Golden Face
A Tale of the Wild West
Vol.II

By

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GOLDEN FACE: A TALE OF THE WILD WEST VOL.II

Chapter Twenty One

Truce.

It was afternoon, and quiet had settled down upon the emigrants' camp once more. While its inmates were despatching their muchneeded breakfasts Vipan and Oregon Dave had sallied forth upon a scout. They soon returned, reporting the whole party of Indians to be retiring over a distant range of hills some twelve miles to the eastward. So, pickets being posted to give warning should they think better of it and return, the cattle were driven down to the water and were now enjoying a graze under the watchful supervision of halfadozen men.

It was afternoon. Most of the inmates of the camp were recruiting themselves after their night of watching and the exciting events of the morning's conflict. A few drowsy snores, or now and then the puling cry of some child within the waggons, or perchance the clatter of pots and pans, as one or two of the women were cleaning up the culinary implements which had served for the morning meal; these were the only sounds which broke the slumbrous stillness.

Stretched upon the turf about fifty yards outside the corral, puffing lazily at an Indian pipe, lay Vipan. He alone of all there present seemed to feel no need of slumber. The dash and excitement of the conflict over, a strange reaction had set in. There was a look upon his face as of a man who, turning back upon the chapters of his own history, finds the reminiscences therein recorded the reverse of pleasant. It was also the look of one who is undergoing a new experience, and a disquieting one.

A light step on the grass behind him.

"Are you really made of castiron, Mr Vipan?"

"H'm, why so, Miss Santorex?"

"Because everyone else is snoring like the Seven Sleepers, and you, who have had as trying a time of it as any three of the rest put together, are still wide awake."

"I might say the same of you. You, too, have been awake all night."

“Oh, dear no; nothing like it. And nowand now we are alone, I want really to thank you as I ought, butbutI don’t know how,” broke off the girl, with a comic ruefulness that was inexpressibly bewitching. “Really, though, I never was further from joking in my life. Now that I have seen what those dreadful savages are like, I seem to realise what a frightful fate you saved me from,” she added earnestly, with a lovely flush.

“Let us talk of something else,” he answered, somewhat abruptly. “You showed extraordinary grit during the recent little unpleasantness between us and our red brothers. May I ask where, when, and how you served your apprenticeship as an Indian fighter?”

She laughed and gave a slight shiver. Now that they were over, the appalling experiences of the early morning could not but tell upon her. She was rather pale, and dark circles round her eyes told of an apprehensive and restless night.

“Poor Mrs Winthrop is quite ill this morning, and no wonder. I hope we shall have no more of those frightful experiences. And yet, to look round the camp no one would suspect that anything out of the way had happened.”

Vipan followed her glance. He was glad that all traces of the bloody struggle had been removedthe dead bodies, including that of the unfortunate emigrant who had been scalped, had been buried while the terrified and wornout women were sleeping the slumber of exhaustion.

“No, it was all horriblehorrible,” Yseulte went on, speaking gravely and sadly. “If I was not halfdead with fear it was thanks to my father’s teaching. He always used to say that panic was fatal to selfrespect, and still more fatal to selfpreservation. Child as I was, the idea took root, and I was able to conquer my fears of bulls or savage dogs, or mysterious noises at night, or at any rate very nearly so.”

“Quite, I should say. Your father must be a somewhat rare type of man.”

“He is. Wait till you see him. Then you will think so.”

“Is he coming out here, then?”

“Coming out here!” she echoed, wonderingly. “Oh, no. I am going back in a few months’ time. I mean when you come to see us and give him the opportunity of thanking you as I never can.”

Vipan looked curiously at her. They had been strolling all this while, and were now well out of earshot of the camp.

“When I come and see you,” he repeated. “To begin with, it is extremely unlikely I shall ever leave these festive plains, let alone go back to England.”

“Ah, you are English. I guessed that much from the very first. But I thoughtwe all thoughtyou were only out here on a trip.”

He did not even smile.

“Do you think, Miss Santorex, that a man out here ‘on a trip’ would be up to every move of a Sioux warparty? No; I have been out here a good many years. There are those in the settlements who speak of me as the white Indian, who have more than once attempted my life because I happen to feel more respect for the savage as he is than for that vilest of all scum of humanity the ‘mean white.’ Why, not many weeks ago I was in a far tighter place than this last little shindy of ours, and narrowly escaped with my life at the hands of the latter.”

“Bang!”

The picket posted on an eminence a mile distant had discharged his piece.

“We must cut short our walk,” went on the adventurer. “That shot means Indians in sight.”

A few minutes and the pickets could be seen riding in. As arranged, the cattle, which had been brought near on the first alarm, were now quickly driven into the corral.

The man who had fired the shot reported a large party of warriors approaching rapidly from the direction in which the assailants had retired. He reckoned it was the same lot coming back.

“Hoorar! Guess we’ll lick ’em into pounded snakes again,” drawled the long Kentuckian, on hearing this news.

“They don’t want to fight,” said Vipan, “or they wouldn’t have drawn off so kindly to let us water and graze the stock. This time they’re coming to talk.”

“Well, that’s better, anyhow,” said the Major. A sentiment which his wife, who was standing at his side looking very pale and scared, thoroughly echoed.

Mounted figures now began to appear on the ridge about a mile away, and presently the entire band was halted upon the eminence. Then a couple of warriors rode out from the main body, and advancing a little distance, made the peacesign. By way of answer a white towel was run up on a pole and waved above the waggon corral.

“I want you to see this, Miss Santorex,” said Vipan. “It’s a sight you may not see again in a lifetime.”

The band had now left its halting place and was riding slowly down towards the camp. If in the wild fury of their swooping charge the Indians had worn a savagely picturesque aspect, with their waving plumes, and flowing tags and scalplocks on weapon and garment, none the less now was the appearance of the warrior phalanx stately and striking to the last degree. So thought Yseulte Santorex, as she gazed with more admiration than fear upon this array of the barbaric chivalry of the Western plains.

The Indians approached in crescent formation, some halfdozen chiefs riding a little in advance. All were in their warpaintthe dresses of some being, moreover, exceeding rich with colour and embroiderythe eagleplumed crest of many a noted brave streaming to the ground as he rode. Not a warrior but showed some bit of gorgeous colour. Even the ponies’ manes were adorned with feathers and vermilion, and the lanceheads and floating pennants gleaming above the sea of fierce stern faces put the finishing touch to a battle array as martial and gallantlooking as it was redoubtable and ruthlessly unsparing.

“It is magnificent!” said Yseulte, as from the coign of vantage which the other had secured for her she surveyed the approaching band. “What tribe are they, Mr Vipan?”

“Sioux. There may be a few Cheyennes among them, but the warparty is a Sioux one. Take the glass, and I’ll tell you who some of them are. The chief there most to the right is CrowScalper, of the Uncpapa clan, a record of whose atrocities would keep you awake at night for a week.”

“He’s a splendidlooking fellow,” commented the girl, gazing withal at the gigantic warrior who had led the last and most persistent charge upon the camp.

“Oh, yes; I know him well. Many’s the hour I’ve spent in his lodge making him talk. Now, look again. The middle one is Mountain Catthe trappers call him Catamount, but the other’s the real rendering of his name. He hates the whites more than any Indian on this continent, and would willingly put a bullet into me if he got the chance. He’s an Ogallalla, and a good big chief too.”

“He looks an awful savage,” answered Yseulte, with the glass still at her eyes. “I never saw a more diabolical expression. Who is the man who has just joined them?”

“Lone Panthera halfbred Cheyennea small chief in standing, but a fiend when he heads a warparty. And now I must leave you for a little, and go and hear what they have to say. It may interest you to watch the progress of our conference through the glass.”

“That it will. But, oh, Mr Vipan, do try and persuade them to leave us in peace. You know them so well, I am sure you can.”

“I’ll try, anyhow, if only for your sake,” he answered, with a queer smile.

The three chiefs named had halted their band, and, attended by a couple of warriors displaying dingy white rags on their lancepoints, were cantering down towards the corral. Arrived within two hundred yards, they halted. There went forth to meet them Vipan, Major Winthrop, and one of the latter’s cowboys, who rejoiced in the name of Sam Sharp; also two of the teamsters to hold their horses.

When within a hundred yards of each other, both parties dismounted. The three chiefs, giving their horses to their attendants, advanced with slow and stately gait to where the three white men awaited them.

“Do we meet in peace, or do we meet in war?” began Vipan, as both parties having surveyed each other for a few moments the Indians showed no inclination to break the silence. No answer followed this straight question. Then Lone Panther, breaking into a broad grin, said:

“Injun brother Goddam hungry. White Colonel gib him heap ‘chuck.’” (Food.)

Of this flippant remark Winthrop, to whom it was addressed, took no notice beyond a signal to Vipan to carry the negotiations further.

The latter explained to the chiefs that the “white Colonel” entertained his friends, not his enemies. They had attacked his outfit, tried to run off his stock, and had made themselves a dangerous nuisance. But that the camp had been vigorously defended they would have killed every one in it. They could not do this, and now they came and asked to be feasted as if they were friends.

To this CrowScalper, putting on his most jovial smile and manner, replied that the whole affair had been a mistake. Young men, especially when on the warpath, would not

always be restrained; that being so, the chiefs were obliged to humour them. Beside, the warriors had no idea that these whites were among the friends of Golden Face, or that Golden Face was in the camp at all. Otherwise they would never have attempted to run off even a single hoof.

Vipan could hardly keep from roaring with laughter at the twinkle which lurked in the speaker's eye, as he delivered himself of this statement. Both he and the red man knew each other wellknew the futility of trying to humbug each other. Hence the joke underlying the whole thing.

What himself and his warriors most ardently desired now, went on CrowScalper, was to show themselves friends of the friends of Golden Face. To this end they proposed to accompany the waggon train as an escort. There were, he feared, bands of very bad Indians roaming the country, who would leave them unmolested if they had for escort a Dahcotah warparty. This course would wipe out all bad blood between them, and atone for the mistake they had made in attacking their dear friends the whites. So having settled this to his own satisfaction, CrowScalper suggested that a proper and most harmonious way of cementing their new friendship would be for the white men to join camp with their red brothers and to invite the latter to participate in a feast.

Vipan managed to preserve his gravity while translating these proposals for the benefit of his companions. The chiefs meanwhile watched every expression of their faces with steady and scrutinising gaze.

"They must take us for born idiots," said Winthrop.

"Thunder! I guess there's no end to the sass of a redskin," said Sam Sharp, the cowboy. "Travel with a warparty of pesky Sioux! Hawhawhaw!"

"Better conciliate them to a small extent, though I never did believe in buying off your Danes," said Winthrop. "I'll give them an order for coffee and sugar and tobacco on the post we last quitted; but I'll see them hanged before they'll get anything out of us here."

This resolve Vipan communicated to the chiefs. The white Colonel felt quite strong enough to protect his own camp and did not need the escort so kindly offered. At the same time his red brothers could best show their friendship by retiring altogether and leaving him quite alone. The chiefs had admitted their inability to control their young men under all circumstances, and this being so, it would be best to part good friends. They could proceed to Fort Jervis and obtain the supplies, for which he would give them an order.

The emissaries saw that the game was up. They might eventually wear out the patience and watchfulness of the whites, and obtain the scalps and plunder they so ardently desired, but they would have to fight. No safe and easy way of treachery lay open to the coveted spoil, and this they recognised.

Then Mountain Cat, who up till now had preserved a stern and contemptuous silence, said:

“Golden Face, the friend and brother of the Dahcotah! Should he not rather be called Double Face?”

The sneering and vindictive tone was not lost upon the other two whites, although they understood not a word of its burden. Glancing at Vipan, they noticed that he was as unconcerned as though the other had never spoken.

“Does one friend kill another?” went on the savage, his eyes flashing with hatred. “Ha! More than one of our young men has been shot this day. Who was their slayer? Golden Facethe friend and brother of the Dahcotah nation!”

“What were my words to the great Council at Dog Creek?” was the calm rejoinder. “‘Those who strike my friends strike me, and turn me into an enemy.’ Were there not enough whites abroad upon the plains for your warparty to strike without attacking my friends whom I accompany? Enough. My words stand. I never go back from them.”

For a moment things seemed to have come to a crisis. The chief made a step backward and cast a halfinvoluntary glance in the direction of his party. A threatening scowl came over his grim countenance, and his hand made a movement towards the revolver in his belt. But Vipan never moved a muscle, beyond carelessly dropping his rifle so as to cover the Indian in a manner apparently accidental.

“The Dahcotah have entertained a false friend in their midst,” went on Mountain Cat, darting forth his hand with a menacing gesture, “one who smokes in their council and then betrays them. Where is War Wolf?”

“Is War Wolf my horse or my dog that it is my business to take care of him?” was the coldly contemptuous reply.

“Who witnessed the scalpdance in our village at Dog Creek, when War Wolf showed his scalps? Who delivered him into the hands of the soldiers?” said the other, meaningly.

“I know who did notand that was myself. We may as well speak plainly. War Wolf appears to have gone about the country bragging how he took the scalps of two white men, when he ought to have kept his mouth shut. If he was seized by the soldiers he has himself to thank for it, and nobody elsecertainly not me, any more than yourself. I would even have warned him if I had been able, but it was impossible. That is enough about the matter.”

“Good,” repeated the savage chieftain, in a tone full of grim meaning. “Golden Face talks well, but in future our warparties will know an enemy from a friend.”

“So be it,” replied Vipan, wholly unmoved by the threat. “If your party attacks our outfit again, we shall fight, as we did before.”

“Excuse me,” put in Winthrop, who was waxing impatient during this protracted conversation. “Excuse mebut our friend there does not seem to enter into the situation in a right spirit. Here is the order. It is made available only up till three days hence. So if you will kindly inform him accordingly, no doubt we shall get rid of the whole crew.”

On the principle of “half a loaf,” the other two chiefs grasped the bit of paper eagerly. They were beaming with smiles, and brimming over with affection for their dear white brothers. Only Mountain Cat held scowlingly aloof. Then they returned to their men.

It was uncertain now how matters would turn. Watching them, the occupants of the corral could see that an animated conference was being held. Would there be another battle? Even if not, a large warparty like this, determined to annoy them, could soon reduce their position to one of imminent peril. By closely investing the camp they could render it nearly an impossibility for the stock to obtain proper grazinglet alone bringing all progress forward to an utter standstill. They could even make it a matter of extreme difficulty to replenish the water supplyand then, too, there would be the constant strain and fatigue of ever being on the watch against surprisewhether by day or night. So that when their conference ended, the whole party mounted their ponies and retreated in the same way as they had come, the feeling evoked in the minds of the spectators was one of entire and undiluted relief.

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Peril of the Plains.

“A ‘tenderfoot,’ and‘turned round’!” (Lost.) And the speaker hands his fieldglass to his companion. The latter brings it to bear and gazes with interest upon the object under observation.

The said object is a horseman, now between three and four miles distant. The observers from their point of vantage and concealment, a little belt of scrub and timber cresting a knoll, have been watching this object ever since it appeared on the skyline.

Thanks to the powerful glass they can make out every movement of the solitary horseman, and very irresolute his movements are. Now he reins in, and looks anxiously around; now he spurs his nag to the brow of some slight eminence, only to encounter disappointment, for the broad rolling plains lie around in unbroken monotony, affording no sort of landmark for the guidance of this inexperienced traveller. There is weariness and disappointment in his every movement. In his countenance there is morean expression of strong apprehension, not to say alarm. This, too, thanks to the developments of science, is clear to the observers.

“A ‘tenderfoot,’ and turned round,” repeats Vipan. “Now, what the deuce can he be doing here, alone, and away from his outfit? Whywhat’s the matter, Miss Santorex?”

“Looklook!” is the hurried reply. “Thereto the rightdown in the hollow! Whatwho are they?”

In her eagerness she has seized his arm, and her face has gone pale as death. But Vipan has seen at the same time what she herself has. His reply is grave and in one word.

For a new factor has appeared on the scene. Stealing around the slope of the hill, out of sight of the horseman, but so that a few minutes will bring them suddenly upon him, come nearly a score of mounted figures. Their plumed heads and long lances show them to be Indians, their painted faces and the fantastic trappings of their ponies show them to be warriors on the warpath. Their stealthy glide, as nearer and nearer they advance upon their wholly unconscious victim, leaves no doubt whatever as to their present intentions. Indeed, the observers can plainly distinguish the exultant grin on each cruel countenance as the warriors exchange glances or signals. A few moments, and the solitary horseman will ride right into their midst.

“Oh, can nothing be done to save him?” cried Yseulte Santorex, clasping her hands in the intensity of the situation.

“I’m afraid, under present circumstancesnothing,” was the reply, given with a calmness that outraged and exasperated her.

“What! I should never have believed it of you, Mr Vipan,” she cried, her eyes flashing with indignation. “I should never have believed that youyou of all menwould stand by and see a fellowcreature barbarously done to death, and make no effort to save him, or even to warn him.”

There was a strange look in Vipan’s eyes as he met her scornful and angry glancefull and unflinchingly.

“Should you not!” he replied. “Well, then, I would stand by and see a hetacomb of ‘fellowcreatures’ done to death, if the alternative lay in exposing you to serious danger.”

“Forgive me,” she said, hurriedly, and in a softer tone. “But leave me out of the question, and let us try and save him. See! There are not many Indians; we can surely do something. Oh! It is too late!”

The stranger’s horse was seen suddenly to stop short, pause, swerve, then start forward with a bound that nearly left his rider rolling on the plain. He had scented the Indians, who at the same moment appeared within a few hundred yards of the white man. Feigning astonishment at the suddenness of the meeting, one of the foremost warriors called out in broken English:

“How! White brother not run away. We good Injundamn good Injun! Stop!say ‘how.’ Smoke pipeeat heap ‘chuck’! Damn good Injun, we! White brotherstop!”

