out from his trap came the entire body of the cougar, in a convulsive struggle, and he lay dead upon the wet leaves, an ounce ball through his head requiring no second shot.

Whoop after whoop answered that of Crooked Nose, but Cal stood still, wet, very wet indeed, and almost wondering how he came to kill that tremendous wild beast.

The wrinkled, ugly face of the old Apache peered over his shoulder.

"Ugh! Heap bad manitou gone!"

Boys and braves came hurrying to the spot, and half a dozen angry dog-soldiers were eager to know who had fired a shot within the limits of the camp, contrary to rule.

"Crooked Nose kill cougar," was the first bit of broken English heard by Cal.

"Ugh!" was the reply. "Pull Stick."

There was a kind of fraud at work. The Apaches believed that Pull Stick had faced the very dangerous animal before him without any help. They had heard the wrathful squall, but knew nothing of the trap. Even when Cal explained it, the glory accorded to him was hardly diminished, for there lay the cougar, claws and all. He had performed a feat precisely equal to that of Ping.

Among the last to come was Kah-go-mish himself, and yet he did not look like himself. The red stocking-legs on his arms were soaking wet, and he wore no hat, while his entire visage had a look of intense dejection. It remained there until he caught a glimpse of the cougar's body, and he nearly repeated the exclamation of Crooked Nose: "Bad medicine gone! Ugh! Heap good!"

Slowly Cal began to understand the meaning of several things which Crooked Nose had told him when he pointed at the tank and the mound. That was a place which, as all Apaches knew, was "bad medicine" for them. They ought not to have camped there or put up lodges, and when the hurricane came it aroused all their superstitious fears. They had been dreadfully frightened; as much so as the poor cougar himself, and they would have cowered in any hole just as he did.

Cal's unexpected feat, therefore, had broken a sort of evil charm of that dangerous locality. He had used a gun, however, to which, as a prisoner, he had no right, and there were serious questions to be considered. He had not undertaken to escape, but he had trespassed upon the "bad-medicine" ground. A storm had come and the bad manitou had thrown trees at him to kill him. Then

he had sent a cougar to tear him to pieces. The bad manitou had not been strong enough, and Pull Stick had thus far escaped, but it was all very wonderful.

Kah-go-mish beckoned Cal to follow him, and they all recrossed the little stream and walked on to the lodge of the chief. Several other lodges stood near it, for none of them had been blown down, but all things wore a soaked, miserable appearance in the dull gloom now settling down over the "bad-medicine camp." The squaws were trying to rekindle the deluged fires, but without any success. Wah-wah-o-be, at her own heap of wet ashes in front of the lodge, was ready to give up in despair.

Kah-go-mish was exchanging guttural sentences with a group of gloomy-looking, elderly warriors, when Cal took out his pocket-knife, picked up a piece of pine wood and began to make splinters and shavings of it. He then took from an inner pocket a case of wax-matches, and in half a minute more he handed Wah-wah-o-be a blazing bunch of what to her was comfort.

"Ugh!" said Kah-go-mish to his counsellors. "Pull Stick good medicine. Heap bring fire. Friend."

That was the turning-point, and Cal had but barely escaped a much worse fate than that of Jonah. At that very moment, however, a mounted brave galloped in from the forest and drew rein before the chief with a sharp, warning exclamation that was echoed by every tongue. Even Cal exclaimed aloud: "Mexicans? Cavalry? Rancheros? What next?"



CHAPTER XXXIII.

LEAVING THE BAD-MEDICINE CAMP.

The camp in the chaparral at Cold Spring was astir before daylight that next morning. Every soul seemed to want a look at the Manitou Water, as well as a drink of it, immediately upon waking. Tongue after tongue declared, in English, Spanish, or Apache: "Just as it was before, only it runs a little stronger." That is, the avalanche had raised the level of the water in the mountain reservoir and the pressure was greater. Every season must have witnessed very much the same changes in the conduct of Cold Spring, but, as a rule, without any human eyes to take note of them. The sage-hens, the jackass rabbits and the antelopes had kept no record.

Cal's father was a sad-hearted man when he mounted his big black horse. He was turning his face homeward without Cal, and he almost forgot that he had come in search of stolen horses.

Ping and Tah-nu-nu were given their own ponies, and were as ready for a start as was anybody else. As they reached the path-opening by which they were to go away, they turned and took a long look at the Manitou Water. It flowed on steadily, without a jump of any sort.

"Ugh!" said Ping. "Manitou sleep."

Colonel Evans and his cowboys, Captain Moore and his cavalry, all did the same thing, but not one of them made the same remark. The three remaining Chiricahua scouts also looked, and the old brave who had told stories to Ping and Tah-nu-nu shook his head, saying something about Kah-go-mish and bad medicine. He was thinking of the fourth Chiricahua who had been the first man of that expedition to drink of the bubbling snow-water.

"Have you any idea when or where we shall get our next news of Cal?" asked Captain Moore, as he rode along at the head of his column.

"No," said Colonel Evans, "but you can count upon one thing, they will try to steal away Ping and Tah-nu-nu. Every movement must be watched. Kah-go-mish and his band are far enough away by this time."

The keenest calculations are sometimes at fault. A sharp gallop of three or

four hours across the desert might have brought a rider from the chaparral very near the camp of the Apaches. If the palefaces, moreover, knew nothing of the movements or plans of the chief, he did not propose to be equally ignorant of their own. Hardly were they well away from the spring before something began to stir under the bushes behind the great cactus on the western side of the open. Then a human head became visible, and in a minute more a tall Apache warrior was stalking around the spring as if he were trying to find anything which the pale-faces might have left behind them. He was in no manner disposed to talk to himself, and his inspection was soon completed. After that, a half-mile of walking through the chaparral brought him to a bush where one of the stolen Evans horses was tied. He mounted and rode away, and when he left the chaparral he did not take the trail which the band had before followed, but struck off across the desert in a southeasterly direction.