But the “white brother,” though obviously a greenhorn, was not quite so soft as that. For all answer he dug the spurs into the sides of his nag in such wise as materially to increase the distance between himself and the savages. The latter, baulked of an easy and bloodless capture, together with the rare sport of putting a prisoner to death amid all manner of slow and ingenious tortures, cast all pretence to the winds, as they darted in pursuit.

Then began a race for life, which the spectators could not but watch with thrilling interest. Fortunately for the fugitive, his horse was an animal of blood and mettle, and seemed likely to show a good lead to the fleet warponies. But on the other hand the fugitive himself was an indifferent rider, and more than once, wholly unaccustomed to

the tremendous pace, he would sway in the saddle, and only save himself by a hurried clutch at his steed's mane from being cast headlong to the earth. The whoops and yells of the savage pursuers sounded nearer and nearer in his ears, and the expression of his countenance, livid as with the dews of death, and eyeballs starting from their sockets, was that of such despairing horror as to turn one of the two spectators sick and faint.

"There's just a chance for him," muttered Vipan, more to himself than to his companion. "If he takes the right fork of the valley he's a dead mannothing can save him. If he takes the left, it'll bring him close under us, and I'll give him a hail."

"Do, for the love of Heaven!" gasped the girl through her ashy lips. "God will help us, if we try and save this stranger."

Along the valleybottom swept this most engrossing of all huntsa manhunt. Whatever advantage the superiority of his horse afforded him the fugitive was throwing away by his own clumsiness; for wildly gripping the bridle to steady himself in his seat, he was checking and worrying his steed to a perilous extent. Bent low on the necks of their ponies, the savages were urging the latter to their utmost speed. Slowly but surely now they were gaining. But a minute more and the fugitive must choosethe right fork of the valley, away into certain deaththe left, succour, possible safety.

Suddenly a warrior, urging his steed in advance of the rest, literally flying over the ground, comes within fifty yards of the fugitive. Fivetenanother effort and he will be within striking distance. Then rising upright in his saddle the savage whirls a lasso in the air. Another moment and the fatal coil will have settled around the doomed man's shoulders.

But it is not to be. A crack and a puff of smoke from the spectators' hidingplace. The distance is too great for accuracy of aimsix hundred yards if an inchbut the ball ploughs up the ground under the pony's feet, causing the animal to swerve and the rider to miss his cast. The warriors, disconcerted by this wholly unlookedfor danger, halt for a moment, gazing in the direction of the report. At the same time a stentorian voice calls out:

"This way, stranger. This way, for your blessed soul, or you're a dead man!"

The fugitive needs no second invitation. His horse's head is turned towards the neversowelcome refuge. Amid a shower of bullets and arrows from his discomfited pursuers he gallops up the gradual slope which lies between himself and safety, and, fainting, exhausted, speechless, more dead than alive, at length flings himself upon the ground at his rescuers' feet.

Vipan's attention is for the moment more taken up with the red warriors than with the man he has saved from their ruthless clutches. The whole party has now withdrawn beyond range, and is busily discussing the sudden turn affairs have taken. Then turning to the panting and exhausted man stretched at full length upon the ground with closed eyes, he remarks drily:

"You've had a narrow squeak for it, friend. I don't think your scalp could sit much more lightly than it has done within the last few minutes short of coming off altogether."

But the fugitive seemed not to hear. His whole attention was fixedrivetedupon the beautiful face bending over him in alarmsolicitudethen unbounded surprise.

"Yseulte!" he stammered. "Yseulte! Is it really you, or am I dead or dreaming?"

"Why it's Geoffry. Geoffry Vallance! Why, Geoffry, where on earth have you dropped from?"

"ErI was trying to catch up yourerMajor Winthrop's partyand lost my way," he answered stupidlyrubbing his eyes in sheer bewilderment.

Chapter Twenty Three.

The “Tenderfoot.”

If Yseulte Santorex stood lost in amazement at this wholly unlookedfor meeting, there was really considerable excuse for some upsetting of her mental poise. Beyond a brief and formal farewell in the presence of her family, she had not seen her former admirer since that passionate and despairing declaration of his in the summer meadows which skirted the pleasant Lant, and neither at that time nor since had the faintest idea crossed her mind that he contemplated any such undertaking as Western or any other travel. And now here he was, flung, so to say, by Fate at her very feet, escaping by the narrowest chance from the hands of hostile savages, the most ruthless in the world. And she had been mainly instrumental in saving him.

But Geoffry had the advantage of her, in that his surprise was mainly confined to the circumstances and place of their meeting. When he had quarrelled with and separated from the rather worthless guide whom he had engaged at the nearest frontier post, he had reckoned on pushing on so as to overtake Major Winthrop’s outfit in a day at the outside, and having found it, the first part of his object would be accomplished. Then he had lost himself, as we have seen, and but for the present opportune meeting his fate was sealed. And now here was the object of his search, more winsome, more beautiful than ever, her loveliness enhanced tenfold by the glorious openair life she had been leading. But who on earth was her companion? Not her brother. George Santorex could never have altered beyond recognition within three or four years; besides, he was darkhaireddarker than Yseulte herselfand had not the herculean build of this stranger. Thus ran Geoffry’s thoughts as, with halfclosed eyes, he lay on the sward, thoroughly done up with fright and exhaustion.

Vipan, for his part, took no notice of the man whose life he had saved. He saw before him a loosely hung, shambling sort of youth, commonplace of aspect, and in no wise overburdened with practical intelligence. Beyond the first halfbantering, halfcontemptuous remark, he hardly seemed to think his new acquaintance worth addressing. Nor did he seem to think the unexpected recognition between him and Yseulte Santorex worthy of notice.

“Will they attack us, Mr Vipan?” asked the latter, with a shade of anxiety. For the Indians, having finished their consultation, were riding just beyond range, so as to make a wide circuit of the position.

“I doubt it. They are going to find our trail leading in here, so as to discover the extent of our force. They will find the trail of two horses, and not having seen you will take for

granted that represents two men, instead of one man and a noncombatant. That, with our friend here, makes three. Three men with rifles, snugly fixed in a strong position, constitute far too tough a nut for a small force like that to try and crack, and they are only sixteen. No. They will conclude to go away and leave us alone."

Yseulte gave a sigh of relief. A skirmish would mean bloodshed, and, brave as she was, the idea of seeing men shot down, even in selfdefence, could not be otherwise than abhorrent to her.

"Look," went on Vipan, "they have picked up our trail, andthere goes the inevitable white rag."

The warriors had stopped, clustered together, and having briefly scrutinised the ground, one of their number rode out, waving a dirty rag on a lancepoint.

"Flourish away, friend," remarked Vipan, drily; "I guess we're not going to be drawn by any such childish device."

"Don't they want to make terms?" said Yseulte.

"No doubt. But we don't. They know our number. What they want now is to find out our strengthwho we are, in short. Now there isn't a red on the Northern Plains who doesn't know me, by sight or intuition, and this time I'm going to let them entertain a Tartar unawares; if they try fighting, that is."

Finding no notice whatever was taken of their signals, the savages again gathered in consultation. Then the warrior who had hoisted the white flag advanced from among the rest, and yelled out in broken English:

"Hayah, hayah! Golden Face Injun's brudder! Good hoss, ole debbil Satantamake big trail. Golden Face bring out lily white gal. Good squaw for Injun brudder! Hayah!"

The whole band screamed with laughter, but the insolent buck grinned rather too soon. Long as the range was, a ball from Vipan's rifle crashed through his shinbone, and both he and his pony rolled upon the ground; the latter in the throes of death. Their mirth changed into a yell of rage; the band scattered, and withdrawing to a more respectful distance, began circling frantically around the position, waving their weapons and bawling out such expletives and coarse expressions as their limited knowledge of AngloSaxon allowed. Finally, their vocabulary having given out, they once more collected together, and with a parting jeer rode leisurely away.

“There go sixteen as disgusted reds as are to be met on the Plains this day,” said Vipan as the last of the warriors disappeared over the far rise. “And now, Miss Santorex, sorry as I am to disappoint you, we must put off our picnic à deux, or rather à trois, and get back to camp as soon as possible. Those chaps might fall in with a lot more of their tribe, and double back on us sharp, or halfahundred things might happen. So we’ve no time to lose.”

Vipan was not the man to leave anything to chance, but although no square foot of the surrounding country escaped his keen glance, as they cantered merrily away from the scene of the late fracas, not a sign of their recent foes was visible. The vast rolling plains shimmering in the afternoon heat lay silent and deserted, and save that a film of smoke in the far distance, marking the site of the emigrants’ camp, was faintly discernible, might have been untrodden by human foot.

“By the way, Mrer?” began Vipan.

”Vallance.”

“Well, Mr Balance.”

“ErVallance.”

“Oh, Vallance, I beg your pardon. Well, Mr Vallance, I was going to say, what do you think of Indian fighting? Never saw ‘Mr Lo’ (Note 1) on the warpath before, I take it?”

“No, never. And I don’t particularly care if I never see him again,” answered Geoffry, flurriedly. “Eryou have saved my life, Mrer?”

“Vipan.”

”Mr Vipan,” he stuttered; “and but for you I should be a dead man at this moment.”

“Not strictly accurate, and that in two particulars,” was the quiet reply. “In the first place, you should have said ‘But for Miss Santorex’; in the second, you would not have had the luck to be a dead man at this moment. You would be squirming a good deal nearer to a slow fire than is either pleasant or salubrious.”

Geoffry turned pale, nor could he repress a slight shudder as he thought of the ghastly fate from which he had escaped, as it were, by the skin of his teeth. Then the sight of his enslaverso unexpectedly met with, and, like himself, dependent for aid and protection amid the grisly perils of these Western wilds, upon this mysterious stranger, who treated

him, Geoffry, with a patronising and tolerant air which under any other circumstances would have been galling in the extremeroused a wave of jealousy and distrust in the young man's breast. What the deuce was she doing here, careering about the country with this splendidly handsome desperado? But the latter's next words seemed to solve the enigma.

"I reckon you'll follow the crowd next time you feel like running buffalo, Miss Santorex. I ought not to have exposed you to even this small risk."

"A delicate way of reminding me that I've only myself to thank for risking being scalped," she replied demurely, but with a mischievous smile struggling not to break forth. "Well, it's perfectly true. I made you take me, and you all agreed it was quite safe. But we killed our buffalo after allthough I didn't like the killing part of itand I shall never get the chance of a buffalo hunt again. Besides," with a glance at Geoffry and a serious ring in her voice, "it looks as if we had been sent here on purpose."

"I say," sputtered Geoffry, staring at Vipan, as though bursting with a new idea. "I say, wwere you ever at the 'Varsity?"

"Which 'Varsity?"

"Why, Oxford or Cambridge, don't cher know. You give me the idea of a man who has been there."

"Do I? If I was there at all, it must have been rather before you were born," replied the other, imperturbably.

"Hang the fellow, he needn't be so close!" thought Geoffry, with a sullen sense of having been "shut up." But he was glad enough to see safety and comfort in the shape of Major Winthrop's camp, which lay about a mile distant, between them and the setting sun, although he was conscious of a profound feeling of jealousy and distrust towards the man to whom he owed that safety and comfort.

"My partner will show up this evening," said Vipan, tranquilly. "In fact I shouldn't wonder if we found him in camp when we arrive, and what's more, he'll know exactly what we've been doing since I joined you."

"How on earth will he know?" asked Yseulte, wonderingly.

"That's just how he will know," was the amused reply. "By looking on the earth. We have a code of our own. But, you'll see, anyhow."

Note 1. A Western joke, from the passage in Pope's Essay on Man which runs: "Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutored mind."

Chapter Twenty Four.

A Bomb for the Rev. Dudley.

The Rev. Dudley Vallance sat in his library sorting out the contents of the postbag.

There was his usual correspondence, all of which he knew at a glance, and tossed impatiently aside, and two or three missives in an unknown hand, which met with no greater attention. But that which he sought was not there. Not a line from his absent son.

More than a month had elapsed since Geoffry had started on his travels. To the surprise of his parents, he had as suddenly come round to their plans, and was as ardently ready to go abroad as he had been formerly opposed to the idea. Still more to their surprise, he had expressed a firm determination to travel in the United States and nowhere else; and, with an energy wholly foreign to his limp nature, had extorted from them a promise to reveal no word of his intention until after his departure. Of course, the reason of this was soon made manifest; yet his indulgent father would not oppose him. And now, for nearly a fortnight, no news of him had been received. To be sure, he had been on the eve of quitting the furthest limits of Western civilisation when he last wroteprobably opportunities of communication were few and far between. Yet the Rev. Dudley felt very anxious, very disappointed.

Mechanically he opened his letters, one after another, but hardly glanced at the contents. Even the announcement that a couple of farms would shortly be thrown on his handsa notice which at any other time would have disturbed his rest for a weekpassed unheeded now. Suddenly his face paled, and a quick gasp escaped his white lips. He had come to the last letter of all, and it was from his solicitors.

We know of nothing more calculated to knock a man out of all time than a wholly unexpected and equally unwelcome communication imparted through the agency of the post. If imparted by word of mouth, he can find some relief in questioning his informant, but when coming through the medium of a letter, especially a lawyer's letter, there is that in the cold, stiff paper, in the precise, hateful characters, as unbending, as inexorable as the very finality of Fate. The communication which, even in the midst of his paternal anxiety, had knocked Mr Vallance so thoroughly out of time, conveyed nothing less than the news that a claimant had come forward to dispossess him of the Lant estates, to contest the late squire's will on several grounds, including that of fraud. And the said claimant was no less a personage than the late squire's son.

And really it is not surprising that he should have been knocked out of time. In a lightningflash there passed before him a vision of years of litigation, draining his resources and impoverishing his estateand that even should things not come to the worst. The tone of his lawyers' letter was not reassuring. This meant that, in their opinion, the claimant had a good case. How good that case might be was a consideration which turned the reverend squire's features a trifle paler.

Then came a ray of hope. Ralph Vallance had not been heard of for years, nearer twenty than ten. He had probably gone to the dogs long ago, had joined the ranks of the "shady," and, in keeping with his umbrageous character, was now trying to extort a compromise, or, failing that, a sum of money not to make himself troublesome. But to this happy idea succeeded a darker one, dousing the first as in a rush of ink. Probably with the extraordinary luck which now and then befalls the thorough adventurer, Ralph was returning a rich man, prepared, out of sheer vindictiveness, to devote a large portion of his wealth to plunging his cousin into protracted litigation, with all its harassing and impoverishing results. This would be about as disastrous, in the long run, as the actual establishment of the claim.

Again and again he read the hateful missive, until every word of it was burnt into his brain, but he gleaned no comfort. From whatever point he thought it over, the outlook was about as gloomy as it could be. The summer air came into the room in soft and balmy puffs, laden with the scent of roses. He could hear his children's voices on the terrace below, and away over many a mile of rolling down his eye wandered over pleasant pastures alternating with velvety woodland, and yellow cornfields awaiting the sickle; to the river flashing like a silver streak through the shade of the beeches, where the deer lay in antlered and dappled groups, lazily chewing the cud in the soft and sensuous forenoon. All this was his own, and his son's after himan hour ago, that is. But now? He saw himself adrift in his old age, and his idolised son drudging miserably for daily bread. He saw the kinsman, in whose place he had for so long stood, ejecting him pitilessly, vindictively; exacting, it might be, all arrears to the uttermost farthing. Even after this lapse of years (nearer twenty than ten) he cowered beneath the bitter and burning hometruths which that kinsman had hurled at him, here, in this very room, and his heart quaked and his blood curdled at the promise of a terrible and unlookedfor vengeance with which his kinsman had left him. Time had gone by; year had succeeded year; his children growing up, and he himself in undisturbed possession, and the force of these denunciations and threats had become dulled. He had long since come to categorise them in his own mind as the furious vapourings of a desperate and disappointed man. And now they were to bear fruit, to strike him down in his old age, to turn him and his homeless and helpless on the world. The wretched man dropped his head into his hands and groaned aloud.

But, the reader will ask, what was the man made of to start by discounting the worst; to throw up the sponge so abjectly at the very first threat of battle? Well, there may be something in the adage that conscience makes cowardsof certain temperaments, or there may have been a something underlying the whole affair unknown even to Mr Vallance's own lawyers, or, possibly, a good deal of both. We can only say: Reader, persevere, and discover for yourself.

Suddenly there floated in upon the summer air a mellow peal of church bells. Mr Vallance aroused himself. He had forgotten it was Sunday, forgotten his anxiety about Geoffry, forgotten everything in this new and terrible blow that threatened him. The turning of the doorhandle made him fairly start from his chair, so overwrought were his nerves.

"The girls have gone on, Dudley," said his wife, entering, a sumptuous presence in her churchgoing attire.

"All right, my dear. Kindly overtake them, will you? I'll follow you when I'm ready."

"But you'll be very late. Why, what is the matter?" she broke off, alarmed by his appearance and the huskiness of his tone. Then glancing at the pile of newlyopened letters"Is it bad news? Notnot about Geoffry?"

"No, not about Geoffry; thank Heaven for that. There is no word of the boy or his movements. It isermerely a very unfortunate and perplexing matter of business. Please don't wait for me."

Those who caught a glimpse of their pastor's face that morning as he swept up the church behind his little procession of choirboys were startled at the grey, set expression it wore; and when, after several mistakes and omissions in the performance of the service, he brought it to a close without a sermon, the parishsuch of it as was present, at leastcame to the conclusion that something must have gone very wrong indeed. Had Mr Vallance heard bad news about his son? No, for when the retired jerrybuilder, who was also churchwarden, meeting the parson after service, made the enquiry in a sepulchral and sympathising stagewhisper, he met with a very unconcerned answer in the negative.

"Parson do look main sick, surely" was the verdict of the village, as, represented by its choicest louts, it hung around the churchyard gate, and subsequently at the corners of the roads and lanes, previous to its afternoon Sunday loaf among the same. "Parson, he be agein', he be."

Thus the village verdict.

“Poor Mr Vallance was looking very ill this morning,” remarked Mrs Santorex at dinner that day. “He could hardly get through the service. Everybody thought at first that he had heard bad news of Geoffry, but it appears not. In fact, he had heard no news of him at all.”