If he had any intention of going back to the "bad-medicine camp-ground," he was making a mistake, because the lodges of Kah-go-mish were no longer there. The Apache scout who came hurrying in, after the hurricane was over and just before sunset the previous evening, had been very near to not getting in at all. He had been all but intercepted by a strong column of Mexican horsemen. The storm had helped him to escape from them, but beyond all doubt he would be followed.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!" loudly exclaimed the Mescalero statesman, and he added his own explanation of this new peril. These were not the Mexicans who had lost the pack-mules; not the command of Colonel Romero. They were probably the very force which had made a target of him as he stood so heroically upon the boulder, and into whose camp he had afterwards so daringly ventured after horses and plunder.

He knew that they were numerous, and he had no thought of fighting them. It was too late and too dark, he said, to begin any march that evening, but every lodge must come down, every pack must be made ready, and the band must move before daylight.

Cal had no idea how narrow had been his own escape from the cruel results of Indian superstition, but he had overheard enough to understand the present flurry and the packing. He sat down, not far from one of the rekindled camp-fires, and watched the proceedings. It made him feel bluer than ever to know that civilized soldiers were so very near. He saw his cougar brought in and skinned, and he ate a piece of the broiled meat cooked for him by Wah-wah-o-be. The moon arose and looked down through the tree-tops, but Cal did not feel like sleeping,

although his wet clothing had ceased to steam, and he felt almost dry.

The lodges were all down at last, and everything seemed quiet, when there came to Cal's ears precisely the same boding hoot that had sounded among the cypress branches above him when he was staked out.

"Must be the biggest kind of an owl," he muttered, but instantly he heard just such a sound again very near him.

He turned to look for the second owl, and there he stood, with one hand at his mouth, for this owl was Kah-go-mish, and he was distributing news and orders among his band.

There were rapid movements in all directions after that hooting. Pack-mules were led in. Squaws toiled hard and warriors worked like so many squaws. The horses of Kah-go-mish were led to the spot where his lodge had been, and one of them, bridled but without any saddle, was assigned to Cal with orders to mount at once. He had hardly done so before he heard near him a whinny that he knew.

"Dick," he said, "old fellow! Don't I wish I were on your back!"

His own saddle was there, and his own rifle and some other weapons were strapped to it. Other property was securely fastened upon them, and for that journey, at least, the red mustang had been turned into a pack-pony. He seemed to almost feel humiliated and downcast, but was otherwise in his usual condition, so far as his master could see.

Hoot! Hoot! Hoot! came the owl cries from the forest westward, and the braves in charge of the shadowy train began to urge it forward.

"Pull Stick, look!"

It was the voice of Crooked Nose, and he was tapping his carbine meaningly.

Cal nodded, but did not speak, for he understood the warning. His life was hanging by a thread, and he was in need of all the caution he possessed.

Every camp-fire was heaped high with fuel before it was left behind, and the forest was all the darker by contrast. The Apaches managed to pick their way, with the aid of torches. It did not seem to Cal that they had ridden far before the trees grew thinner, and there was more moonlight. Then there were no trees; a little farther on and there were no bushes; all was plain enough then, for the bare desert was reached, and Cal knew by the stars that the band was heading in an easterly direction well out from the line of timber.

Hardly had he said to himself, "Kah-go-mish got away in time, anyhow," before he heard a muffled tumult in the forest behind him. Every animal in the train was pushed more rapidly.

"Mexicans!" exclaimed Wah-wah-o-be. "Find fire. No find Kah-go-mish. Ugh!"

A sharp rattle of distant musketry offered her a sort of angry reply, but it only drew a laugh from Wah-wah-o-be.

The great chief she admired had been compelled to hurry up his plans, but he had not been caught in the surprise skilfully prepared for him by the Mexican commander. That officer had acted with energy and good judgment. He had determined to attack the Apaches in their camp at night, and he had not wasted an hour. He had deserved success, but he had not won it. The Apache owls had defeated him.

As the silent Mexican columns worked their slow way through the forest, they had remarked upon the uncommon number and wakefulness of those night-birds. They were in three divisions, dismounted for better work in the woods, and each division met its own owls, or seemed to. They saw the glare of the camp-fires and moved more slowly, with greater caution, in excellent order, until they had all but surrounded the bad-medicine camp-ground. A bugle-note gave them a signal for a simultaneous shout, and they shouted. Another bade them fire a volley towards the camp-fires, and they fired it. A third bugle sounded the charge, and the Mexicans dashed in magnificently. If there had been any Apaches there, not an Indian could have escaped, or at least not a pony or a lodge.

"Kah-go-mish has gone!" roared the disappointed officer, and his entire command agreed with him, but not a soul of them all could guess in what direction, by any light that the chief had left behind him.

As for Cal Evans, he had received an important lesson concerning the ways and wiles of Indian warfare, and his own escape seemed more impossible than before.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

TAH-NU-NU'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

Santa Lucia seemed to be under a cloud, in spite of the bright June weather. Vic grew more and more uneasy, and did not try to conceal it. She was not able to understand how her mother maintained such an external appearance of self-possession.

"I wish we had two letters a day from them," she exclaimed for the third or fourth time.

"One would satisfy me. Oh dear! Why can't we know something about them!" responded Mrs. Evans, and the broken serenity helped Vic.

Perhaps it was as well that no letter came, since any written from Cold Spring would have carried the dark tidings which Colonel Evans was bringing home with him.

Captain Moore made a push that morning straight across the desert, that he might reach water and pasturage before noon if possible. The sun was hot, and frequent halts were needful for the horses, but the forced march was made with perfect success.

"Well, boys," exclaimed the captain, at last, "I'm glad to see grass again."

"Seven hours," the sergeant responded, "is a sharp pull, captain; how far do you think we've come?"

"Twenty-five miles of gravel," said the captain. "There! Glad of that!"

A whoop from a Chiricahua scout, in advance, announced at that moment that water had been found. It was a tree-shaded pool, evidently fed by springs. Around it was a bit of forest, and outside of that were scattered patches of chaparral.

"Well on my way home!" groaned Colonel Evans, "and Cal is not with me."

Through all that weary ride Ping and Tah-nu-nu had plodded along cheerfully. They had talked with anybody who wished to have a chat, and had given no token of discontent. They did not look at all like a pair of plotters, but they had conferred much in their own tongue when no Chiricahua was within hearing.

They had plenty of opportunities, for those three red-men had undergone a change. Even the story-teller had been moody and silent ever since the great spirit of the Manitou Water.

Although of another band, which had become nominally friendly to the pale-faces, the Chiricahuas were as much Apaches as were the Mescaleros, and had been every way as bitterly opposed to life on any Reservation. Their present friendship was with American blue-coats only, and not with Mexicans, and Kah-go-mish had smitten their old enemies in a way to merit their approbation. All that, and their traditions and superstitions, laid a capital foundation for the Manitou Water to work upon. To their minds they had been notified that it was "bad medicine" for them to do anything against Kah-go-mish upon his present war-path. If they were ever to kill him, it must be at some future time when things were going against him and his medicine was defective.

Stronger and stronger grew the pressure of the vague ideas that took possession of the minds of the three scouts. They even looked hard at the pool of water they now led their horses to, as if this also might present some supernatural tokens. They had been there before, and they now found nothing new, but they felt as if they did, and each in turn remarked, "Bad medicine." Something rippled the water away out in the middle. Perhaps it was a fish, perhaps it was a frog or a snake or a water-rat, or it may be that an old ripple had been tied up at the bottom and had just broke loose and come up for air. Whatever it may have been, the old story-teller winced when he saw it.

"Ugh!" he said. "More manitou. Chiricahua no fight Kah-go-mish. Bad medicine."

None of the white men overheard that remark, and none of them dreamed of watching Chiricahuas after what had occurred at the spring. The feud between the two bands was supposed to be more bitter than ever.

It was decided by Captain Moore that several miles must be added to the day's journey as soon as the horses had fed and were rested, in order that something might be done towards catching up with the possible movements of Kah-go-mish.

Ping and Tah-nu-nu mounted their ponies, but just before they did so the old Chiricahua came and seemed to be spinning to them some of his yarns. It must have had reference to the pool, for he pointed at it, and both of them nodded as if it were an interesting story.

No story of the past had been told, but one of the immediate future had been

suggested. In fact, it was all carefully planned out, and all that remained was to act it out, for there was no one there to write it.

The intention of the cavalry and cowboys was to take things easy that afternoon, and they rode on in a long, straggling cavalcade, among groves of trees, reaches of grass, clumps of bushes, and occasional bits of rocky ground, while away to the south were evidently mountains such as Kah-go-mish led his band through after his great feat in the character of a log with a knot on it.

Up to this time Ping and Tah-nu-nu had hardly been separated for a moment, but now he seemed willing to lag towards the rear, talking with the old Chiricahua, while she rode forward with the others, as if she too had become a scout. If any white man had suspected them of a purpose of getting away, the suspicion disappeared when this was seen.

Colonel Evans had no suspicion concerning Tah-nu-nu or the two Chiricahuas, but he almost wanted to put away his thoughts of Cal, and he pushed his big black horse on alongside of her pony. There were flashes in her dark eyes and there were tightenings of her lips, and now and then she glanced right and left half excitedly. She drew her breath very hard and glanced at the Chiricahuas as she and the colonel rode past a rugged patch of craggy forest. His face was as if made of wood, but he said "Ugh!"

The whip in Tah-nu-nu's hand fell sharply upon her pony's flank. It was a blow given in utter vexation, rather than purposely, but the pony sprang forward all the same. So did the big black, and the strong hand of Colonel Evans reined in the pony.

"No, Tah-nu-nu," he said, "you can't get away."

"Ping is the son of a great chief!" she exclaimed, angrily. "Got away! Whoop! Heap good! Tah-nu-nu stay! Die! No pale-face!"

She was intensely excited, her dark, regular features were flushed, and the colonel said to himself that she looked like another girl. All three of the Chiricahuas were with him at that moment. Not one of them took any notice of Tah-nu-nu's utterances, but the colonel straightened in the saddle. "Boys," he shouted to the nearest men behind him, "where's that young 'Pache? Go for him! The girl's been trying to escape!"

Men in blue uniforms and men in red shirts wheeled at once, shouting to others farther in the rear. The whole line wheeled and shouted and searched hither and thither, and not any were more active than were the three Chiricahuas.

It was all in vain. There was not a trace to be found of The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead.

Tah-nu-nu was suffering a terrible disappointment, and so was somebody else. Colonel Evans felt badly enough, but his caprice for a chat with Tah-nu-nu had prevented the superstitious Chiricahuas from entirely avoiding the "bad medicine" of Kah-go-mish. Part of it had been put away when the old storyteller, riding by Ping's side, had remarked, "Ugh! Heap bush." He came out of that bit of chaparral all alone, and, for some reason, Ping knew where he ought to expect a meeting with Tah-nu-nu. He did not at once walk his pony as the rest were doing, but galloped hard for quite a distance. He made a wide circuit in advance and at last dismounted upon the summit of a ledgy hill, among crags and forest trees. Here he could look down and see what occurred, and almost hear what was said as the cavalcade went by.

"Heap rock!" he had exclaimed. "Now Tah-nu-nu come."

Then he saw why she did not, could not come, and his disappointment was as bitter as any human disappointment well could be. A light which had grown in his dark young face faded from it. He hung his head almost listlessly as he wheeled his pony southward. He had escaped and he could not return into captivity, but Tah-nu-nu was still a prisoner. What should he say to Kah-go-mish and Wah-wah-o-be? That is, indeed, if he should succeed in finding his own perilous way to the lodges of his band.



CHAPTER XXXV.