“Likely enough he has been hard hit in the pocket department,” rejoined her lord. “Probably, ‘poor Mr Vallance’ has been dabbling in bubble investments; and his particular bubble hasgone the way of all bubbles. Rather rough that he should hear about it on Sunday, though, the day of all others when he has to show up in public. So he blundered over the service, did he? Well, our shepherd ought to know by this time that he can’t serve two mastershaha!”

But when later in the afternoon Mr and Mrs Vallance, with a brace of daughters, dropped in, Mr Santorex felt persuaded that at least one of the quartet had come there with further intent than that of making a mere friendly call, and accordingly he awaited events in a kind of mental ambush congenial to his cynical soul.

“Any news of Yseulte?” asked Mrs Vallance, rising to depart.

“Yes. She has fallen in with a Major Winthrop and his wife. They seem very good sort of people, and the little girl is going to travel under their charge. They are neighbours of my boy George, and are returning to their ranche.”

“Can I have a word with you, Santorex?” said the Rev. Dudley, lingering at the gate, having told his wife and daughters to go on without him. “Erthe fact is,” he continued, lowering his voice, as the other nodded assent, “the fact isersomething rather troublesomea mere trifle that is to sayhas occurred to worry me. Have you any idea of the whereabouts of Ralph Vallance?”

“Not the faintest.”

“Oh. I thought perhaps you might know something about him. I believe you and he wereeron friendly terms at one time?”

“Yes, we were. Why? Have you heard anything about him?”

“Erwell, I may say this much. I fancy the poor fellow is in need of assistanceif only I knew where he was.”

“Afraid I can’t help you to learn. Stay. It was only lately I was turning out a lot of old correspondence, and there was a whole bundle of Ralph’s letters. It was just before Chickie went away. I’ll hunt them up and see if they afford any clue.”

The other started. A scared, anxious look came into his face at the mention of the correspondence.

“Might Imight I just look over those letters?” he asked, eagerly.

“H’m. I’m afraid I can hardly agree to that. But if I find anything in them likely to be of service to you I won’t fail to let you know.”

With this, Mr Vallance was forced to be content. His late host stood shaking his head softly as he looked after his retreating figure, and that cynical halfsmile played about the corners of his mouth.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Poor Geoffry Again.

True to Vipan's prediction, the first person they met on their return to camp was Smokestack Bill.

Leaning against a waggonwheel, lazily puffing at his pipe, his faithful Winchester ever ready to hand, the scout watched their approach as imperturbably as though he had parted with his friend but halfanhour back, instead of nearly a month ago, when he had watched the latter ride off with Mahtosapa's band into what looked perilously like the very jaws of death. But he could not restrain a covert guffaw as he marked in what company he now met his friend again.

"Hello, Bill! Any news?" cried the latter, as they rode up to the waggon corral. "By the way, I must call round and collect that twenty dollars from Seth Davis."

"Guess you'll have to trade his scalp to raise it," was the grim reply. "And you'll find it drying in the smoke of an Ogallalla teepe."

"That so?"

"It is. Couple o' nights after War Wolf was run off, a crowd of 'em came along and shot Seth in the doorway of his store. Then they cleared out all the goods and burnt down the whole shebang. They couldn't nohow get rid of the idea that he'd had a hand in giving War Wolf away."

"Well, we've just stood off a handful of reds."

"Sho! With the young lady too! Say, stranger"he broke off, turning to Geoffry"are you the 'tenderfoot' them reds was after?"

"Eryes. Buthow did you know?" answered Geoffry, staring with astonishment.

"Struck your trail. But jest before, I'd struck the trail o' them painted varmints. Knew they'd jump you, but reckoned you'd make camp 'fore they got within shootin' distance."

"You're out of it this time, Bill," said Vipan. "He'd have been roast beef by now if we hadn't happened along. It was a very pretty chase, though," he added, with a laugh. "Our friend here covered the ground in fine style."

“Bless your heart, stranger, that’s just nothing,” laughed the scout, noting the offended look which came into the young man’s face at this apparently unfeeling comment on the frightful peril from which he had barely escaped. “Why, me and Vipan there have had many and many such a narrow squeak when we’ve been out scoutin’ aloneay, and narrower. Haven’t we scooted for a whole day with a yellin’ warparty close on our heels, and no snug corral like this handy to stand ’em off in!”

“Really!” exclaimed Geoffry, openmouthed. “You bet. Them devils were just a lot of young Cheyenne bucks out in search of any devilment that might come handy. But you were in luck’s way, stranger, this time.”

Smokestack Bill was the bearer of news which tended not a little to relieve the travellers’ minds. He had thoroughly scouted the country ahead and pronounced it free from Indians. He was of opinion that no further trouble need be feared. The Sioux, he declared, had quite enough to occupy their attention at home, for they were mustering every available warrior to resist an expected invasion of the troops, and to this end all raiding parties then abroad on the Plains had been called in. A council of war on a large scale, together with a grand medicine dance, was to be held at the villages of Sitting Bull, Mad Horse, and other chiefs of the hostiles, and it was expected that from twelve to fifteen thousand warriors would assemble. Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, and some few other chiefs still remained on their reservations, but the bulk of their followers had deserted and joined the hostiles. The scout was of opinion that they would encounter no considerable body of Indians, though their stock might be exposed to the risk of stampede at the hands of a few adventurous young bucks, such as those who had so nearly captured Geoffry Vallance.

The latter’s arrival in the camp, or rather the manner of it, was productive of no slight sensation among the more inexperienced of the emigrants. The seasoned Western men, however, characteristically viewed the incident as of no great importance, and after one glance at the new comer, tacitly agreed that the advent of a “tenderfoot” more or less constituted but a sorry addition to their fighting force. However, with the consideration and tact so frequently to be found among even the roughest of the pioneers of civilisation, no sign of this was suffered to escape them, and beyond a little goodhumoured chaff, and an occasional endeavourgenerally successfulto “cram” the “Britisher,” Geoffry had no reason to complain of lack of kindliness or hospitable feeling on the part of the travellers, who, while amusing themselves at the expense of his “greenness,” were ever ready and willing to give him the benefit of their experience or lend him a helping hand.

By the Winthrops the young man was made warmly welcome. The Major, glad of such an acquisition as an educated fellowcountryman, pressed him to remain with them until

they arrived at their destination, and see something of the West under his own auspices, and his kindhearted little wife, very much impressed by his tragic escape from such a terrible fate, took the young stranger completely under her wing, and was disposed to make a hero of him.

Thus the days went by, and the waggon train pursued its slow course over the Western plains; now winding around the spur of some high foothill of a loftier range; now emerging from the timber belt fringing some swiftlyflowing river, upon a level tableland carpeted with the greenest of prairiegrass, bespangled with many a strange and delicatehued flower. The exhilarating air, the unclouded blue of the heavens, the danger lately threatening them removedremoved, too, by the sturdy might of their own right handsinfused a cheerfulness into the wanderers. And when the camp was pitched and the waggons securely corralled for the night, many a song and jest and stirring anecdote enlivened the gathering round the red watchfires. By day the more enterprising spirits would diverge from the route to track the red deer or the scarcer blacktail in the wooded fastnesses of some neighbouring ravine, while the waggons creaked on their slow and ponderous course.

To this strange new life Geoffry Vallance took with a readiness which was surprising to himself. Indeed, he would have been thoroughly happy but for one thing. From the moment they had recognised each other, when he reeled panting and exhausted to the ground at her feet, Yseulte's demeanour towards him had been one of studied coldness and reserve. She would never address him of her own initiative, and deftly defeated any attempt on his part to be with her alone. The poor fellow was beside himself with mortification; and when he recalled the circumstances of that first recognition, how he had found her alone with the splendidly handsome scout, to his mortification was added a perfect paroxysm of jealous rage.

Mrs Winthrop took in the situation at a glanceindeed, it would have been manifest to a far less clearsighted observer, so transparent were the symptoms in so simple a subject as poor Geoffryand it annoyed her.

"I can't think why," she began one day, when the latter was away on some hunting expedition with most of the men, and the two ladies were alone together, "I can't think why you treat the poor fellow so standoffishly, Yseulte. I'm sure he worships the very ground you walk on, and you might be a little kinder to him."

"Really, I don't see that the fact entails upon me a corresponding reciprocity," was the reply, given a little coldly.

“There you go with your long words, Yseulte. And now you turn the standoffishness upon me. I only mean, dear, that I want everyone to be friendly and on good terms around. Let him say what he wants to say. Then give him an answer. That’ll fix him one way or another right along, and put everything on a friendly footing again.”

“Would it? Supposing I were to tell you, Hettie, that Geoffry Vallance can’t take No for an answer, you would retort that you thought the more of him for it. But there is more than that. He should not have followed me out here. It was not rightit was even ungentlemanly. He has taken an unfair advantage in besieging me like this. In fact, he has placed me in a thoroughly false position.”

“But, dear,” mischievously, “so far from following you, it was you who brought him here.”

“Say Mr Vipan, rather. I am not an Indian fighter.”

Then spake Hettie Winthrop unadvisedly.

“Well, Mr Vipan, then. But, Yseulte dear, you are always pleasant and cordial enough with Mr Vipan. Naturally the other poor fellow notices it.”

Yseulte turned her grand eyes full upon the speaker, and there was an angry flash in them. These two friends were as near a quarrel as they would ever be likely to arrive.

“I don’t know what you mean, Hettie. Mr Vipan saved me from the most horrible of fates. Am I to show my appreciation by keeping him at arm’s length to please Geoffry Vallance?”

“Tuttut! You needn’t be so fiery about it,” said the other, laughing mischievously. “I didn’t mean anything in particular that I know of, and I guess I don’t hold a brief for any Geoffry Vallance.”

That evening, for the first time since her rescue just alluded to, Yseulte was strolling by herself. She had been strangely reserved and silent all day, and now had stolen quietly away to be alone and think. A stream flowed between its fringe of fig and wild plum trees, about two hundred yards off the camp, and now she stood meditatively gazing into the current and thinking with a pang over the loss of her troutrod. The evening air was lively with many a sound, the screech of myriad crickets, the shout of the teamsters driving in the animals for the night, the occasional cry of a fretful infant, and the wash and bubble of the water flowing at her feet. Suddenly the utterance of her own name

broke in upon her meditations. There stood Geoffry Vallance, the expression of his face that of eagerness to make the most of his opportunity.

“Why do you always avoid me now?” he began, with a quick glance around, as if fearful of interruption, “What have I done that you will hardly speak to me now?”

A flush of anger mounted to her face.

“Have they come back from hunting?” she said, ignoring the question.

“No, I came back by myself. I couldn’t go on any longer till I knew what I had done to offend you. Have I not followed you to the end of another world? And this is how you treat me.”

She could have struck him. “What an idiot the boy is!” she thought. “Father was right. A witless idiot!”

“That is just what you have done,” she flashed forth. “Who gave you any sort of encouragement to follow me to what you are pleased to call ‘the end of another world’? Why did you come here to render me thoroughly ridiculous, to place me in a false position? By what right do you presume to call me to account? Answer me that, and then kindly leave me at once.”

For a moment he seemed thunderstruck, and stood staring at her in blank dismay. Then a light seemed to dawn upon him.

“I thought, at any rate, that one more to protect youto stand between you and harmin this wild country, counted for something. But it seems to constitute an offence. Well, I will leave, this very night if you wish it.”

“Nonsense!” was the angry retort. “Have you so soon forgotten the result of trying to cross the plains alone? You know perfectly well I don’t want you to run any such foolish risk. But you should not have followed me here at all. I thought I had given you a final answer once and for all at Lant”

“Good evening, Miss Santorex!” struck in a voice behind them. And Vipan raised his hat as he rode by at a foot’s pace within a dozen yards of them. So engrossed had they been that they had not heard the hoofstrokes of his horse. A flush came over Yseulte’s face. Could he have heard? she thought. Surely he must have. The evening air was so still, and Geoffry’s voice was of the high “carrying” order. Oh, that unlucky Geoffry! And for the

moment she found it in her heart to wish that he had been left to the tender mercies of the red men.

“I can’t think how it is,” said Geoffry, moodily, bringing his glance back from Vipan’s retreating form to the flushed face of his companion. “I’ve a dim recollection of having seen that fellow beforehow, when, and where is just what puzzles me.”

Yseulte started. If she was thinking the same thing she was not going to say so. She suggested a return to the camp.

“And it’s my belief,” pursued Geoffry, with a dash of venom“my firm belief, that he’s a bad hat.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. I’ve heard one or two queer whispers about him in the camp. It’s said that he’s too friendly with the Indians.”

“Especially the other day when you and I had the pleasure of meeting. Where would you be now but for him, or where should I? I don’t think we ought to go out of our way to cultivate a bad opinion of a man who has saved both our lives, do you?”

She left him, for they had now reached the campleft him standing there feeling very sore, very resentful, and thoroughly foolish. Yseulte Santorex could be very scornful, very cutting, when she chose.

Chapter Twenty Six.

"At his Time of Life."

"Something not quite right therenot quite right. No, sir," said the scout to himself, shaking his head softly as he furtively watched his companion. "And I reckon I can fix it," he added. "Lord! Lord! To think what we may come tothe most sensible of us as well as the most downright foolishest."

Vipan, stretched at full length beside the camp fire, smoking his long Indian pipe, looked the very picture of languid repose. Yet his thoughts were in a whirl. Why had he come there?why the devil had he stayed?

The hour was latelate, that is, for those destined to rise at the first glimmer which should tell of the rising dawnand sundry shapes rolled in blankets, whence emanated snores, betokened that most of the denizens of the encampment were sleeping the sleep of the healthy and the just. The murmur of voices, however, with now and then an airy feminine laugh from the Winthrops' side of the corral, told that some at any rate were keeping late hours.

"Say, Bill, I conclude I'll git from here."

No change of expression came into the speaker's face. Nor did he even glance at him addressed. The words seem to escape him as the natural and logical outcome of a train of thought.

"Right, old pard. I'm with you there. Where'll you light out for?"

"I think I'll go to Red Cloud's village and see what's on. Perhaps look in upon Sitting Bull or Mahtosapa on the way."

"There I ain't with you," answered the scout decisively. "Better leave the reds alone just now. Haven't you been shooting 'em down like jackrabbits around here, and won't they now be bustin' with murderation to take your hair? No, no."

"May be. But I want a change, anyway. So I'm for looking up that placer on upper Burntwood Creek. The troops won't molest us this time, because all the miners'll have left. Besides all available cavalry will be told off against Sitting Bull."

“It’s strange that Mr Vipan hasn’t been near us all day,” Mrs Winthrop was saying. “But I suppose he’ll clear out as suddenly as he came. These Western men are queer folks, and that’s a fact.”

“Vipan isn’t a Western man,” answered the Major, thoughtfully. “And it’s my private opinion he could give a queer account of himself if he chose. Sometimes I could swear he had been in the Service. However that’s his business, not ours.”

“Well, he might be a little more open with us, anyway, considering the time we have been together.”

“Just over a week.”

“That’s as long as a year out here. But I shall be sorry when he does leave usvery sorry.”

“May I hope that remark will apply to me, Mrs Winthrop?” said a voice out of the gloom, as its owner stepped within the firelight circle. “It’s odd how things dovetail, for as a matter of fact I strolled across for the purpose of taking leave.”

“Oh, how you startled me!” she cried. “Of taking leave? Surely you are not going to leave us yet, Mr Vipan? Why, we hoped you would accompany us home, and stay awhile, and have a good time generally. You really can’t go yet. FredYseultetell him we won’t allow it.”

“Why, most certainly, we won’t,” began the former, heartily. “Come, Vipanyour time’s your own, you know, and you may just as well do some hunting out our way as anywhere else.”

“Of course,” assented his wife. “ButI know what it is. We have offended him in some way. Yseulte, what have you done to offend Mr Vipan? I’m sure I can’t call to mind anything.”

“There is no question of offence,” protested Vipan. “I am a confirmed wanderer, you see, Mrs Winthrophere today, away tomorrow. The country is clear of reds now, and you will no longer need our additional rifles. If we have rendered you some slight service, I can answer for it, my partner is as glad as I am myself.”

No man living was less liable to be swayed by caprice than the speaker. Yet suddenly he became as resolved to remain a little longer, as he had been a moment before to leave. And this change was brought about by the most trivial circumstance in the world. While he was speaking, his eyes had met those of Yseulte Santorex.

Only for a moment, however.

When Vipan, in his usual laconic manner, informed his comrade that he concluded to wait a bit longer, the latter merely remarked, “Right, pard. Jest as you fancy.” But as he rolled over to go to sleep, he nodded off to the unspoken soliloquy

“It’s a rum starta darn rum start. At his time of life, too! Yes, sir.”

Chapter Twenty Seven.

In the "DugOut."

Yseulte Santorex was conscious of a new and unwonted sensation. She felt nervous.

Yet why should she have felt so, seeing that this was by no means the first time she had undertaken an expedition à deux under her present escort? But somehow it seemed to her that his tone had conveyed a peculiar significance when he suggested this early morning antelopestalk at the time of making up his mind to remain.

It was a lovely morning. The sun was not an hour high, and the air was delicious. But their success had been nil. To account for the absolute lack of game was a puzzle to Vipan, but it could hardly be the cause of his constrained taciturnity.

Yseulte felt nervous. Why had he induced her to come out like this today? Instinctively she felt that he was on the eve of making some revelation. Was he about to confide to her the history of his past? Her nervousness deepened as it began to dawn upon her what an extraordinary fascination this adventurer of the Western Plains, with his splendid stature and magnificent face, was capable of exercising over her. A silence had fallen between them.

"I want you to see this," said Vipan suddenly as they came upon the ruins of what had once been a strong and substantial building. "It's an old stagestation which was burnt by the reds in '67."

There was eloquence in the ruins of the thick and solid walls which even now stood as high as ten or twelve feet in places, and which were still spanned by a few charred and blackened beams, like the gaping ribs of a wrecked ship. The floor was covered with coarse herbage, sprouting through a layer of débris, whence arose that damp, earthy smell which seems inseparable from ancient buildings of whatever kind. Standing within this relic of a terrible epoch, Yseulte could not repress a shudder. What mutilated human remains might they not actually be walking over? Even in the cheerful daylight the flap of ghostly wings seemed to waft past her.

"If these old walls could speak they'd tell a few queer yarns," said her companion. "Look at these loopholes. Many a leaden pill have they sent forth to carry 'Mr Lo' to the Happy HuntingGrounds. I don't know the exact history of this station, but it's probably that of most others of the time. A surprisea stiff fightalong siege in the 'dugout' when the reds had set the building on firethen either relief from outside, or the defenders, reduced by famine or failure of ammunition, shooting each other to avoid capture and the stake."

“Horrible!” she answered, with a shiver. “But what is a ‘dugout’?”

“Let’s get outside, and I’ll tell you all about it. Lookyou see that mound of earth over there,” pointing to a round hump about a score of yards from the building, and rising three or four feet above the ground. “Well, that is a roof made of earth and stones, and therefore bullet and fire proof. It is loopholed on a level with the ground, though it’s so overgrown with buffalograss that the holes’ll be choked up, I reckon. This roof covers a circular hole about ten or twelve feet in diameter, and just high enough for a man to stand up in. It is reached by a covered way from the main building, and its object was this:When the reds were numerous and daring enough they had not much difficulty in setting the building on fire by throwing torches and blazing arrows on the roof, just as they threw them into our camp the other day. Then the stage people got into the ‘dugout,’ and with plenty of rations and ammunition could hold their own indefinitely against all comers. The ‘dugout’ was pretty nearly an essential adjunct to every stagestation, and a good many ranches had them as well. And now, if you feel so disposed, we will try and explore this one, and then it will be time to start campwards.”

She assented eagerly. First going to the mound, the removal of the overgrowth of grass revealed the loopholes.

“It is like looking into the oubliettes of a mediaeval castle,” said Yseulte, striving to peer through the apertures into the blackness beneath.

“Now come this way,” said her companion, leading the way into the building once more.

A moment’s scrutinythen advancing to a corner of the building he wrenched away great armfuls of the thick overgrowth. A hole stood revealeda dark passage slanting down into the earth.

“Wait here a moment,” he said. “I’ll go in first and see that the way is clear.”

The tunnel was straight and smooth. Once inside there was not much difficulty in getting along. But it suddenly occurred to Vipan that he might be acting like a fool. What if he were to encounter a snake in this longclosedup oubliette, or foul air? Well, for the latter, the matches that he lighted from time to time burnt brightly and clear. For the formerhe was already within the “dugout” when the thought struck him.

He glanced around in the subterranean gloom. It was not unlikely that the floor of the tomblike retreat might be strewn with the remains of its former owners, who had perished miserably by their own hands rather than fall into the power of their savage

foe. But no grim death'shead glowered at him in the darkness. The place was empty. Quickly he returned to his companion.

"It's pretty dark in there," he said. "Think you'd care to undertake it? It may try your nerves."

But Yseulte laughingly disclaimed the proprietorship of any such inconvenient attributes. She was resolved to see as much wild adventure as she could, she declared. Nevertheless, when she found herself buried in the earthy darkness as she crawled at her companion's heels, she could not feel free from an inclination to turn back there and then.

But when she stood upright within the underground fortress, and her eyes became accustomed to the halflight, she forgot her misgivings.

"How ingenious!" she cried, looking first around the earthy cell and then out through the loopholes. "Now, let's imagine we are beleaguered here, and that the savages are wheeling and circling around us. We could 'stand them off'isn't that the expression?till next week."

"And then if nobody came to get us out of our fix next week?"

"Oh, then we could hold out until the week after."

"You think that would be fun, eh?"

"Of course," she answered, her eyes dancing with glee in response to his queer halfsmile.

"H'm. Well I'm very glad there's no chance of your undergoing the actual experience," he answered drily, turning away to gaze out on the surrounding country, but really that she should not see the expression that swept across his face. For it had come to this. Rupert Vipanadventurer, renegade, freebootera stranger, for many a year, to any softening or tender feelinga man, too, who had already attained middle agethought, as he listened to her words, how willingly he would give the remainder of his life for just that experience. To be besieged here for days with this girlonly they two, all alone togetherhimself her sole protector, with a violent and horrible death at the end of it, he admitted at that moment would be to him Paradise. Yet a consciousness of the absurdity of the idea struck him even then. Who was he in her eyes, in the eyes of those around her, her friends and protectors? An unknown adventurera mere commonplace border ruffian. Andat his time of life, too!

“Were you ever besieged in one of these places?” asked Yseulte.

Her voice recalled him to himself.

“Once,” he answered. “In ’67, on the Smoky Hill route, four stagemen and myself. The reds burnt us out the first night, and we got into the dugout. It was wearisome work, for they preserved a most respectful distance once we were down there. They wouldn’t haul off, though. So one man kept a lookout at the loopholes, while the rest of us played poker or varied the tedium by swapping lies.”

“Doing what?”

“Oh, exchanging ‘experiences.’ Tall twisters some of them were, too. Well, by the third night we got so sick of it that we made up our minds to try and quit. The reds were still hanging around. We needn’t have, for we had plenty of rations and ammunition, but the business was becoming so intolerably monotonous. Well, we started, and the upshot was that out of the five, three of us fell in with a cavalry patrol the next evening, having dodged the reds all day, each of us with an arrow or two stuck more or less badly into him, and the Cheyennes went home with a brace of new scalps. Otherwise the affair was tame enough.”

“Tame, indeed? But you tell it rather tamely. Now, how did the Indians first come to attack you? You left that out.”

“Did I? Oh, well, I happened to discover their propinquity, and concluded to warn the stage people. The red brother divined my intention afar off, and came for meand them.”

“You ought to be called the Providence of the Plains,” she said, with a laugh that belied the seriousness of her face. “There, I christen you that on the spot.”

“That would be a good joke to tell them over in Henniker City! But to be serious, in these latter days I never go out of my way to spoil the red brother’s fun. None of my business, any way.”

“But you made an exception in favour of us. I don’t believe you are talking seriously at all.”

“You don’t?” he echoed, turning suddenly upon her, and there was that in his tones which awed her into wonder and silence. “You don’t? Well, let me tell you all about it. It was you, and you alone, who saved every soul in that outfit from the scalpingknife and the stake. I sighted your party straggling along just anyhow, and I’d already been

watching the Sioux preparing to ambush it. Then while promising my self a good time lying up there on the butte, and looking on at the fun, I chanced to catch sight ofyou. That decided the business. Instead of assisting at a grand pitched battle in the novel character of a spectator, I elected to warn your people. Otherwiseambling along haphazard as they werethey'd have lost their headcoverings to a dead certainty. That is how you saved them."

"What! You would have done nothing to warn them? I cannot believe it."

"Wouldn't have lifted a finger. Why should I?" he broke off, almost angrily. "What interest had I in a few ranchmen and bullwhackers more or less? They were no more to me than the painted savages lying in wait to scalp them. Stop, you were going to say something about colour, religion, and all that sort of thing. But a white skin as often as not covers as vile a nature as a red one, and for the other consideration look at its accredited teachers. About as good Christians as the average Sioux medicineman, neither better nor worse. It was a blessed good thing, though, that I had a first rate fieldglass on that occasion."

She raised her eyes to his as if expecting him to continue, and they seemed to grow soft and velvety. But he did not continue. Instead, he had taken a rigid attitude, and appeared to be listening intently.

"What can you hear?" she began, wonderingly.

But the words died away on her lips, and she grew ashy pale as her dilated glance read her companion's face in the gloomy halflight of the "dugout." No need to pursue her enquiry now.

For, audible to both, came a dull muffled roar, distant, faint, but of unmistakable import. Even Yseulte did not require her companion to explain the sound. Even she recognised in the long, dropping roll the heavy discharge of firearms.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

A Terrible Drama.

The waggon train had just pulled out.

Winding along over the wide prairie came the string of great cumbrous vehicles, their white tilts gleaming in the morning sunshine, the monotonous creaking of their axles mingling with the cheery shout of the “bullwhackers” and the crack of whips. Here and there along the line rode horsemen in twos and threes, some leading spare horses, others giving a general eye to the progress of the train. Squads of children chattered and squabbled in the waggons, a shrill feminine voice now and again rising high in remonstration. Women sat placidly sewing or knittingindulging too in gossipof which perhaps Yseulte Santorex was the subject more frequently than she would have guessed or approved. All were in good spirits, for their journey was nearing its end. No room was there for apprehension either, for they had now reached the extreme limits of the Sioux range. So far from all minds was any thought of danger that even scouting precautions had been of late very much relaxed.

Thus they journeyed.

“There’s something moving away there on the bluff, Dave,” said Winthrop, suddenly, shading his eyes.

“D’you say so, Colonel?” answered the cowboy, who with his employer and mate was riding some little way ahead of the train. “Likely enough it’s Smokestack Bill coming back. He started off in that direction before daybreak to hunt.”

They were skirting a range of low roundtopped bluffs, on one of which had appeared the object which attracted Winthrop’s attention.

“It’s gone now,” said the latter, still gazing intently. “I could have sworn it was somebody’s head.”

“Oh, thunder! Look!” said the cowboy, quickly reining in his horse with a jerk.

Well might even his stout heartthe heart of every soul in that companydie away. For the crest of the bluff was by magic alive with mounted figures. A great sheet of flame burst forth, and amid the deafening crash of the volley a storm of leaden missiles whizzed and hummed around the ears of the party. Oregon Dave had uttered his last words. He threw up his arms with a stiffening jerk, and toppled heavily from his saddle.

Then followed a scene of indescribable terror and confusion. Rending the air with their shrill, vibrating warwhoop, a vast crowd of painted horsemen swooped down in full charge upon the doomed and demoralised whites. Flinging themselves behind their trained steeds, the Sioux delivered their fire with deadly effect, then, recovering themselves in the saddle with catlike agility, they rode in among their writhing, shrieking victims, spearing and tomahawking right and left. Perfectly mad with terror, the draught animals stampeded. Waggons were overturned, and their inmates flung screaming to the ground, or crushed and mangled beneath the wreckage.

The surprise was complete; the demoralisation perfect. Utterly panicstricken, helpless with dismay, men allowed themselves to be cut down without offering a shadow of resistance. Apart from the terror inspired by the suddenness of the onslaught, there was literally not a minute of time wherein to mass together and strike a blow in defence. Even the privilege of selling their lives dearly was denied these doomed ones.

The waggon train, pulled out at its full length, offered an easy prey, and along this line, after the first and fatal charge, the warriors, breaking up into groups, urged their fleet ponies; shooting down the wretched emigrants with their revolvers, and ruthlessly spearing such few who, being wounded, instinctively tried to crawl away. Whooping, yelling, whistling, brandishing their weapons, they strove to increase the terror of the maddened teams, who, unable to break loose, upset the vehicles wholesale. They goaded the frenzied animals with their lancepoints, laughing like fiends if the wheels passed over the bodies of any of the inmates thrown out or trying to escape; and once when a whole family, driven wild with terror, instinctively flung themselves from the creaking, swaying vehicle, which, upsetting at that moment, crushed mother and children alike in a horrible mangled heap beneath the splintering wreckage, the glee of the savages knew no bounds.

It was all over in a moment. Not a man was left standingnot a man with power in him to strike another blow. All had been slain or were lying wounded unto death. All? Stay! All save one.

Winthrop, alone out of all that outfit, was untouched. But he had better have been dead. His wife! Oh, good God! For her to fall into the power of these fiends!

There was the light horse waggon; but between himself and it already surged a crowd of skimming warriors. Many a piece was aimed at himmany a bullet sang about his ears, but still he went unscathed.

Spurring his horse, straight for the waggon he wentstraight into the thick of the yelling, whirling crowd. Already, searing his ears like molten lead, rose the piercing shrieks of miserable women writhing beneath the scalpingknife, or struggling in the outraging grasp of the victorious barbarians. He sees a number of small bodies flung high into the aireven marks the piteous terror in the faces of the wretched little infants as they fall, to be caught dexterously on the bright lancepoints extended to receive them, and the laughing yells of the painted fiends as the warm blood spurts forth and falls in jets upon their hands and persons. All this passes before his eyes and ears as a vision of hell, and more than one of those fierce and ruthless assailants deftly turns his horse away rather than face the awful fury of despair blazing from his livid countenance. One after another falls before his revolver. A moment more and he will reach his wife. Then they will both die together by his own hand.

The crowd of whirling centaurs seems to give way before him, and with his eye upon his goal he spurs between their ranks. But a roar of mocking laughter greets his ears.

The canvas curtains of the waggontilt part, and a great savage, hideously painted, springs forth, uttering an exultant whoop as he brandishes something in the air. It is a scalpthe blood trickling freely down the long, shining, silky tress.

The whoop dies in the Indian's throat. Winthrop's ball has sped true. His wife's slayer falls heavily, still grasping in the locked grip of death the relic of the murdered victim. Yet, grim as it may seem, the murderer really deserves the gratitude of both. Then a thumping blow on the arm sends his pistol flying out of his hand.

"How! white Colonel," says a gruff voice at his side. "How! CrowScalper big chief. White scalp damn better nor 'chuck.' How?"

Grinning with delight, the gigantic warrior extended his hand in the most friendly fashion; with difficulty curbing the plunges of his excited steed. He felt sure of his prey now.

Not yet.

Quick as thought, Winthrop had whipped out another pistola Derringer.

But for a timely swerve, CrowScalper would have been sent straight to his fathers. Then thinking things had gone far enough, the chief pointed his revolver and shot the unfortunate Englishman dead.

It was all over in a momentthe firing and the din, the shrieks of tortured women, the dying groans of mortallywounded menover in an infinitely shorter time than it takes to narrate. Not a man was left alive; and already many a corpse lay where it had fallen, stripped and gory, a hideous mangled object in the barbarous mutilation which it had undergone. Some of the Indians were busy looting the waggons. Others, scattered far and wide over the plain, were in pursuit of the fleeing animals, which had stampeded in every direction. All were in the wildest degree of excitement and exultation. They had mastered the outfit at a stroke, with the loss of only three warriors. They had wiped out their former defeat, and had reaped a rich harvest of scalps. They accordingly set to work to make merry over their plunder.

Over the worst of what followed we will draw a veil. There were females in that doomed waggon train. Where these are concerned the red man, in his hour of victory, is the most brutal, the most ungovernable fiend in the world.

Singing, dancing, feasting, whooping, the barbarians kept up their hideous orgie. Then in furtherance of a new amusement a number of them began to pile together the beams and planks of the wrecked waggons until a huge heap was formed, in shape something like a rough kiln. Up to this structure were dragged about a dozen bodies.

Dead bodies? No; living.

Men wounded unto helplessness and death, yet still with just the spark of life in them. Women, two or three, too elderly or unattractive to fulfil the terrible fate invariably befalling the female captive of the ruthless red man. Some of the elder children who had not been speared were also there. All these, bound and helpless, were first deliberately scalped, then flung inside the improvised kiln. Fire was applied.

Drowning the appalling shrieks of their miserable victims in shrill peals of laughter, the whole array of painted and feathered fiends danced and circled around the blazing pyre in an ecstasy of glee. For upwards of an hour this frightful scene continued. Then when the anguish of the tortured victims had sunk in death, the savages gathered up their spoils and departed, refraining from setting fire to any more of the wreckage lest the too conspicuous sign of their bloody work should by its volume be visible at a greater distance than they desired.

One more tragedy of the wild and bloodstained West. A pack of coyotes, snapping and snarling over their meal of mangled and defaced corpses, whose scalpless skulls shone red and clotted in the sunlight. A cloud of wheeling, soaring vultures, a few piles of charred and shattered wreckage, and many an oozy, shining pool of gore. One more frightful massacre. One more complete and ruthless holocaust to the unquenchable

vendetta ever burning between the unsparing red man and his hated and despised foe, the invading white.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Thermopylae.

“The camp is attacked,” said Yseulte, not even pausing to brush off the dust which had gathered upon her clothing during her passage into and out of the “dugout.”

“I’m afraid so.”

Both stood eagerly listening. Again came the long, crackling roll, this time more dropping and desultory, also more distinct than when they first heard it underground.

“How will it end?” she asked.

Their glances met. In the grave and serious expression of her companion’s face Yseulte read the worst.

“We must hope for the best. Meanwhile, my first care must be for your safety, so we must leave this spot at once. See what comes of allowing oneself to get careless. As a matter of fact, we are off the Sioux range, and reckoning on that we haven’t been scouting so carefully as we ought.”

“When can we return to the camp?”

“Not a moment before dark,” he replied, wondering if she knew that the chances were a hundred to one against there being any camp to return to. For to his experienced mind the situation was patent. That sudden and heavy fusillade meant a numerous warparty. It also meant a surprise. Further, and worst of all, he realised that at the time it took place the waggon train would have pulled out, in which event the Indians would not allow it time to corral. Again, the firing had completely ceased, which meant that one of two things had happened. Either the assailants had been beaten off; which was hardly likely within such a short space of time. Or they had carried the whole outfit at the first surprise; and this he decided was almost certain. But there was no need to break the terrible news to his companion.

“Can we not wait here?” said the latter. “We could retire into the ‘dugout’ if they discovered us.”

“How very near your ideal of fun has come to being realised!” was the reply, with a shadow of a smile. “No, we should stand no chance.”

It did not escape Yseulte that, previous to starting, her escort gave a quick, careful look to her saddlery and girths, pausing to tighten the latter, and her heart sank with a chill and direful foreboding.

“You see, it’s this way,” continued Vipan. “It is almost certain that the warparty is a Sioux one, probably our old friends CrowScalper and Mountain Cat. This is the extreme western edge of the Sioux range, consequently when the reds quit the scrimmage they are bound to travel north or northeast. So we must put as much space as we can between us and them in the contrary direction. For the same reason, if your friends have whipped them”

He paused abruptly, but it was too late. She turned to him, her eyes dilating with horror.