HAND TO HAND BY FIRELIGHT.

Colonel Evans and Captain Moore were vexed more deeply than they could have told by the escape of Ping. How it had been accomplished was a mystery. It was of no use whatever to lay the blame upon the Chiricahuas, or to ask them any questions. Each had been able to render a seemingly good account of himself, and each had taken the occasion to declare his undying enmity to Kah-go-mish and all his band. They did not tell how much better they felt, now that Ping's part of the "bad medicine" which threatened them had galloped away.

As for Tah-nu-nu, she had never before known what it was to feel lonesome. So long as Ping had been in the camp she had been able to keep up her spirits, but now even her pride almost broke down, and if she had not been the daughter of a great chief she could have cried about it all.

One of the two securities for Cal's safe return having disappeared, there was sure to be greater care taken of the other. Sam Herrick had probably never said "Colorado!" more emphatically than he did when he added: "Well, now, I'd like to see that gal git away. She won't!"

Cal should have had still greater security held for him by his friends instead of less, for the events of the previous night had by no means ended when the squaw and pack-mule part of the Apache encampment succeeded in getting out into the open desert.

The Mexican commander had made all his plans with caution as well as with skill, and their nature had been but imperfectly reported to Kah-go-mish. That chief knew that his assailants were drawing near the camp, through the woods, on foot, in three detachments. He knew that each body of soldiers was too strong for him to face, and that all had been cavalry before they dismounted. He was sure, therefore, that away in the rear of all must be a drove of several hundreds of horses. What he did not calculate upon was the strength and vigilance of the detachment left in charge of those horses.

When, therefore, the Apache camp was abandoned, and all its treasures of quadrupeds and stores had been hurried out of harm's way, Kah-go-mish did not go with his family and household goods. He and a score of his best warriors rode

away upon an errand worthy of so great a commander. They made a wide circuit, along the edge of the plain, entered the deep forest once more, dismounted, tied their horses, and pushed rapidly forward on foot. They were in the rear of the attacking columns, and were very near to the rear-guard and its drove when the Mexicans dashed in upon the camp.

Creeping from tree to tree, nearer and nearer, the chief and his chosen braves reached the right spot and were entirely ready for the dash which they also had prepared at the moment when they heard the rattling volleys, the shouts, and the bugle-calls.

Small fires had been kindled by the Mexican rear-guard, and there were torches here and there, but these were not enough. The darkness was still sufficient to conceal from the creeping Apaches the fact that the Mexican commander had left a hundred men to guard his precious quadrupeds. He had stationed them well, also, and they were on the alert for Indians.

Loud rang the war-whoops of Kah-go-mish and his daring followers, and their rifles cracked rapidly for a half-minute before they sprang out of their cover. Not many bullets could be expected to reach a human mark by firelight and torchlight. Very few soldiers were touched, but quite a number of horses received wounds which made them give tenfold effect to the panic and fright produced by the yells and rifle-reports. Neighing, kicking, screaming, the entire drove broke loose as the Apaches dashed in among them, and the shadowy woods around were full of trampling hoofs.

As a military manœuvre, the plan of Kah-go-mish had thus far been a complete success, for he wanted only a stampede, and had no idea of capturing any of those horses. There, however, his success ended. The drove was scattered, so that there could be no immediate pursuit of him and his, but the Mexican militia had not been stampeded. They stood their ground like brave fellows, and closed in at once upon the whooping red-men.

Bitter was the wrath of Kah-go-mish, for he found himself outnumbered several times. Half of his own warriors had instantly disappeared among the trees, as was their duty. The other half went down around him, man by man, whooping, firing swift and deadly shots, but well aware that for once their trusted leader had led them into a death-trap.

There came a lurid moment when he stood alone, in front of one of the blazing heaps of light-wood, surrounded on all sides by men who had drawn their sabres because they could not use firearms for fear of hitting one another.

Calm and ringing was the whoop of defiance with which he stood at bay, a revolver in one hand and a bowie-knife in the other.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief!" he shouted.

Another whoop sprang to his lips, but it was not completed. There were flashes of steel blades in the shadows around him, and he fell heavily upon the grass.

The Mexican commander was as much astonished by the sounds of battle behind him as he had been by the deserted condition of the camp he had intended to surprise. He ordered his three detachments to wheel at once, but they were impeded by the part of the stampeded drove which rushed in their direction. There were shouts and exclamations all along the line as the frightened animals broke through, but the officers held their men well in hand and pushed steadily forward. It was all a riddle until they marched out at the line of corral camp-fires. There were the rear-guard, drawn up in perfect order, except a few who were out in the woods gathering horses, and a few who were wounded, and a few more who would never mount again.

Explanations were promptly made, and the officer commanding the rear-guard was warmly commended.

"The Apache chief fell," he said. "Kah-go-mish."

"What?" exclaimed the commander. "Kah-go-mish? That is enough. It was worth what it cost."

An hour or so later all that was left, a dozen out of the score who had ridden with the chief, caught up with their band. They came in silence until they were very near. The entire train halted, and a sort of shudder seemed to run through it. Not so should a war-party have returned, under the leadership of Kah-go-mish. There should have been a well-known voice, sounding its accustomed whoop of triumph. Instead of it another voice arose, long drawn and mournfully. It was the death-whoop of the Apaches, and it was answered by a woman's involuntary wail, for Wah-wah-o-be knew that the signal had been given for Kah-go-mish.

Crooked Nose had not been with the chief's party, but had ridden by Cal as a special keeper. The instant he heard the death-whoop he turned to his charge and said, in a not unfriendly manner: "Pull stick got bad manitou. Ugh! All Apache heap mad. Heap kill. Great chief gone dead. All paleface die. Heap bad medicine."



CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW CAL WAS LEFT ALL ALONE.

All that Crooked Nose had said about the grief and wrath of the Apaches over the loss of Kah-go-mish was true, but Cal seemed for a few hours to be almost forgotten.

"Tan-tan-e-o-tan is a great chief," said the warrior upon whom the direction of affairs appeared as a matter of course to fall.

He was the short, intoed, bow-legged brave who had been accustomed to command in the now dead leader's absence, and he had never yet told anybody how much he envied and hated Kah-go-mish. His first duty was to get away from the Mexicans without losing any more braves or horses, and there was no time for mourning. He then saw before him an immediate path to safety if not to glory, and he determined to follow it. He did not know that he had determined to carry out the great plan of Kah-go-mish.

Very faint and difficult to find or follow was the trail left upon the sun-baked, wind-swept gravel of the plains by the dejected Mescalero cavalcade. It was several hours before Tan-tan-e-o-tan and his warriors deemed it safe to turn again towards the line of forest and find a new camp-ground.

They knew that they were in no immediate danger, for the Mexican cavalry could undertake no pursuit that night. Even when morning came a large part of the horses Kah-go-mish had stampeded were yet roving through the woods. Scouting parties were sent out in all directions, however, and a courier was hurried away with the news of the destruction of the dangerous chief and of the eight warriors who had fallen with him. Unlucky Colonel Romero, two days' journey westward, was at the same hour penning a sad despatch announcing the loss of his mules and supplies.

Tah-nu-nu once more awoke as a prisoner in the hands of the pale-faces, and the first thought which came to her was that Ping was gone and that she was alone. A remarkably good breakfast was provided for her, and while she was eating it she heard Captain Moore say, with emphasis: "You are right, Colonel Evans. Your best plan is to strike for home by the shortest road. You won't hear one word more about Cal before you get there. What Kah-go-mish means is

plain. He wants to keep as many of your horses as he can and trade your boy for his girl. He can't stay in Mexico. You'll hear from him at Santa Lucia. My trip is ended and I'm willing to push as fast as ever you wish."

Tah-nu-nu asked the Chiricahuas about it soon afterwards, and then she knew that she was to be taken to the lodge of the long cowboy chief, and kept there until Kah-go-mish should come and pay ponies for her. It was an awful thing for an Indian girl to think of, but there was no help for it, and she mounted her pony, sure of being well guarded. It was Sam Herrick's turn or Bill's, to ride by her side whenever the colonel was not there. The Chiricahuas were not needed any more, considering what had become of The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead.

They did not, indeed, know what had become of him. Perhaps the old Chiricahua guessed that he had been hidden among the "heap rock" boulders and crags at one time, and knew why Tah-nu-nu did not join him. Even for the dusky scouts all was guess-work beyond that.

Somewhat so had it been to Ping himself, but he had not listened to all the wise words of his father and the elders of his band for nothing. Even the stories told him by Wah-wah-o-be had been full of instruction. From one of these, concerning the feats performed by a great brave of the Apaches, he had derived lessons which had just now been of value to him. So had the uncommon size of the Reservation-collection trousers which had fallen to his share. Even after they were cut off at the knee there was room in them for another boy of his size. The pockets were so many canvas caves, and they were pretty well filled. Any boy knows that a pocket will hold a large part of his property if he keeps on putting things in, and Ping had put in everything he or Tah-nu-nu could lay their hands on. The pale-faces had his bow and arrows, but he had collected their full value. One trouser leg concealed a bowie-knife and the other a revolver. There were hooks and lines in one pocket and some cartridges, with some hard-tack. A large chunk of boiled beef was in another, and it was plain that the Chiricahuas had done something to prevent a famine to Ping from bringing upon them more of the "bad medicine" of Kah-go-mish. Unless he should meet with enemies or with too wide a desert, Ping was fairly well provided for a hunting and fishing excursion. He had never in all his life felt so proud and warrior-like as when he rode out from among the crags and wheeled his pony southward to find the trail of his people. He did not reach it that day, but when he made his lonely camp-fire at night, ate for supper some fish he had caught and the last of his chunk of beef, he would have been all over comfortable and satisfied if only Tah-nu-nu

had been with him instead of being a long day's march nearer Santa Lucia.

That same night was by no means so comfortable for Cal. Tan-tan-e-o-tan had not so much as spoken to him all day long, but neither had he spoken to Wah-wah-o-be. He had seemed to grow haughtier and more gloomy from hour to hour, and had given orders as if he had been Kah-go-mish and a trifle more. The march had been through as much desert and chaparral and rocky ground as was convenient, and an early camp was made in order that the four-footed wealth of the band might have a long rest and a good feed. Tan-tan-e-o-tan declared that they would need it, since the next day's trail would be through mountain-passes.

"Good!" said Wah-wah-o-be. "Do what Kah-go-mish say. Heap bad Indian. Ugh!"

The band had lost its chief and some warriors, but it was rich in horses, ponies, and mules. Part of these were doubtful property so long as the band remained in Mexico, but might not be so much so if carried north of the boundary line. The Santa Lucia quadrupeds, on the other hand, had no Mexican claimant, but would be poor property in the United States. These facts presented serious questions, and Tan-tan-e-o-tan reflected that Pull Stick was the only person in his camp who not only knew the whole story, but would be willing to tell it if he had a chance given him. There was much talk among the leading braves that night, as well as much mourning for Kah-go-mish and the fallen warriors. No decision was reached, and Crooked Nose told Cal that every friend of Wah-wah-o-be and her children had been opposed to "Make heap fire all over Pull Stick."

Wah-wah-o-be herself was too full of grief to say anything, and Cal was left with a pretty clear idea that his case was getting darker. It was not easy to keep up much courage, but he was very weary in mind and body, and he slept as well as any fellow could, lying on the bare ground with his hands tied behind. He was untied when morning came in order to eat his breakfast, and he was busily at work upon it when a great shout at the other side of the camp was answered by a positive yell of delight from Wah-wah-o-be.

"Ping! Ping!" she screamed, and added all the syllables of his best name.