“If! Oh, tell me the truth. You think they have no chance?”

“One can but hope for the best.” She turned her face away, and the tears fell thick and fast. She could hardly realise it. Her dear friends, under whose protection she had travelled many and many a day, in whose companionship she had been initiated into the delights of this wild new land, and also its perils, now massacred; even at that moment, perhaps, falling beneath the merciless blows of these bloodthirsty savages. She could hardly realise it. Her mind felt numb. Even the sense of her own peril failed to come home to her.

But her companion realised it to the full. This was no time to think of anything but how to neglect no possible means of effecting her safety, yet he could not banish the thrill of triumph which the thought inspired in him that her fate, her very life, was absolutely in his hands. Suddenly she turned to him. The black drop of suspicion was corroding her mind.

“Why did you bring me away from them all this morning?” she said, speaking quickly and in a hard tone. “Did you know what was going to happen?”

The adventurer’s face went ashy white. Even she could entertain such suspicions!

“You forget, Miss Santorex. My tried and trusted friend of years is in that outfit. Should I be likely to sell his scalp, even if I sold those of your friends?”

There was a savour of contempt in the cold incisiveness of his tone that went to her heart. What is baser than the sin of ingratitude? Did she not owe her lifeand more than her lifeto this man already, and now to be flinging her pitiable and unworthy suspicions at him! Would she ever recover his good opinion again?

“Forgive me!” she cried. “Forgive me! I hardly knew what I was saying.” And she burst into tears. Even yet she would hardly believe but that her fellowtravellers would succeed in holding their own.

Young though the day was, the torrid rays of the sun blazed fiercely down upon the great plains. Some distance in front rose a rugged ridge, almost precipitous. The only passage through this for many miles was a narrow cañona mere cleft. Beyond lay miles and miles of heavilytimbered ravines, and for this welcome shelter Vipan was making. This plan he explained to his companion.

“Look! What are those?” she cried, growing suddenly eager. “Indians? No. Wild horses? I didn’t know there were any wild horses in these parts.”

Save for a scattered line of brush here and there, the great plains until they should reach the defile above referred to were treeless, and presented a succession of gentle undulations. Nearly a mile distant, seeming to emerge from one of these belts of brush, careering along in a straggling, irregular line converging obliquely with the path of the two riders, came a large herd of ponies. It almost looked as if the latter were bent on joining them.

Yseulte did not see the change in her companion’s face, so intent was she on watching the ponies.

“Get your horse into a gallop at once, but keep him well in hand,” he said. But before she could turn to him, startled, alarmed by the significance of his tone, the sudden and appalling metamorphosis which came over the scene nearly caused her to fall unnerved from her saddle. By magic, upon the back of each riderless steed there started an upright figure, and, splitting the stillness of the morning air with its loud fiendish quaver, the hideous warwhoop went up from the throats of half a hundred painted and feathered warriors, who, brandishing their weapons and keeping up one long, unbroken, and exultant yell, skimmed over the plain, sure of their prey.

“Keep quite cool, and don’t look back,” he said. “We’ve got to reach that cañon before they doand we shall. The warpony that can overhaul old Satanta when he’s in average working order has yet to be built.”

So far good, so far true. But the same would not precisely hold good of Yseulte’s palfrey, which steed, though showy, was not much above the average in pace or staying power.

The race was literally one for life, and the pace was terrific. To the girl it seemed like some fearful dream. Sky and earth, the great mountain rampart reared up in front, all blended together in rocking confusion during that mad race. The yells of the pursuing barbarians sounded horribly nearer, and the pursued could almost hear the whistle of their uncouth trappings as they streamed out on the breeze.

Vipan, reaching over, lashed her horse with a thong which he detached from his saddle. The animal sprang forward, but the spurt was only momentary. And the warponies were horribly fresh.

Nearer, nearer. The great rock walls dominating the entrance to the pass loomed up large and distinct. Again he glanced back at the pursuers. Yes, they were gaining. It was more a race than a pursuitthe goal that grim rockbound pass. Even should the fugitives reach it, what then? Their chances would still be of the slenderest.

Ah, the horror of it! Yseulte, white to the lips, kept her seat by an effort of will, her heart melting with deadly fear. Her companion, fully determined she should never fall alive into the hands of the savages, held his pistol ready, first for them, then for her, his heart burning with bitter curses on his own blind and besotted negligence. It was too late now. They were to founder in sight of land. Ah, the bitterness of it!

Bang!

The whiz of a bullet, simultaneously with a puff of blue smokethis time in front. Vipan ground his teeth. There was no escape, they were between two fires.

But the regular thunder of the pursuing hoofs seemed to undergo a change. What did it mean?

Bang!

Then a glance over his shoulder told him that as the second ball came whizzing into their midst, the painted warriors had swerved, throwing themselves on the further side of their horses.

Only for a moment, though. Realising that this new enemy represented but a single unit, they hurled themselves forward with redoubled ardour, yelling hideously.

“The gulch, pardner! Streak for the gulch!” sung out a stentorian voice; and sending another bullet among the onrushing redskins, this time with effect, Smokestack Bill

kicked up his horse, which had been lying prone, and in half a minute was flying side by side with his friend.

Short though this check had been, yet it had given them a momentary advantage. But, now, as they neared the mouth of the pass, it became clear to these two experienced Indian fighters that one of them must give his life for the rest.

“Take the young lady on,” said the scout. “You’re in it together, and must get out of it together. Reckon I’ll stand them back long enough for you to strike cover.”

Here was a temptation. Vipan knew well that it was so. A short ten minutes would save herwould save them both. His friend could hold the bloodthirsty savages in check for more than that. A struggle raged within hima bitter strugglebut he conquered.

“No, no, old pard. I’m the man to stay,” he answered, slipping from his saddle, for they were now at the entrance of the pass. “Goodbye. Take her in safe.”

It was no time for talking. The pursuers, rendered tenfold more daring by the prospect of the most coveted prize of alla white womanwere almost on their heels, the rocks reechoing their exultant yells. Yseulte’s horse, maddened with terror and stimulated by a shower of blows from the scout, bounded forward at a tearing gallop.

“Wait, wait! We cannot leave him like this! We must turn back!” she cried, breathless, but unable to control her steed, which was stampeding as though all the Sioux in the NorthWest were setting fire to its tail.

“Help me! Help me to turn back!” she cried, in a perfect frenzy of despair. “We have deserted himleft him to die!”

Left alone, the bold adventurer felt no longer any hope, but in its stead he was conscious of a wild elation. His death would purchase her safety, and death was nothing in itself, but every moment gained was of paramount importance. Carefully he drew a bead on the charging warriors and fired. A pony fell. Another rapid shot. This time a human victim. This stopped their headlong rush, and still wheeling in circles they hesitated to come nearer.

He glanced around. Overhead, the slopes, almost precipitous, offered many a possible hidingplace. He might even escapebut he was not there for that. He was there to hold back the enemytill night, if necessary.

The day wore on. The Sioux, who had drawn off to a distance, seemed in no mood to renew the attack. They were resting their ponies.

Suddenly he saw a score of them leap on horseback again and ride rapidly away. What could this mean?

A shadow fell between him and the light. There was a hurtling sounda crashand before he could turn or look up, the whole world was blotted out in a stunning, roaring, heaving sea of space. Then faintness, oblivion, death.

Chapter Thirty.

“I would rather have died with him.”

Not till they had covered at least two miles could Yseulte Santorex regain the slightest control over her recalcitrant steed. In fact, in her fatigue and nervousness it was as much as ever she could do to keep her seat at all. At length, panting and breathless, she reined in and turned round upon the scout, who had kept close upon her pony’s heels.

“I am going back,” she cried, her great eyes flashing with anger and contempt. “I would sooner die than desert aa friend.”

“Not to be done, miss,” was the quiet answer. “Vipan said to me the last thing‘Bill, on your life take her safe in.’ And on my life I will. You bet.”

Yseulte looked at him again. A thought struck her and she seemed to waver.

“See here, miss,” went on the scout. “Vipan and I have hunted and trapped and prospected together and stood off the reds a goodish number of years. We are pardners, we are, and if he entrusts me with an undertaking of this kind, I’ve got to see it through. Same thing with him. So the sooner we reach Fort Vigilance, where I’m going to take you, and you’re safe among the people there, the sooner I shall be able to double back and try what can be done for Vipan.”

“Oh, I never thought of that. Pray do not let us lose a moment.”

“So. That’s reasonable. You see, miss, it’s this way. Women are terrible deadweights when it comes to fightin’ Indians. The varmints’ll risk more for a white woman than for all the scalps and plunder in this Territory rolled together. No. Like enough, now that you’re snug away, they’ll turn round and give up my pard as ‘bad medicine.’ I reckon there ain’t a man between Texas and the British line knows Indians better than my pardner. One day he’s fighting ’em, another day he’s smokin’ in their lodges. He knows ’em, he does.”

With this she was forced to be content.

Loyalty to his friend thus moved him to reassure her, but, as a matter of fact, the honest scout felt rather bitter towards this girl. He blamed her entirely for his comrade’s peril. He had narrowly watched that comrade of late, and accurately gauged the state of the latter’s feelings. Why had this fine lady come out there and played the fool with his comradethe man with whom he had hunted and trapped for yearswith whom he had

fought shoulder to shoulder in many a fierce scrimmage with white or red enemies? They had stood by each other through thick and thin, and now this English girl had come in the way, and to satisfy her vanity had sent Vipan to his deathhis death, possibly, amid the ghastly torments of the Indian stake. She would probably go home again and brag of her "conquest" with a kind of patronising pity.

In silence they kept on their waythe scout's watchful glance ever on the alert. Suddenly his companion's voice aroused him from the intensity of his vigilance. He started.

"Tell me," she said. "What chance is there of rescuing your friend?"

Her tone was so calm, so selfpossessed, that in spite of the deathly pallor of her face it deceived the worthy scout. He felt hard as iron towards her.

"About as much chance, I judge, as I have of being elected President," he replied, gruffly. "And now I want you to know thisIf you hadn't troubled your dainty head about my pard, he wouldn't be where he is now. And mind me, if it hadn't been for him, where d'you think you'd be today? You'd be wishing you were dead. You'd be doin' scavenger work in a Sioux village, leading a dog's life at the hands of every sooty squaw in the campif it hadn't been for Vipan. And now if the Lord works an almighty miracle and I get my pard clear of the red devils, maybe you won't say overmuch to him if you meet himwon't be overanxious to say you're glad to see him safe and sound again"

The speaker pulled up short, staring blankly at her. She had burst into a wild storm of sobs.

"You are unjust. Oh, God! Oh, God! send him back to me!" Then turning to the dumbfoundered scout, and controlling herself to speak firmly: "Listen. If it would save his life I would cheerfully undergo death at this moment. I would suffer the slow fire or anything. Think what you like of meGod knows I speak the truth."

"Say that again, miss," stammered the other. "Well, I ask your pardon. I allow I don't know shucks of the ways of women. If it's to be done, my pard'll be brought out. What shall I tell him if so be I find him?" he added, as if struck with a bright idea.

"Tell him," and her voice shook with a tenderness she now no longer cared to conceal, "tell him to come straight to me wherever I am. And ifah, I cannot think of itI would rather have died with him!"

Thus the secret of her tortured heart escaped her in that cry of anguish; not to a sister woman, but to the rough and weatherbeaten frontiersman who was piloting her across that grim and perilhaunted wilderness.

Again she relapsed into silence, and her escort noted that her tears were falling thick and fast. Suddenly she asked about the attack upon the waggon train.

Smokestack Bill felt in a quandary. She had gone through so much already, she still had need of all her strength, all her nerve, before she should reach the distant frontier post to which he was guiding her. What would happen if he were to tell her the horrible news that they two were the sole survivors of the illfated caravan; that he owed his escape from the hideous massacre to the same cause as she did her ownaccidental absence? He felt unequal to the task, and evaded the necessity of replying by the invention of a somewhat cowardly pretext, to wit, the imperative advisability of preserving silence as far as possible.

Chapter Thirty One.

A Race forDeath.

When Vipan recovered consciousness he found himself unable to stir. A lariat rope was tightly coiled around him from head to foot, binding his arms to his sides, and rendering him as helpless as a log.

He tried to move, but an acute pain shooting through his head seemed to crush him again, and he half closed his eyes, stunned and confused.

A dark face peered into his. A tall Indian was bending over him. In the grim painted lineaments he recognised, to his astonishment, the countenance of War Wolf.

“Ha, Golden Face. You feel better now? Good! We will start.”

He made no reply. Glancing around him, he noted that the warriors were making their preparations to move. The ponies, which had been grazing all ready saddled, were caught; and at a sign from War Wolf two of the Indians proceeded to loosen the lariat rope in such wise as to allow him the use of his legs.

“Now, mount,” said one of them, as his fellow led a pony alongside of the captive, who surveyed his steed designate with a dubious air.

“That sheep isn’t up to my weight,” he said.

“He will carry you as far as needful,” was the reply, ominous in its grim brevity. “Quick, mount.”

As he turned to obey a wild thought rushed through the adventurer’s mind. Could he not seize the opportunity to make a dash for it? His wily guards must have read his thoughts, for, catching his eye, they shook their heads with a ferocious grin. Then with a raw hide thong they secured their prisoner’s feet beneath the horse’s belly, and one of them winding the end of the lariat rope which served as a bridle round his hand, the band started.

Ever with a keen eye to opportunity, Vipan noted two thingsone that the band had undergone diminution by at least half its original number, the other that they were travelling almost due northeast. The halt had been made not many miles from the fatal gorge, whose frowning entrance he could just see as he turned his head.

No one could be more thoroughly aware than himself of the desperate strait into which he had fallen. He had witnessed more than one instance of men taking their own lives at the last critical moment to avoid capture and its inevitable sequel, a lingering death amid tortures too horrible to name. And now even that alternative was denied to him. The opportunity was past and gone.

“Ha, Golden Face,” said War Wolf, ranging his horse alongside his prisoner. “You thought I should have been hung before this.”

“Well, yes, I did. How did you manage to get clear?”

Then the savage, in fits of laughter, narrated all that had befallen him at Fort Price; how, after a time, he had been allowed a certain amount of guarded liberty, and how he had deftly managed to disarm the sentry and make his escape. It was a bold exploit, and so his listener candidly told him.

“Ha!” cried the warrior, chuckling and swelling with inflated vanity, “I am a man. Even the stone walls of the Mehneaska cannot hold me. I laugh, and down they go!”

Several of the Indians gathered around, and the conversation became lively. No one would have thought that this white man in their midst, with whom they were chatting and laughing so gaily was a prisoner, doomed to the most barbarous of deaths at their hands. The conversation turned on his own capture, and, in a nonchalant way, Vipan asked for particulars of that feat.

“Ha! Burnt Shoes is not a fool,” said War Wolf. “He is my brother.”

The warrior named grinned, and at a word from the chief he narrated how he had slipped away from the main body, and, unobserved by the prisoner, had gained the rocks over the latter’s head. When he was ready he had signalled to his fellows, who had made that unexpected move in order to fix the prisoner’s attention. He could easily have shot his enemy, but the temptation to take him alive was great. Therefore, seeing a convenient boulder handy, he had hurled it upon his enemy’s head, with the most satisfactory result to himself and his tribesmen.

“But,” added this candid young barbarian, “your scalp will be mine, anyhow.”

Vipan took no notice of this remark. He knew the speaker by sight apart from having recognised him as War Wolfs brother. Then he asked what had become of Satanta.

Here the Indians looked foolish, at least most of them did, while those who did not, unmercifully chaffed their companions. It came out that the black steed objected to the new ownership which it was purposed to assert over him, and watching his opportunity, which occurred while his saddle was being changed during the recent halt, had concluded to part company with the band. In a word, he had started off as fast as his legs could carry him. But several warriors had gone after him, added the speaker.

"They are after a shooting star, then," said Satanta's lawful owner. "They had the best horse in the NorthWest, and they have let him slip through their hands."

The party had been travelling at a rapid pace, and now the day was merging into twilight. Despatching pickets to neighbouring heights, the savages prepared for a good long halt.

Vipan was released from his steed, and allowed to seat himself upon the ground by the side of a fire that had been built. His captors crowded round him, laughing and talking in the friendliest fashion, and, noting it, his heart sank within him.

And who shall blame him? Bound and helpless, he knew the moment had come for putting him to the most hellish tortures. He read it in the grim, painted visages closing him in on every side. And between those ruthless demonfaces he beheld in the background a sight whose meaning he knew but too well.

Two Indians were busy driving strong pegs into the ground at intervals of several feet apart.

Then he did a strange thing. Quick as thought, and without any warning, he spat full into War Wolfs face.

With a yell of rage, the young chief, starting back, swung his tomahawk in the air. In another instant the prisoner would have gained his wish. He intended to exasperate the Indian into killing him on the spot.

But the others were wider awake. Seizing their chiefs arm, a couple of bystanders succeeded in arresting the blow. Then halfadozen sinewy warriors flinging themselves upon Vipan began to drag him towards the pegs aforesaid.

A barbarity popular among the Plains' tribes is that known as "staking out." The wretched captive is stripped and thrown on his back. Each hand and foot is then fastened to a peg driven firmly into the ground at the necessary distance apart. Thus spreadeagled, he is powerless to stir, beyond a limited wriggle. Then the fun begins, and

when is remembered the hideous agony that a handful of live coals stacked against the soles of a man's feet alone is warranted to produce, it follows that the amount of burning at the disposal of the red demons before death mercifully delivers the victim from their power is practically unlimited. In fact, their hellish sport may be bounded not by hours, but even by days. They generally begin by roasting the tenderest parts of the body, finally piling up the fire all over the stomach and chest of the sufferer.

Vipan, aware of the fate in store for him, seized his opportunity. While the savages were slightly relaxing their grasp in order to pull off his clothes, he made one stupendous effort. Cramped as he was, his herculean strength stood him in good stead. A couple of violent kicks in the stomach sent as many warriors to the earth gasping, and dragging others with them in their fall. Like a thunderbolt he dashed through the group, and before his enemies had recovered from their confusion he was many rods away, speeding down the hillside like a deer.

A frightful yell went up from the startled redskins. A score of rifles covered the flying fugitive, but a peremptory word from War Wolf knocked them up. Their prisoner was safe enough, no need to spoil sport by killing him. Though his legs where free, his arms were bound. A rush was made for the ponies. The plain was open for miles and miles. In five minutes they would retake him with ease.

Of this Vipan was only too well aware. The chances of escape had never entered into his calculations when he made his wild attempt. On foot and unbound he might have distanced the savages, but what chance had he against their ponies? A waterhole lay in the bottom, a mile away. He would strive to reach this, and, bound as he was, an easy death by drowning would be the alternative to hours of fiery torment.

And as he ran it seemed to the hunted man that this was no real occurrenceonly a horrid nightmare. The events of a lifetime shot through his mind. Then the thunder of flying hoofs behind.

He glanced over his shoulder. Would he reach the water? Ah, never did hunted man strain every nerve and muscle for life as did this one with death before him as the prize.

Nearer! The waterhole gleams cool and inviting. A hundred yardsthen fifty. The roar and thunder of hoofs is in his ears. It stuns him. Now for the final leap. Then death! Twenty steps more. He poises himself for the final spring. But it is not to be. The coil of a lazo has settled around him; he is jerked from his feet, dragged back a dozen yardsstunned, half senseless.

Then, as he wearily opens his eyes, doubtful whether he is dead or alive, he finds himself in the midst of a crowd of Indians, all mounted save the halfdozen who have run forward to secure him. With a sensation of surprise, his glance wanders amid the sea of painted visagesof surprise because many of them are known to him, and were certainly not among the band that effected his capture. Andcan he believe his ears?the chief of the party, a fine martiallooking warrior, is giving instructions that his bonds shall be cut.

“Wagh!” ejaculated the latter, with the ghost of a smile. “You have fallen upon rough times, Golden Face.”

Then the prisoner, once more a free man, looked up at the speaker and knew that he was safe. He recognised Mahtosapa.

And now a great hubbub arose as War Wolf and his party rode up, and angrily demanded their prisoner, emphasising their request by making a dash at the latter. But at a sign from the chief a dozen warriors placed themselves in front of Vipan.

Then the debate began to wax very breezy, and small wonder. By every right of immemorial custom and usage, the late prisoner was absolutely their property, and had they not been “choused” out of a rare and exquisitely enjoyable form of sport? Vipan, though too far off to hear all that was being said, caught the name “Tatankayotanka” as mentioned pretty frequently, and it seemed to have the effect of a damper on War Wolf. That impulsive savage, having indulged in a good deal of swagger, ended by sullenly accepting the situation. There is not much hardandfast law among Indians in a matter of this kind. If the redoubted warchief of the Minneconjou clan, surrounded by a large armed force, chose to retain halfadozen prisoners, War Wolf, who was not, properly speaking, a chief at all, had no redress, save such as he might attain by force of arms. But his following numbered barely thirty warriors, whereas Mahtosapa was at the head of fully five times that number.

Dismounting, the Minneconjou chief gravely sat down upon the ground. Then filling his pipe, and applying a light to the bowl, he handed it to Vipan without a word. In silence the latter received it, and after a few puffs handed it back.

“What was said just now about Sitting Bull?” he enquired at length.

“This. I have come out to look for you, Golden Face. Sitting Bull is anxious that you should visit him.”

“Oho, I begin to see,” said the adventurer to himself, as he lazily watched his late captors draw their ponies out of the crowd and ride sullenly away.

Now, in the debate just held, his rescuer had justified his action on twofold ground. War Wolf having allowed his prisoner to escape had forfeited all claim to him; secondly, the said prisoner, being an Englishman, his presence was required by Sitting Bull, the renowned chief of the hostiles, for political purposes.

Chapter Thirty Two.

The Village of the Hostiles.

All night longwith a brief halt towards morningthe warparty, with Vipan in its midst, pushed forward at a rapid pace.

The sun rose. They had passed the intricate defiles of the Bad Lands, and were now threading the rugged and broken country beyond. Piled in chaotic confusion, the great peaks leaning towards each other, or split and riven as by a titanic wedge, caught the first red glow upon their iron faces. Dark pinnacles soaring aloft, huge and forbidding, stood in the first delicate flush like graceful minarets; and here and there through a vista of falling slopes, the striped and fantastic face of a mesa would come into view, seamed with blue and black and red, according to the varying strata of its soft and evercrumbling formation. A hundred bizarre shapes reared their heads around. Here a clean rock shaft, so even and perpendicular in its towering symmetry that it seemed impossible to have been planned by the hand of Nature alone, standing side by side with some hugely grotesque representation of a head, changing from animal to human with every fresh point of view, so distorted yet so real, so hideous and repelling as to suggest involuntary thoughts of a demonguarded land. There a black and yawning fissure whose polished sides would hardly seem to afford restingplace for the eyrie of yon great wareagle soaring high above, his plumage gleaming in the lustre of the newborn day. Dark, cedarclad gorges rent the mountain sides, and on the nearer slopes the flash of something white through the tall, straight stems of the spruce firs showed where a deer, alarmed by this redoubtable inroad on his early grazing ground, had darted away, with a whisk of his white “flag.”

And in thorough keeping with its surroundings was the aspect of the wild host, threading its way through these solitudes. A clear, dashing mountain brook curved and sparkled along a level bottom carpeted with the greenest of sweet grass, and along this, strung out to the distance of a mile, cantered group after group of mounted savages, the fantastic adornments of themselves and their steeds streaming out to the morning breeze; their waving plumes, and painted faces, their shining weapons and brilliantlycoloured accoutrements, and the easy grace with which they sat their steeds as they defiled along the everwinding gorge, forming about as striking and wildly picturesque a sight as would be happened upon, travel we the whole world over.

All fear of pursuit being now over, the warriors rode anyhow, broken up into groups or couples as the humour possessed them. Most of them were chatting and laughing with that ease and lightheartedness which in their hours of relaxation is characteristic of most savage peoples, a lightheartedness and freedom from care which renders them

akin to children. Near the rear of the party rode Mahtosapa and his prisoner, together with three or four warriors of high rank.

For that he was such, Vipan himself was not left in any doubt, nor was there room for any. Though relieved from the indignity of bonds, yet his arms had not been returned to him, not even a knife. Moreover, the steed he bestrode was far from being the best in the party. All of which he had hinted as delicately as possible to the chief. The latter's reply was characteristic.

"PatienceGolden Face. It is not we who have taken your weapons; it is War Wolf and his party. As for horses, my young men are none of them too well mounted. Besides," added the Indian, a humorous gleam lighting up his fine face as he noted the other's deprecatory shake of the head, "besidesGolden Face has shamefully neglected his red brothers since the Mehneaska waggons came along. Why do they bring beautiful white girls into a country where the ground is too rough for their tender feet? No. Have patience. My young men would be more than angry did you leave them now to go and look after a white woman. She is safe now, but both she and the Brown Beaver would have fallen into the hands of War Wolf had you not acted as you did," he continued. "Wagh! Golden Face, it is not like you to throw away your life for a squaw!"

The adventurer made no reply, but the other's remark set him thinking. It left, so to say, an unpleasant taste. He was at an age when most men have parted with their illusions, and he himself certainly was no exception. To his keen, cynical nature absolute trust was wellnigh impossible. Would he ever see Yseulte Santorex again, and even if he did, would he not be in the same position as beforea king in these Western wilds, in civilisation a pauper? He knew the worldnone better. It was one thing for this beautiful and refined girl to feel drawn towards a companion and protector in the midst of the perilous vicissitudes of Western travel, but that after months of reflection on her return to safety and comfort she should still continue to think of a man whose antecedents were doubtful, of whose very identity she was ignorant, in the face, too, of the opposition of friends and relatives, was quite another. For long he rode in silence, and his thoughts were very bitter.

All day the march continued. That night the Indians, being comparatively beyond fear of pursuit, camped for a long rest, and resuming their progress at dawn, towards nightfall reached the bank of a river. This was immediately forded, and then halting on the opposite bank the whole band collected together. Then, after a word of instruction from their chief, the warriors formed into line, and with a loud and prolonged whoop dashed forward at a brisk canter.

The shout was answered from some distance ahead, and lo! as by magic, there sprang up the red glow of many a fire, and among the thinlyscattered timber bordering the stream tall lodges might be descried, standing in groups or in long irregular lines, hundreds and hundreds of them. Then in the gloaming the whole village swarmed with dusky shapes. Squaws flung down their burdens, or abruptly quitted their household employments, and, dancing and singing, crowded around to welcome the returning warparty. Young bucks, eager to know what had been done in scalps and plunder, turned out by the dozen. Children yelled and curs barked and howled, and still the everincreasing crowd gathered about the returned warriors.

Suddenly the latter, reining in their ponies, burst into a wild warsong. It was taken up by the motley crowd following upon their ponies' heels, and as the savage horsemen, in all the trappings of their martial bravery, paced at length into the centre of the village, the shrill, weird chorus echoing from many thousand throats, while the red light danced and glowed upon plumed crests and burnished weapons rising above the sea of fierce painted visages, the bold mind of the white adventurer was filled with admiration as he gazed upon this stirring picture which for grandeur and awesomeness left nothing to be desired.

Thus they entered the camp of the hostiles.

"Listen, Golden Face," said Mahtosapa, as he spread a buffalo robe for his guest. "It will not be well to wander in the camp alone."

"No, I am a prisoner, and unarmed."

The other smiled slightly, with a significant glance at an old leathern wallet hanging to the pole. Then he left the lodge.

The adventurer, following his glance, promptly explored the receptacle. He found an old singlebarrelled pistol and a scalpingknife. The pistol was capped and loaded.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Sitting Bull.

The morning after his arrival in the village of the hostiles Vipan was seated eating his breakfast in the lodge of his host, in company with the latter and one of his brothers, when the door of the teepe was darkened, and an Indian entered.

Now there was nothing in the appearance of this warrior to denote special rank. His dress was strikingly plain, the beaded blanket thrown around his shoulders was considerably the worse for wear, not to say shabby, and his head was adorned with a single eagle quill stuck in the back of his hair. Yet a glance at the powerful, thicklybuilt frame, the deepset, though penetrating eyes, the square jaw and slightly pockmarked countenance, and Vipan felt instinctively that this was none other than the redoubtable warchief of the hostiles himself.

With a grunt of salutation, the new arrival sat himself down among the inmates of the teepe, then, without a word, and as a matter of course, proceeded to help himself out of the threelegged pot containing the smoking and savoury stew which constituted the repast. Not a word was spoken, not a question asked, and the four men proceeded with their meal in silence.

Tatankayotanka, or Sitting Bull, was at that time in the very zenith of his pride and influence. He represented the fearless and implacable warfaction in the nation, and in his persistent and uncompromising hostility to the Americans and the United States Government he differed from the more diplomatic Red Cloud. As in the case of the latter, however, Sitting Bull was not born to hereditary chieftainship, yet at that time the influence he had achieved among his countrymen by his personal prowess and skilful generalship was so solid and farreaching that sagacious and powerful warchiefs such as Mahtosapa deemed it sound policy to cooperate with him; for the authority of a chief among the Plains tribes, in addition to his prowess in war, depends not a little on his conformity with the sense and wishes of his tribesmen, and he who should commit himself unreservedly to a peace policy in opposition to the desires of his people would soon find himself in the position of a chief without any adherents. Yet as savages rarely do things by halves, it followed that however inclined for peace they might be at first, such chiefs and warriors once they stood committed to war threw themselves into the prosecution of hostilities with all the ardour and aggressiveness of their more bloodthirstily disposed brethren.

Sitting Bulllike many another savage leaderwas a shrewd thinker. The experience of the last campaign had inspired him with profound contempt for the United States Government. The latter's demands had then been successfully resisted, and after a sharp and sanguinary struggle, culminating in the Fort Phil Kearney massacre, the Government had retired, almost precipitately. The Sioux nation had never been conquered. The Sioux warriors were as daring and warlike today as then, and were better armed, for they could obtain, and had obtained, from unscrupulous traders as many weapons of the latest improved patterns and as much ammunition as they could afford to purchase. The Government, he reasoned, had not kept faith with them in the matter of the Black Hills and other sections of their country, then full of white men; therefore, let the Government look to itself. That the Indian leader's reasoning was sound according to his lights, was proved by subsequent events, among them the calamitous massacre of nearly three hundred brave soldiers, together with one of the most dashing cavalry officers and successful Indian fighters the United States army has ever possessed. (Note 1.) But no savage of his race and instincts could be expected to take into his reckoning the steady tide of immigration pouring into the American continent from the Old World, for the simple reason that his conception of the very existence of an Old World was of so shadowy a nature as to be practically legendary.

The meal over, each of the three Indians wiped his knife upon his leggings or the soles of his moccasins with a grunt of satisfaction. Then the inevitable pipe was filled, lighted, and duly passed round.

Vipan, thoroughly restored by a good night's rest, and with perfect confidence in himself, looked forward to the keen skirmish of wits which was at hand, and in which the slightest failure in coolness and wariness might cost him his life, with feelings not far short of downright enjoyment.

After the pipe had gone round in silence, Sitting Bull spoke. He had often heard of Golden Face, the friend of the Dahcotah nation, he said. Now he was glad to have an opportunity of smoking with him, and learning from his lips.

The speaker paused, and Vipan merely acknowledged the compliment by a grave bend of the head. The chief continued:

Golden Face, he had been given to understand, had been a great fighting man among his own people, and a leader of warriors. He was not of the Mehneaska, the nation with whom no faith could be kept. Why, then, had he fought for the Mehneaska against his Dahcotah brethren?

Vipan, with due deliberation, replied that those for whom he fought were his own countrymennot Americans. They were subjects of the Great White Queen, whose dominions lay to the north (Canada). Why had the Dahcotah attacked them and run off their stock?

“Were they all King George men?” asked the shrewd chief, half closing his eyes and looking into space.

This was a staggerer, but Vipan was equal to it.

“They were not,” he said. “Only the leader and his household. For the rest, they bore me as little love as they do the Dahcotah warriors who ran off their horses and cattle. Listen now, and mark.” Then he graphically narrated the circumstances under which he had warned Winthrop’s outfit of the lurking warparty, making it appear that his warning had been due simply and solely to his recognition of his fellowcountrymen among the travellers.

Not a muscle of Sitting Bull’s crafty countenance moved as he listened.

“How!” he said, quietly, when the speaker ceased. “Did not Golden Face declare that he owned no nationality?”

This was another staggerer, and a more serious one than before. But Vipan’s imperturbability was of a quality warranted to stand shocks. Inwardly he laughed over the other’s shrewdness in bringing up his own words in judgment against him.

That was true, he replied. But apart from the fact of that particular white man being his fellowcountryman, and therefore one against whom the Dahcotah nation had no quarrel, he was the son of a man who had once rendered him a most important service. Who worthy of the name and dignity of a warrior ever forgot to requite a good turn once rendered, even at the peril of his life?

This answer, if not altogether received as gospel by his hearers, sent him up ten per cent, in their estimation. Nowhere is diplomatic talent and readiness in debate held in such high respect as among savage races.

“The white girl who hunted with Golden Face is very beautiful,” went on Sitting Bull. “Was it for her he lifted his rifle against his Dahcotah brethren?”

“Who would not fight for a beautiful woman, be she white or red?” answered Vipan, with a burst of welltimed frankness. “Sitting Bull is a great chief, let him judge if my words

are straight. Did War Wolf and his followers come to me as to a friend? No; they attacked me as enemies. Then when they treated me as an enemy and an ordinary prisoner of war, did I complain? Sitting Bull is a great chief, a warrior of renown, but who is War Wolf? Who is he, I say? Enough: I have smoked in council with Red Cloud and the chiefs of the Dahcotah nation. My words are for the ears of chiefs, not for those of boys, who passed the Sundance but yesterday."

The ghost of a smile flitted across Sitting Bull's grim features at this reply, while a murmur of approbation escaped the other two auditors. No one understood better than the speaker the advantage of making the most of himself among these people, nor was the dexterous compliment to his own eminence thrown away upon the bold and sagacious warrior who had, so to say, risen from the ranks.

"But," rejoined the latter, "if the white girl was of the race of King George, with whom we have no quarrel, why did not Golden Face bring her among his Dahcotah brethren, where he might have lived with her in peace and safety?"

Vipan explained that a white girl such as her of whom they were speaking would never consent to accompany him unless as his wife, and even then she must be married according to the customs of her people. To this the wily chief quoted the case of his friend and brother, Mahtosapa, who had a white wife. She had been taken to wife according to Dahcotah custom; and whose lodge was more comfortable than hers; who was cared for better than she?

Now Vipan was aware of the existence of this personage, yet strange to say, bearing in mind his friendship with the Minneconjou chief, had never seen her. He was aware, too, that she was originally a white captive, seized by the Indians during one of their dreaded raids upon a settlement or waggon train some years previously, but that was the extent of his knowledge. It must be confessed he felt a good deal of curiosity on the subject, but he was not the man to allow any sign of it to appear. His answer, however, was ready and to the point.

That might be true, he replied; but it was a matter of which he, Vipan, knew nothing, nor did it concern him in any way. What he did know was this: The white girl in question was of very considerable account in her own country. True, most of the warriors in Sitting Bull's village were histhe speaker'sbrethren. But some were not. There were some in it at that moment who looked upon him as an enemy, who had treated him as one. What if he had brought this white girl with him, and she had metwith harm at the hands of any of these? Would not her people require a heavy reckoning? The Dahcotah huntinggrounds were bounded on the north by the British line. Would it be the act of a friend to do anything which should embroil the Dahcotah nation with two strong Powers

instead of one, in such wise too that they should be surrounded with enemies on every side?