There was a grand time after that, and The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead was a hero and the most important person in the entire camp. Even Tan-tan-e-o-tan considered him so until his report was made as to what the blue-coats and cowboys were doing, and Wah-wah-o-be did not give it up then. She was comforted concerning Tah-nu-nu, while Ping listened with all the trained

steadiness of an Indian brave to the dark, tidings of the death of Kah-go-mish.

He listened in silence, looking at Cal, and it may be that he had in his mind a picture of the first glimpse which he and Tah-nu-nu had had of the young pale-face horseman, for his next inquiry was concerning the "heap pony."

Wah-wah-o-be sprang from the ground, where she had seated herself for her recital. She darted away; and in a few minutes more Cal saw her return.

Well might Ping's delight break through his grief, for with one bound he was upon the back of the red mustang. Cal's belt, with its pistol and cartridge case, his repeating rifle, his elegant knife, even his Panama hat, were duly delivered to The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead. Saddle and bridle and all, Ping had taken the place of Pull Stick as the master of the swiftest, toughest, best mustang in all southern New Mexico—just now in old Mexico.

Part of Ping's news had been that he had seen and been seen by a party of Mexican cavalry. There were not many of them, apparently, but he was now summoned to pilot some braves who were to ride out and take a distant look at them. Proud was he, and a proud squaw was Wah-wah-o-be when he rode away upon the red mustang.

It was a dark hour for Cal. The preparations for breaking camp went swiftly on. They had been nearly completed when Ping appeared, and now every pony and mule and horse was soon in motion. No pony was brought for Cal. Instead thereof came Tan-tan-e-o-tan, with a grim scowl upon his face. He was accompanied by a pair of Apaches as merciless as himself, and they had plainly determined to put away the one witness whose memory and tongue were dangerous to them. They did not see fit to use lead or steel or fire, but Cal was more securely staked out this time. No twig was driven into a gopher hole, and he was told, "Pull Stick get away now. Ugh! Medicine gone."

Their task accomplished, they remounted and rode away, leaving their victim alone and helpless in the shadowy forest.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

RESCUED BY THE RED MUSTANG.

The scouting party of Mexican cavalry reported by Ping were few in number, and were a long distance from any support. They had been willing enough to follow the movements of a solitary Indian boy, but were not disposed for a skirmish with the braves who now rode out of the forest behind Tan-tan-e-o-tan. There would have been no brush at all if it had not been for the revengeful tumult in the heart of Ping, and for the fact that he was so splendidly armed and mounted.

The men in uniform yonder belonged to the troops who had slain Kah-go-mish, and Ping shouted, in Apache, "I am the son of a great chief!"

He disobeyed a warning whoop of Tan-tan-e-o-tan, for he was bent upon riding within range, and Dick bore him swiftly onward. All the warlike thoughts and hopes which make up the thoughts of an Indian boy were dancing wildly around in his fevered brain. He was a warrior, facing the ancient enemies of his race, the men who had killed his father.

Alas for Ping! Range for him was also range for the now retreating cavalry, and his one fruitless shot was replied to by a volley.

"Zst-ping!" he exclaimed, involuntarily shouting his own nickname, as the bullets whizzed past him, and then he felt suddenly sick and dizzy. One ball had not gone by.

Dick obeyed the rein and wheeled towards the forest, but after that he was left to his own guidance. Ping was not unconscious, and he clung proudly, courageously to his rifle—Cal's repeater. He held on to the pommel of the saddle with one hand, but he hardly knew more than that he was riding the "heap pony"—riding, riding, riding—somewhere.

Tan-tan-e-o-tan alone followed, at a considerable distance, the wounded son of Kah-go-mish, the other braves dashing away at once to join the band upon its eagerly pushed retreat into the mountains.

Under the shade of the forest trees, near the waning camp-fire at which Wah-wah-o-be had cooked his breakfast, lay poor Cal. For him, apparently, all hope

had departed, for he had vainly struggled to loosen the forked stakes which held down his hands and his feet.

"I've no chance to pry," he groaned, "or I could do it;" but then that is the very reason why the red-men fasten their prisoners in that manner. Any man can pull up such a stick, if he can get a pry at it or even a direct pull.

"I shall die of hunger and thirst and mosquito bites," he said. "It's worse than killing one right off. It's as bad as fire could be!"

Just then he heard the sound of a horse's feet, and he drew his breath hard as he listened. Was it one of the Apaches come to torture him? Could it be a Mexican? It was a moment of awful expectation, and then he exclaimed, "Dick!"

Dick had come, and he had found his way to the camp he had left, and he had brought home his young rider, but that was all, for Ping reeled in the saddle and then fell heavily to the earth. He was never to become a war-chief of the Mescaleros. His first skirmish had been his last.

"Dick!" again shouted Cal, and the faithful fellow at once walked over to where his master lay. He seemed to understand that something was wrong with Cal, for he pawed the ground and neighed and whinnied as if asking, "What does this mean?" Dick's eyes had an excited look, and his ears were moving backward and forward, nervously, when again there was a sound of coming hoofs. Cal raised his head and saw Tan-tan-e-o-tan spring from his horse, stoop and examine poor Ping.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Heap dead!" A whoop followed instantly—a fierce and angry whoop.

One of Dick's pawing forefeet had been unintentionally put down close by Cal's left hand. It was a quick thought, a lightning flash of hope, which led Cal to grasp the hoof with all the strength he had.

Dick lifted his foot, and oh, how Cal's wrist hurt him, in the sudden, hard wrench that followed! It was his last chance for life and he held on, and the whoop of Tan-tan-e-o-tan was given as he saw the forked stake jerked clean out of the ground.

Forward, with another yell, sprang the angry savage, drawing his knife as he came, but that screech was too much for the nerves of the red mustang. Out went his iron-shod heels, and there was a sharp thud as one of them struck between the eyes of Tan-tan-e-o-tan.

"Hurrah for Dick!" shouted Cal, as his enemy rolled over and over upon the ferns and leaves. "That fellow won't get up again."