He had played a very trump card in making this reply, and he knew it. For he had seen through Sitting Bull's motives in requiring his presence in the camp of the hostiles, and was resolved to make the most of it; and upon the extent of his success he was well aware that his very life depended.

"Wagh!" exclaimed the chief, with wellfeigned indifference. "The Dahcotah people fear the enmity of no one. Yet they seek no quarrel with the countrymen of Golden Face. They have always heard that the King George men have straight tongues, and that the Great White Queen keeps her promises, and fulfils her treaties with the red tribes within her territory."

Then followed a good deal of what, for want of a better word, we will call "dark" talking. Sitting Bull in a series of highly diplomatic hints, and using much figurative language, strove to sound his prisoner as to the probability of the British being induced to espouse his people's cause in the event of the coming campaign ending disastrously to them. Vipan, ever mindful of his precarious position as in fact a prisoner, though treated outwardly as a guest, answered cautiously, and to the effect that although the British would be to the last degree unlikely actively to interfere in their favour, yet it would be fatally imprudent to commit any act tending to incur the hostility of the great and mighty Power who occupied the northern boundary line of their country, and whose territory, indeed, might yet serve them as a refuge in time of need, for who could foretell the chances of war? At the same time he threw out more than one dexterous hint as to the services he himself might be able to render his Dahcotah brethren in the event of any such lamentable contingency.

Judging that enough had been said for the present, Sitting Bull arose.

"It is well," he said, throwing his blanket round his shoulders, as he prepared to depart. "The counsels of Golden Face are always good to listen to. His presence is very welcome to his red brethren."

Judging the moment a favourable one, Vipan delicately hinted that so welcome a guest should not be treated in a manner unworthy the dignity of a warriorin a word, that his weapons should be restored to him.

Again that ghost of a smile crossed the face of the wily chieftain.

“No one could mistake Golden Face for anything but a warrior,” he said, sweetly. “Is he not surrounded by his friends, his brothers? Who requires to go armed among his friends?”

There was nothing for it but to accept the position, and, moreover, to accept it with a good grace. Suddenly there arose a terrific din outsideshrieks and yells, shouts of demoniac laughter, and the trampling of many feet.

Note 1. General George A. Custer, who fell into an ambuscade on the Little Bighorn river, and perished with his entire command at the hands of the hostile Sioux, under Sitting Bull, on the 25th June, 1876.

Chapter Thirty Four.

The Two Victims.

If ever a spectacle of hell let loose was vouchsafed to mortal eye, assuredly it must have borne a strong family likeness to that presented by the Indian village, as Vipan and the three chiefs stepped gravely outside the teepe to see what was going on.

A wild, roaring, yelling crowd came surging into the open space where stood the councillodge. Bucks and squaws, children and dogs, all mingled together in a motley mass, whooping, laughing, chattering and grinning. A sea of wild excited faces, the crowd poured onward, gathering as it rolled. Then the cause of all this excitement became discernible. In the front of the throng, in the centre of a group of yelling squaws, hustled, beaten, kicked, dragged along by the bloodthirsty harpies, were two white men. Their arms were tightly bound behind their backs, but their feet were tied so as to enable them to make short steps. They had been stripped naked, and their bodies, already lacerated with many a weal, and bruised from the switches and clubs of their tormentors, were plentifully besmeared with their own blood.

"Wagh, Golden Face!" exclaimed Sitting Bull, with grim humour. "Our squaws seem to handle your countrymen very tenderly."

The adventurer made no reply. Even he felt his heart sicken within him at the thought of the hideous fate these two wretched men were about to undergo. Yet drawn by an uncontrollable impulse, he found himself moving beside the three Indians, who were strolling leisurely in the direction taken by the crowd. Not that his red friends manifested any interest in the proceedings. The torture of helpless prisoners was sport for boys and squaws, and unworthy of the attention of great chiefs or warriors of renown. Still, with the characteristic weakness of their race to witness anything unusual, they followed the crowd.

As the latter thundered along the open space, the inmates of the clustering groups of teepes on either side poured forth to swell its ranks. Young bucks would dart out in front, and execute a series of leaps in the air, uttering shrill whoops, and even the river was dotted with bullboats, as the inhabitants of the villages on the opposite bank crowded over in hundreds to see the fun. Knives were flourished in the prisoners' faces, kicks and slaps were their portion at every step; indeed, it almost seemed that the illusage of the infuriated mob would mercifully end their sufferings before they should reach the terrible stake. Something of this seemed to strike their tormentors themselves, for all of a sudden a compact band of young bucks charged into the mass, drove back the

yelling squaws, and seizing the two unhappy wretches, dragged them forward at a smart run.

Just outside the village was a clear space. Here a couple of stout posts, eight or nine feet high, had been driven into the ground about a dozen yards apart.

And now Vipan had an opportunity of estimating the strength of the band or bands into whose midst he had so involuntarily penetrated. Far along the riverbanks on either side, extending a distance of five or six miles, the tall lodges stood in lines and clusters among the thin belt of timber which lined the stream. These and the village behind him, roughly reckoning, he estimated to represent some four or five thousand warriors. Overhead the great mountains shot up their craggy heads, blasted into a score of fantastic shapes, frowning down upon the barbarous scene like grim tutelaries of destruction.

The two miserable men were backed against the posts and firmly secured, their arms being drawn up high above their heads and stretched to the utmost. Powerless to move a limb, they were ready for the torturers.

Suddenly a piercing cry for help burst from one of them. In it Vipan recognised his own name.

In deference to their rank, the crowd had made way for the chiefs in whose company he was. At a sign from Sitting Bull, it now gave way further, and Vipan was able to approach within easy speakingdistance of the prisoners.

“Oh, for God’s sake, Mr Vipan, save me from torture! Kill meput me out of my misery at once!”

Vipan stared at the utterer of this agonised prayer. In the distorted features, cut and bruised out of all knowledge, and livid with the dews of bodily and mental anguish, in the strained eyeballs staring from their sockets in deadly fear, he could hardly recognise the unfortunate Geoffry Vallance.

A curious change passed over the adventurer’s face, so curious that even many of the Indians standing around noticed it and wondered.

“I am the last person in this world, of whom you ought to ask a benefit,” he said curtly.

Had there been time for reflection, poor Geoffry might well have been amazed. Now, halffrenzied with terror, he only moaned:

“Save me from the torture! Kill me, that is all I ask you!”

“I cannot if I would,” was the answer, in a more relenting tone. “How did you manage to let them capture you?”

“It was the day the camp was taken,” gasped the wretched prisoner. “I was lingering behind and got lost, and then my horse ran away when I was dismounted. I don’t know how it was, but I looked up and found myself in the middle of the Indians.”

“Well, I can do nothing for you. Mind me, though. I knew a chap in your position once. He managed to roll his tongue back into his throat and choke himself. He escaped the fire that way. Try it. It’s your only chance.”

The despairing moan with which this gloomy alternative was received was drowned by a loud cry from the other white man.

“Colonel Vipan. Git us out of this fix, for the Lord’s sake! I kin put you on to a good thing, I kin!”

The adventurer turned in amazement. He saw what was a villainous countenance at the best of times, and now with the shaggy beard matted with saliva and gouts of blood, it was hideous and horrible in the extreme. He recognised the man he had felled in the liquor saloon at Henniker CityBitter Rube.

“How in thunder did you get into this hobble?” he said.

“It’s this way, Colonel. The red devils jumped us at our placer. They scalped the other three.”

“Burntwood Creek?”

“That’s it, Colonel. You get me out of this, and I’ll make you a rich man for life. There’s gold there worth millions and millions.”

“Glad to hear it, Bitter Rube,” was the unconcerned reply. “I know the place all right; going to work it by and by. It’s where your mate jumped me and got laid out for his pains. Remember your scheme to lynch me, eh, Bitter Rube?”

“Oh, Lord, Colonel. It was the other chaps. See here now”

“Well, I can’t even repay the little service you were going to render mea short shrift and a long rope,” interrupted Vipan, the scowling glances and increasing murmurs of the throng convincing him of the peril he himself was incurring. A frantic yell burst from the prisoner.

“You snakespawned white Injun! Here’s a white man being cut into chunks before your eyes. I’ll haunt yer! I’ll ghost yer! I’ll make life a hell to yer!”

The miserable wretch went on to bellow the most frantic blasphemies. One of the young Indians, stepping up behind him, thrust a redhot faggot into his open mouth. This was greeted as an excellent joke by the onlookers, who shouted and screamed with laughter. Then one of them applied a light to the victim’s unkempt and shaggy beard. It frizzled and flared up, burning the wretched man frightfully about the face and head. The mirth of the spectators became wellnigh uncontrollable.

“How! white brudder,” said a burly buck, grinning hideously into Geoffry’s face, and patting him fraternally on the shoulder. “Injun brudder hab heap fun. Injun brudder not hurt you first. Other man hurt firstyou see himyou hab heap good fun. You hurt first, you no laughother hurt first, you plenty laughInjun brudder plenty laugh. Howhow!”

Then the wretched Geoffry understood that with a diabolical refinement of cruelty the savages intended that he should witness the torture and death of his companion in adversity before his own turn came. He could only raise his eyes stupidly to the grinning countenance of his addresser.

Two squaws now stepped forwardhideous hags whose long flattened breasts fell in disgusting flaps below their waists. They were nearly naked, and each held in her hand a sharp knife. Advancing to the sufferer they made an incision down each of his sides, and proceeded to skin him alive as coolly as a butcher would flay a dead sheep.

The anguished shrieks of the victim were terrible to hear; but no spark of pity did they stir in the hearts of the ruthless fiends who crowded around, gloating over this diabolical performance. They danced and laughed, leaping high in the air, hurling taunting epithets at the miserable victim, and exhorting the other prisoner to observe what was in store for him. And in their hellish glee the women, if anything, surpassed the younger and more ferocious of the warriors.

For nearly an hour the scene went onvaried at intervals by the passing of a lighted torch along those portions of the victim’s body already laid bare. The piercing shrieks of the tortured wretch sunk into laboured and hollow groansthen ceased altogether. He had fainted.

A glance having sufficed to show them that he was not dead, the performers stood back, contemplating their handiwork with a grin of ferocious satisfaction. And so deftly had they done it, that from chin to feet, the front and sides of the sufferer's body was entirely denuded of skin, which hung from his shoulders in a bleeding and ghastly mantle. Yet this was only the first stage of his torture.

Vipan, who had perforce witnessed this hideous spectacle, felt seized with a violent and wellnigh uncontrollable nausea, and would have turned away. But as the exhibition of the slightest repulsion or feeling would have been not merely inexpedient, but highly dangerous, he was constrained to master himself. Besides, a sort of horrible fascination rooted him to the spotan overmastering and morbid curiosity to see how the other prisoner would fare.

Sitting Bull, who with a few other chiefs had been witnessing the hellish performance with grave impassiveness, must have read his thoughts.

"They are not King George men," he remarked laconically. "They are not your countrymen, Golden Face."

Vipan made no reply. The remark suggested an idea. He might be able to save Geoffry by claiming him as a fellowcountryman. A strange struggle took place within him. Why should he? If he attempted to do so it would be at deadly risk to himself, and even then would he meet with success? And apart from these considerations, as he himself had told the unfortunate one, he was the last man from whom the latter should claim any assistance.

Then the bloodthirsty rage of the barbarous horde took a fresh turn. Their one victim was for the time being insensible to pain, but there was another. Him they had been reserving with this end in view. Shouts were raised that it was time to begin upon him.

With a wildbeast laugh, the two fiendlike hags approached the new victim, their reeking knives in hand, the yells and roars of the crowd urging them on. The miserable Geoffry, bound immovably to the stake, watched their approach. His eyes protruded from their sockets, a cold sweat rained down his distorted countenance, and there was a strange hoarse rattle in his throat. It was a sight to haunt the spectator for a lifetime. Then his head fell heavily forward on his chest.

Seizing him by the hair, one of the female fiends forced it back. It was as lead in her grasp. Then the truth became apparent. The miserable captive was stonedead. He had died of sheer horror and fright.

A moment of silence, then with a wild yell of disappointed fury the ferocious crowd flung itself upon the corpse and hacked and mutilated it into a shapeless and gory mass. Then the blind madness of their bloodthirsty rage fairly let loose, they turned once more to the first victim. The scalp was torn from his head; knives and burning splinters were stuck into his flesh; and the yet warm and palpitating heart was plucked out and reared aloft on the point of a lance. Then bundles of dry brushwood were piled around both of the mangled corpses, and set alight, and soon the red tongues of flamewhose roaring and crackling was drowned by the frenzied yells of the savages as they danced and leaped around like devils let loose from the nethermost hellshot upward, licking around the cruel stakes of torture, and a horrible and sickening odour of burning flesh hung upon the air. A great volume of smoke mounted to the heavens, and, after watching it for a while, the whole fiendlike crowd surged back to the village, there to hold a gigantic scalpdancebearing the reeking trophies aloft on lancepoints.

All that remained of the border ruffian and the unfortunate Geoffry Vallance were two little heaps of calcined bones.

Chapter Thirty Five.

The Sun Queen.

A month had gone by. The mountain air had become thin and steely, and the gorgeous glories of the goldenhued woods were falling fast. Winter was in the atmosphere.

In the villages of the hostiles time was of no account. Dancing and warlike exercises, gossip, storytelling and gambling, and hunting in the adjacent mountains, thus this great gathering of savages on a warfooting solaced their leisure hourswhich were many. Bands of warriors, under some favourite chief or partisan, would strike the warpost, and sally forth on some more or less desperate foray, returning in due time with scalps or plunder, or both. Once they brought with them a wretched prisoner, who was promptly done to death under the usual circumstances of revolting barbarity.

Now, of this life Vipan had become heartily sick. Accustomed as he was to come and go at will among the camps and villages of the Sioux, the restraint of knowing himself a prisoner galled him. For although allowed a certain amount of liberty, and rather ostentatiously treated as a guest, he was carefully watched. But it is doubtful whether another cause had not more to do with his weariness and disgust. That was no mere passing passion whose expression had so nearly escaped him when standing in the dugout with Yseulte Santorex. By an inexplicable rebound from his wild and reckless life, this man's mature mind and strong nature had sprung to the other extreme. Well he knewnone betterhis position, or, rather, the utter lack of it, did he return to civilisation, and there were times when he felt tempted to throw himself in heart and soul with his Indian friends, to lead them on the warpath, and in ferocity and daring excelling even the savages themselves, to devote the remainder of his life to acts of vengeance upon that civilisation whose laws had placed it in the power of a specious hypocrite to drive him forth from its midst a pauper and an outcastacts of barbarous and bloody vengeance that should render his name a terror to the whole of the Western frontier. What had he to do with softnesswith loveat his time of life? Yseulte Santorex would be safe in her English home by this time, probably recallingwhen she did recall ittheir acquaintanceship only as a passing romance embedded among her other adventurous experiences. With such reflections would he lash and torture himself.

More than once when accompanying some of their hunting parties into the mountains he had been seized by a wild impulse to make a dash for liberty. But the catlike watchfulness of the Indians never flagged, and upon such occasions a glance was enough to show the impracticability of any such scheme. The first step would be the signal for a volley of bullets through his bodymoreover, he was never allowed the use of anything but an inferior steed.

And now, day by day, his situation became more precarious. Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and the other chiefs had somehow waxed more than doubtful of late as to whether his services in regard to a possible British intervention would be of any use at alland this idea was insidiously fostered by his enemies, who were many and powerfulMountain Cat, the Ogallalla warchief, and CrowScalper, who hated all whites, and the band of young desperadoes who had attached themselves to the fortunes of War Wolf. The latter brave's bumptiousness had become simply overwhelming. Full of the recentlyacquired importance conferred upon him by his captivity among the whites and subsequent escape, he would strut and swagger around, bedecked in all his warpaint and finerypassing Vipan with a contemptuous laugh or a remark of covert insolence. The only consideration that restrained the latter from inflicting summary chastisement was the certainty that the hour he did so would be his last. And his friend and protector, Mahtosapa, was frequently absent on warlike or diplomatic expeditions. The sullen and hostile feeling growing around him was written on every grim and scowling face. He felt as helpless as a fly in a spider's web.

Pondering over these things, he was seated one day alone in the lodge of his hostthe latter being away upon one of those absences which constituted such a peril to himselfwhen a shadow darkened the entry and a feminine voice inquired in English:

"May I come in?"

He started, as well he might. The accent was pure and refined, the tone firm and pleasing. For answer he rose and bowed, and the speaker entered.

Strange as it may seem, during all this while Vipan had seen his host's white wife by no more than a few stray passing glimpses, and then at a distance. It had always struck him that she avoided him with design, and he had respected her motives. She dwelt in two teepes, which she occupied all to herselfan unwonted luxuryand was attended on by a Shoshone slave girl of unrivalled hideosity, captured on one of the chief's forays into the country of the Snakes.

He saw before him a tall, finelooking woman who might or might not have been under forty. She was habited in the tasteful Indian dress, and the tunic and leggings of soft doeskin, beautifully embroidered, brought out every line and curve of a splendidlymoulded figure. Her face, browned and hardened by exposure to the sun, and a life not altogether free from privation, was lighted up by a pair of clear blue eyes, and must formerly have been one of striking beauty. But the chief attraction was her hair. This was not arranged in two long plaits after the Sioux fashion, but rippled over her shoulders in a heavy redundant mass, forming a very mantle of sheeny, ruddy gold,

explaining to the astonished spectator the name she bore among her adopted compatriots, The Sun Queen. ButHeavenswhat an apparition to meet with in the camp of the hostile Sioux!

“Thanks,” she said, simply, seating herself upon the pile of robes which Vipan had dragged forward for that purpose. Then pausing a moment to see if he would break the silence, she went on: “You do not seem to remember me.”