Cal could now toil away with his lame hand to set the other at liberty. After that he was glad to find his knife in his pocket, for one of his ankle stakes refused to come up, and had to be whittled through. He worked with feverish, frantic energy, and he barely finished his task in time. He had only to whistle for Dick. His whole body seemed to tremble as he hurried forward to regain the belt and rifle which Wah-wah-o-be had so proudly given to Ping. The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead would never need them or the "heap pony" any more.

Cal did not mount, but led Dick away into the cover of the forest.

"We should be seen if I rode away now," he said to Dick.

Hardly was he well concealed behind dense bushes before, as he peered out, he saw Wah-wah-o-be, followed closely by Crooked Nose, gallop into the deserted camp. She had already heard that Ping was wounded, but not how badly, and she threw herself upon the ground beside him with a great cry. Crooked Nose bent for one moment over Tan-tan-e-o-tan, and the Apache death-whoop rang twice, long and mournfully, through the forest. It was followed by fierce and angry utterances, among which Cal caught something about Mexicans, and then Crooked Nose looked sharply around him.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Heap Pony gone. Pull Stick gone! Big medicine. Bad manitou."

Cal's second escape was plainly a greater mystery than the first had been. It was as Crooked Nose declared, and he was a boy whose medicine enabled him to get out of tight places.

Cal decided that it was time for him to get away, lest others should come, for he did not know how fast the band was retreating. He had a thought, too, of meeting the Mexicans who had wounded Ping. He picked his way carefully, stealthily, among the trees, followed faithfully by Dick, and at the outer border of the forest he mounted. No Mexicans were in sight, nor any Indians, and he knew that beyond the broken ground before him lay the desert. What he did not know was that his father and all who were with him were already two days' march on their homeward journey.

"I can find my way by the sun and by the stars," he said to himself. "I've had my breakfast. Dick can have some grass by and by. I may kill game on the way.

Never mind if I don't. Santa Lucia is off there to the northeast. Now, Dick, this is your business. How many miles can you put behind you between this and sunset?"

Dick pawed the ground, but he said nothing. Cal examined his cartridges; filled two or three empty chambers in his rifle and revolver; tightened the girth of his saddle a little; fixed his belt right—

"Dick!" he shouted. "Now for Santa Lucia!"

Away went the red mustang, and if any Indians had followed him, they would have lost the race.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW THEY ALL REACHED SANTA LUCIA.

A band of Indians who are in a great hurry travel rapidly, even if now and then they leave a worn-out pony behind them. They are also pretty sure to take short cuts and to save distances, and that was more than Cal Evans was able to do.

The Chiricahua scouts with Captain Moore knew every inch of the country, and did not permit the cavalry and cowboys to do any needless travelling.

Late in the forenoon of the third day after Ping's first and last ride upon the "heap pony," all was serenely quiet at Santa Lucia. It was too quiet, altogether, because its inmates were in such blue anxiety that they did not feel like doing anything. Reading was impossible, and any effort at conversation did but repeat the regret that there was no news from Cal or his father. The failure of everything else accounted for the fact that at this hour Vic and her mother were upon the roof, sweeping the horizon with the field-glass.

Suddenly Mrs. Evans held out the glass, exclaiming: "Look! Vic! Cavalry!"

"Oh!" shouted Vic, and in a moment more they were hurrying down and out of the hacienda.

A roll of the prairie had hidden the approach of a column of mounted men until they were pretty near, and now all who wore uniform and a number of others halted at a hundred yards from the stockade gate at which Mrs. Evans and Vic were standing. One man dismounted and walked forward, leading by the hand a strangely dressed but comely-looking Indian girl. His face was flushed and troubled, and the eyes of the girl glanced timidly in all directions, as if seeking a means of escape from meeting those two pale-face squaws.

"Husband!" exclaimed Mrs. Evans, turning very pale, "where is Cal?"

"Cal!" echoed Vic, with painful eagerness.

"He is a prisoner," faltered the colonel.

"Father!" almost screamed Vic. "The Apaches have got him?"

"The same band that took the horses, and that this girl belongs to. Vic, this is Tah-nu-nu. We shall hear from Cal."

It was dreadful news, and it was not possible to hear it calmly, but Captain Moore now rode up and so did Sam Herrick. They had wished that first meeting over, and the report of Cal's captivity made without their being too near. Mrs. Evans managed to maintain her dignity fairly well to receive them, but they found Vic in an uncontrollable fit of crying.

"Vic," said her father, "don't cry. Cal will surely come back soon, safe and sound. Take Tah-nu-nu into the house."

At that moment they were all startled by a burst of cheering from the mounted men. Cheer followed cheer, and as the group at the gate turned to look, they saw a rider who dashed past the cavalry at full gallop. He was swinging his hat tremendously, but seemed unable to hurrah.

"Colorado!" shouted Sam Herrick. "Cal and the red mustang!"

After that nobody could have told what was said by anybody during a full three minutes. Then there came a sort of breathing-spell that was almost silence. They had begun to walk towards the house, and Vic was leading Tah-nu-nu a little in advance of the rest.

"How did you say you managed to get away from Kah-go-mish?" asked Captain Moore.

"It's a pretty long story," said Cal, "but there isn't any Kah-go-mish. He was killed in a fight with the Mexicans."

"Did Ping get in before you left them?" asked Colonel Evans.

"Yes, he did, father. I felt real bad about that. Such a young fellow. Not any older than I am."

"Killed, was he? Colorado! I'm sorry," exclaimed Sam Herrick.

The leading features of Cal's capture and escape had already been told, but they were now gone over more minutely, and it was determined not at once to tell Tah-nu-nu.

"I must think the matter over," said Mrs. Evans.

"Poor little thing!"

That was what Vic said, but she took Tah-nu-nu to her own room, and the shy, frightened look of the lonely Indian girl began to turn into one of relief, but also of intense curiosity. She saw nothing but friendliness in the face of Vic, and at last she remarked: "Tah-nu-nu glad Heap Pony get away."

Vic could laugh heartily at that, and she was joined by Tah-nu-nu when the chief's daughter discovered what was next expected of her. She rebelled stoutly at first, but Vic was determined to have her own way, and when they came out again Tah-nu-nu was too proud and shy to utter a word. She wanted to run away and hide, and yet she wished to be seen in her new outfit, for Vic had put upon her a dress which she herself had refused to wear because it was too brightly gay for her sense of dignity. Tah-nu-nu had very pretty moccasins of her own, and now, with white metal ornaments at her throat and upon her wrists, and with a bright ribbon in her coal-black hair, she was the best-dressed girl of the Mescalero Apaches.

It seemed too bad to tell her any saddening news then, and during all the rest of that day Tah-nu-nu was treated as an Indian gentleman's daughter on a visit to Santa Lucia.

It was a great day for Tah-nu-nu, and Norah McLory and the Mexican servants were explaining to her the wonders of the kitchen during the long time spent by Cal in telling the minute particulars of his adventures in the Cold Spring chaparral and in Mexico. His mother and Vic seemed disposed to keep their hands upon him, from the beginning to the end of his story, as if for fear that he might again be lost or captured.

Captain Moore and his cavalry camped near Santa Lucia that night, and marched away early in the morning.

Tah-nu-nu awoke in a pale-face bed, in a great lodge, such as she had seen before but never entered, and she hardly felt like a prisoner.

"Kah-go-mish is a great chief," she said, for her first thought was of his coming for her release.

An hour or two later she and Vic and Cal took a long horseback ride, and once more Tah-nu-nu admired the "heap pony." She was beginning to feel very much at ease, especially with Cal, for he had been acquainted with her family.

They had been back at the ranch but a short time when Sam Herrick came in and beckoned to Colonel Evans.

"What is it, Sam?"

"Colorado!" exclaimed Sam. "There's an Indian and a squaw come. The red mustang was out there, and the Indian whooped when he sot eyes onto him. They want to see Pull Stick."

"That's my name!" shouted Cal, and he sprang up and hurried out.

He was followed by everybody but Tah-nu-nu, and in a moment he was shaking hands with Crooked Nose and Wah-wah-o-be.

Their errand was briefly given. The whole band, what was left of it, had decided to return to the Reservation. They knew that in order to do so safely they must give up the Santa Lucia horses, and they had sent Wah-wah-o-be to say that they were ready to do it. What they did not add was that they were rich enough with the other quadrupeds won by Kah-go-mish in his successful war with Mexico. They wished to have word sent to the blue-coats. Nobody need follow them, and the horses belonging to Colonel Evans would be delivered next day, with two good Mexican mules to pay for his cattle. It was a capital bargain for him, and reduced his loss to a low figure. He agreed to it at once, and then Wah-wah-o-be asked for Tah-nu-nu.

"We are going to keep her," said Mrs. Evans. "We will keep you, too, if you will come. You need not go to the Reservation."

Wah-wah-o-be's blanket came up over her head, and her loud, wailing cry was heard in the adobe. In a moment more Tah-nu-nu's arms were around her mother, and she knew that she should never again see Kah-go-mish or The-boy-whose-ear-pushed-away-a-piece-of-lead.

Down upon the ground they sat, the great chief's wife and daughter, and it was hours before they could be persuaded to speak or to come into the house. When they at last did so, the mind of Wah-wah-o-be was made up. Kah-go-mish had declared that he would never return to the Reservation. Whatever others might do, therefore, she would not. Her proud position in her band was also gone, with her wise, brave husband and her promising son. She was ready to consent that Tah-nu-nu should remain at Santa Lucia. She would herself come back and bring her property with her.

Tah-nu-nu would hardly have consented if it had not been for the positive commands of her mother, and if these had not been helped by her wonderful new dress and by the urgency of Vic. She roundly declared, however, that she would never hoe corn.

Crooked Nose had very little to say after his first errand was completed, but just before he rode away he led Cal a little to one side. They were out in front of the adobe, and Dick was standing near them, unsaddled, unbridled, very much as if he were a house-dog, with a right to step around anywhere.

"Ugh!" said Crooked Nose. "Pull Stick get away again. How?"

"Heap Pony," said Cal, pointing to the red mustang.

"Ugh!" said Crooked Nose. "Who kill Tan-tan-e-o-tan."

"Heap Pony," replied Cal again.

"Ugh! Heap bad medicine. No like him. Pull Stick got manitou."

Something like that, in a higher and better form, was what Cal's mother had been telling him. She also declared that she meant to do all in her power for the squaw who brought Cal his gourd of water when he was all but dying of thirst, and for her bright-eyed daughter. Something very good was, therefore, in store for Tah-nu-nu. Perhaps it was something which Ping could not or would not have taken.

Wah-wah-o-be kept her word, and when she returned she brought quite a drove of horses, mules, and ponies with her, as the property of Kah-go-mish, and Colonel Romero was not there to identify any of them. Cal did not know one from another, whether they were Apache bred or Mexican, and he said so.

There was really but one horse in the world that he cared much about. In fact, not only he and his family, but the cowboys and Wah-wah-o-be and Tah-nu-nu were disposed to attach an almost human idea to the uncommon qualities of head and heart which had been displayed by the red mustang.

THE END.

Transcriber's Note

Some inconsistent hyphenation and spelling in the original document has been preserved.

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

Page 60 fale changed to face
Page 61 Chiracahua changed to Chiricahua
Page 64 Sante changed to Santa
Page 69 Gringoes changed to Gringos
Page 72 woop changed to whoop
Page 81 Chiracahua changed to Chiricahua
Page 85 Tar-nu-nu changed to Tah-nu-nu
Page 103 discontentetly changed to discontentedly
Page 154 led changed to lead
Page 217 spirt changed to spirit
Page 223 ranche changed to ranch

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