“Pardon me. I am not likely to have forgotten you,” was the quiet reply, with an undercurrent of cutting satire. “Who that had seen her could ever forget the beautiful Miss D’Arcythe Belle of the Island?” She broke into a bitter laugh. “Is that what they used to call me? I had forgottenit seems such a long, long time ago. Could it have been myself? I, Isabel D’Arcy, who held the whole island in thrall; Government House, the garrisonallall my humble devoted slaves, now the wife of a painted savage! In a word, an Indian squaw!”

“And because I declined to make one of the crowd of your humble devoted slaves you ruined my life. You blighted my whole career as a sacrifice to your ruffled vanity. One word from you would have exonerated meyet you did not speak it.”

“Why did you not defend yourself? Why did you not explain the matter fully?”

“I was a fool not to, perhaps. In fact, I am sure I was. Well, you seeit was no part of my creed to give away a friend, nor yet a womanfor it was in a secondary degree on your account that I kept silence and set up no defence.”

“On my account?” she echoed.

“Yes. Your only chance of getting clear out of the business was to deny the whole thing and stick to it. If I had cut in with the story of the other man borrowing my charger for the occasion, especially as owing to our striking resemblance we were often taken for each otherwhy the whole murder would have been out. No, there was nothing for it but the denial.”

“Andand have you never explained a word of it since?”

“Never. What was the use? I was already condemned. Your uncle, Sir George, had more than enough influence for that, and I was practically cashiered. I must, however, give him credit for the astute way in which the business was hushed up. Barentyne, I suppose, couldn’t clear me for fear of giving you away.”

“And what became of Major Barentyne?” she asked eagerly.

“He left the service soon afterwards. He’s a governorgeneral now, a sort of viceroy, and all sorts of things; while I’mwell, a fair specimen of a Western border ruffian. Thus, in this world, is the saddle clapped upon the wrong horse, and the scapegoat is jerked forth into the wildernessand it doesn’t much matter.”

There was no heat, no upbraiding in his tone. After the first touch of satire underlying his recognition of her he spoke in an even, almost monotonous voice, puffing slowly at his long Indian pipe with the impassiveness of the red men themselves. Then a silence fell between them. The meeting, the conversation, seemed to have bridged over the weary, hopeless years of captivity of the one, the aimless and chequered wanderings of the other. By magic the Indian teepe, with its confusion of parflèches and robes and cookingpots and wickerbeds, seemed to have disappeared, and once more their minds were back among the Government House state and the garrison festivities of the island colony, and many a familiar, but longforgotten, face and memory of other days. And now the once beautiful girl who had queened it there, the descendant of a good old line, was the weary, middleaged wife of a Sioux chief, doomed to live and die among the red barbarians. Truly the whirligig of Fortune was executing a strange freak when it brought these two face to face thus.

“I have, indeed, injured you,” she said at length. “But I can yet make some amends?”

He shook his head.

“Listen,” she went on. “I can do this. I can give you in writing a full and true statement of the whole affair. Then you can return home and clear yourself.”

“And to what end?” he answered. “Nothing on earth is to be gained by raking up old troubles already forgotten. Besides, you are forgetting; I am a prisoner here, and, candidly, have very small hope of ever knowing liberty again. My time is about run out. Do you know that from hour to hour I live in unceasing apprehension of treachery? Any moment may be my last. See, I have an old pistol hereonly one shot. I am keeping it for myself, if necessary, for I will never figure at their hellish stake.”

She shuddered.

“But,” she urged, lowering her voice, and speaking quickly, “but what if I can help you to escape?”

He looked up, a flash of hope in his eyes. Then he shook his head.

“I’m afraid it can’t be done. They would be certain to detect your agency in the matter, and then what would be your fate?”

“What, you can still make that a consideration!” she exclaimed in amazement. Then, suddenly she burst into a flood of tears.

“Forgive me,” she said, quickly recovering herself. “I am very foolish. But you are the first of my race I have conversed with for eight long years. The only white faces I have seen during that time have been those of wretched prisoners brought in for torture and outrage, or of horse thieves and border ruffians, more repulsive and villainous than those of the savages themselves.”

“I had no idea of your identity,” he said, “until you came in here just now. Then I recognised you, for I never forget a face. I am not easily astonished, but I was then. If the subject is not painful I should be glad to know the circumstances of your being here at all.”

She laughed drearily.

“Oh, no! Feeling is pretty well dead by now, and happily so. The story is that of many another, only I suppose I ought to reckon myself fortunate when I think of what I have seen others go through. In an evil moment I arranged to come home from the Islands with some friends, who were anxious to do the trip overland. We landed at San Francisco, and all went well until we reached this side of the mountains. We were a small party, so small that the people at Fort Laramie tried all they could to dissuade us from going on, as most of the tribes were on the warpath. We were attacked on the banks of the North Platte, about two days out from Laramie. It was early in the morning, and we had just hitched up for a start. The spring waggon containing ourselves was a little behind the rest. Suddenly a band of warriors, hundreds of them it seemed, charged in upon us yelling like fiends. The teamsters were shot dead in a moment. Mr Elsdale, under whose protection I was travelling, was run through with a lance almost before he had time to fire a shot, and his wife and I were at the mercy of the savages. Even now I would rather not think of what she had to go through.”

“And yourself?”

“I fainted, mercifully. I must have remained unconscious for hours, for when I came to I found myself tightly held by a powerful Indian in front of his saddle. The party was travelling at a considerable pace, and some of them carried freshlytaken scalps, those of our unfortunate outfit. My captor smiled goodhumouredly as I opened my eyes, and,

with signs and a word or two of English, told me not to be afraid, they were not going to kill me. Even then it struck me that he had a fine face. There was an expression of humanity and kindness in it totally absent from the hideous and painted visages of the rest. That man was Mahtosapa."

She paused, and seemed to make an effort to proceed. Her listener, keenly interested, still smoked gravely without speaking.

"That night, when we halted, there was a frightful scene. Mrs Elsdale was a prisoner too, but I had not seen her until then. Well, you know Indians and their ways. She was dead before morning. That I escaped the same brutal treatment was due to the chief. It appears that he had captured me with his own hand, and he claimed me as his exclusive property. There was nearly a fight over me, and I have since learned that it was little short of a miracle that he carried his point. Well, I was taken to their head village unmolested, for the chief protected me unswervingly the whole way, and then he took me as his wife. What could I do, at the mercy of a band of ruthless savages? Some women might have killed themselves, but I was a fullblooded creature and clung to life; besides I always had a strong dash of the Bohemian in me."

Vipan remembered how that very thing used to be said of her among the envious gossips of the island colony, who had predicted all sorts of queer futures for Isabel D'Arcy. Surely, however, that which had befallen her was many degrees queerer than even they had ever designed for her.

"The chief was a splendidlooking man," she continued, "and I felt genuinely grateful to him when I thought what he had saved me from. So I made a virtue of necessity, and resolved to make the best of the situation; and that I succeeded in obtaining a certain amount of ascendancy over him you may judge from the style in which I am allowed to live. He has always treated me well, and I have never been molested in the smallest degree from the time it was an understood thing that I was his property. I have more than once been the means of saving a wretched prisoner, not from deaththat would be beyond even my powerbut from the frightful ordeal of the stake. The reason why those two unhappy wretches were done to death outside the village the last time instead of here, in its midst, was on my account. The horrible sights I have witnessed here would make even you turn sick. Well, I laid myself out to acquire influence among the Indians, doctoring them in a small way and teaching them various little things; and once my position assured I took no small pains to keep up its dignity. They soon named me The Sun Queen."

"And do you never contemplate a return to civilisationto your friends?" said her listener as she paused in her narrative.

“Never. Friends! Why, I never had a real one; and as for relations, they would spurn me from their door. No, I am accustomed to this life now, and I shall live and die among the Sioux, the squaw of a savage. Rather a contemptible object, am I not?” she ended, with a harsh and bitter laugh.

“No, I should not say that,” said Vipan, slowly, puffing out a great cloud of smoke.

“What!” eagerly. “You do not despise me in your heart?”

“Certainly not. Look here. Let us put the case fairly and without prejudice. Supposing you had lived the ordinary society life. You might, as hundreds have done before you, have married some vulgar parvenuwe’ll say from force of circumstancesor a fellow who got drunk on the quiet and threw empty bottles at you, or some execrable gutterling who happened to be rolling in money. Civilised men and Christians, mind. I am brutally frank, you see. Or again, more than one Englishwoman of birth and breeding has been known to espouse some slanteyed, sallowskinned Oriental for the sake of his rank and jewels, sometimes not even that. Well, you have allowed that Mahtosapa, as a man, is not contemptible either in aspect or qualities. Now I call him a king in comparison with such as I have just mentioned. Of those who would define him as a heathen and a savage, not one in a hundred could boast half his good points. My opinion is that you have shown sound judgment in making the best of the situation.”

“Do you know, you have taken a weight off my mind. I had often thought of what you now say, but required someone else’s opinion. No, I shall live and die among these people. But you? I will think out and form some plan for you to escape, but I do not disguise from you that it will be difficult and risky. And should you find yourself threatened with immediate danger, do not delay, take refuge at once in my lodge. I believe they would hesitate to pursue you there.”

She rose from her seat with a lithe, rapid movement, grasped his hand, and glided from the lodge.

Chapter Thirty Six.

A Tardy Reparation.

Vipan, left alone, felt drowsy, and kicking up the lodge fire into a blaze, rolled himself in a blanket and lay down in the long wicker basket which did duty as his bed. But sleep refused to come. This strange meeting had something weird about it. That this woman, whose selfish reticence had ruined his life, to screen whom he had sacrificed his prospects up to blighting point, as to whose whereabouts he had long ceased to speculate, should appear before him alone in the camp of the hostile Siouxliving there as one of themselvesstruck him as little short of miraculous, and a superstitious feeling seemed to warn him, eagerly as he strove to dismiss it, that an occurrence so startling, so entirely out of all reckoning, portended some grave crisis to himself. Was her appearance after all these years destined to herald some other turningpoint in his life? Thus musing, sleep at length overcame him, and still his dreams were haunted by the sad face of the exsociety belle, doomed to spend her life among savages, even resigned to that deplorable destiny.

A stealthy form wormed itself quickly through the opening of the teepe. Vipan, who slept with one eye open, never moved, but his hand tightened on the stock of the pistol in his breast. Only for a moment, though; for he recognised the hideous lineaments and beady eyes of the Shoshone slave girl.

“Rise quickly, Golden Face,” whispered the latter. “The Sun Queen sends for you. Come at once.”

Prepared for any emergency, he obeyed without a word. It was already dusk, and at the other end of the village were signs of a gathering of some sort which was about to take place. Unobserved, he entered Isabel D’Arcy’s tent.

Enjoining caution by a sign, she beckoned him to a seat. The firelight glinted on her shining hair, and he noticed that her still handsome face was clouded with anxiety. The teepe was furnished in quasicivilised style. There was a camp bedstead instead of the Indian wicker basket, a table, two trunks, and even a few books.

“I have just learned something,” she began, “that renders it necessary for you to make the attempt at once. Listen. Time is short, and we must lose none of it. There is to be a big scalpdance tonight in the Ogallalla camp. Hark! They are beginning now. Afterwards you are to be seized and put to the torture. I know the plotnever mind how. Nothing can save you. The Ogallallas have fourteen hundred warriors in the village, and are allpowerful. The whole of our band, except about fifty, are away with Mahtosapa, and

even he could hardly protect you if he were here. Mountain Cat, War Wolf, Long Bull, and a dozen others are all in the plot. Now, quickquick, I say!" stamping her foot. "Obey me or you are lost. Take as much as you can carry of this," handing him a parflèche half full of dried meat. "And this is the only weapon I can find."

With a thrill of satisfaction he found himself in possession of a large navy revolver, loaded in every chamber.

"But," he objected, "if I get clear will they not visit it upon you?"

"No. They dare not. Quick. You have only an hour's start, with the best of luck. You may not have ten minutes. Roll your blanket round your chin, so as to hide your beard, and put on this."

She handed him an Indian headdress of beadwork and cloth, from whose summit rose a tall eaglefeather. Fixing it on, he stood there transformed into a stalwart savage.

"Now, my plan is simplein fact, ridiculous. You must personate an Indian larking with my slave girl here. She will pretend to run away, and you must pursue her. She will lead you to the nearest herd of ponies; you must catch one and trust to luck. Now, goodbye. God speed you!"

He thought he detected a quaver in her voice as she grasped his hands, and would have lingered. She stamped her foot angrily.

"Go, go! You are endangering both of us, and the plan will fall through." And she almost pushed him from the lodge.

A mischievous cackle, and the dark form of the Shoshone girl glided round the outside of the teepe. Vipan, entering thoroughly into his rôle, started boldly in pursuit. So well did he act up to it that a group of squaws whom he passed within ten yards screamed with laughter at the sight of a stalwart buck larking after the Sun Queen's hideous slave, no less than at the broad jests which he was gruffly hurling after her as she ran.

The dark figure still glided on between the teepes, hardly visible in the falling gloom. To those who did see it the sight was an everyday one, so that beyond a shout of mirth and a boisterous wish for his success, no notice was taken of it.

The last line of teepes was passed. In front lay the timber belt, then a subdued "crunch, crunch," betokened the proximity of a group of ponies. The dark figure of the Shoshone girl had disappeared. "The nearest," his deliverer had said. His lariat rope was ready.

Gently, soothingly, he approached the one he reckoned the best. Up went the perverse brute's head with a resentful snort, as it sidled and backed away. He tried another, with the same result. His heart was in his mouth. The ponies had stopped feeding, and were gazing at him in alarm. The least thing might stampede the herd and arouse the attention of its owners. There was no time to lose. Whirling the noose around his head he let fly. The coils tautened out. The affrighted animal thus noosed, plunged, and fell heavily. He was upon it like lightning. Avoiding the kicking hoofs, he wrenched a bight of the rope into its mouth, jerked the trembling and terrified steed to its feet, and was on its back like a circusrider. The rest of the herd trotted away, snorting and throwing up their heels.

Suddenly a wild, shrill whoop went up from the village. Ah! now for the race for life; but what were the odds in his favour? They had discovered his flight.

On, through the darkness, the fugitive urged his unwilling steed, whose bucking and plunging would have unseated any less skilful horseman. And as he fled, carefully picking his ground with the instinct of a consummate plainsman, he strained his ears through the darkness to catch the first sounds of pursuers behind, of a possible manoeuvre to outflank and head him in front. But the discovery had not, in fact, been made. The wild shouts were the yells of the scalpdance just beginning. Fainter and fainter behind him sounded the savage chorus, then died away, and amid the solitude of the grim mountain waste only the soft hoofbeats of his steed, and the occasional scream of a panther among the craggy heights, broke upon the dead and ghostly silence of the night.

Chapter Thirty Seven.

Between the Living and the Dead.

With the first lightening of dawn, the fugitive realised that it behoved him to exercise tenfold wariness. Save one brief halt to rest his steed, he had ridden the night through, and now he intended to lie hidden in some snug retreat until darkness again should cover his flight beneath its friendly folds. A shallow stream flowed close at hand, now losing itself in the timber, now gurgling along a grassy bottom, to emerge a few hundred yards further down. Into the water Vipan now guided his steed, and riding down stream, emerged a mile or so further on. This manoeuvre, executed with the object of hiding his trail, he had performed already twice that night.

The morning dawned but slowly; dark and cold, for a thick mist had settled down on the land. And now it seemed to Vipan that the ground was becoming less precipitous. Could he be getting clear of the mountains already? Suddenly the murmur of guttural voices struck upon his ear, and strangely enough they sounded ahead of him.

Softly he checked his horse. Then to his unbounded amazement the subdued murmur arose again. This time it was behind him.

A puff of air drove a space through the mist, and now Vipan's heart stood still. On either side of him, all around, gigantic in the filmy wrack which swept over them in thickening or decreasing folds, loomed shadowy horsemen. Their deeptoned conversation, their plumed heads and painted faces, were only too familiar to this man who was flying there for his life. He was riding in the very midst of a warparty.

Their strength he could not estimate. Ghostly forms appearing and disappearing as the mist thickened or partially dispersed, no clue could he obtain as to their numbers. One even called out to him a remark. He answered with a laconic grunt, and in his heart fervently blessed the foresight of his deliverer which had invested him with the eaglecrested headdress. The savages evidently took him for one of their party. Fervently, too, did he bless the welcome fog and its kindly aid, for the fraud could not have lived a moment in broad daylight.

Gradually, imperceptibly, he checked his steed. Any moment the fog might lift. He must back out of this perilous escort as imperceptibly as he had entered it. But, just as he reckoned himself clear, a fresh group of figures would start up on his rear, and canter forward in the wake of those who had gone before. These ceased, and by the time the fog began fairly to roll back beneath the dispelling power of the rising sun, Vipan, to his inexpressible relief, found himself alone. Then spying a confused heap of rocks and

bushes high up on the slope of a hill he made for it. As a hidingplace it was perfect. Entering its welcome shelter, he secured his tired steed in such wise that the animal could crop the green herbage growing in the cool shadow of the rocks. Then he lay down and fell fast asleep.

When at length he awoke it was with a shiver of cold. The sun was not an hour from the western horizon. He had slept the whole day.

Cautiously he peered forth. His hidingplace, being at a considerable elevation, afforded a wide view of the surrounding country. The blue line of the Black Hills cleft the sky to the southeastward, and he could make out the granite cone of the towering Inyan Kara. His course had so far been an accurate one.

Suddenly a moving object caught his eye. Was the land absolutely bristling with enemies? Advancing along his trail far down in the bottom came a file of mounted figures. Though nearly three miles off, there was no mistaking them or their object. Then he chuckled sardonically. The trail of the warparty, under whose escort he had so unwillingly travelled for ever so brief a space, would obliterate his own a hundred times over.

Nearer and nearer they drew, riding at an easy canter. He made out fortyone Indians in warcostume. He watched them with a sneer and a chuckle.

Suddenly, when nearly abreast of his position, the leader halted, gazing intently at the ground. The band clustered round him, then scattered, as if searching for more trail. Then a smothered curse escaped the lips of the watcher. In obedience to a rapid signal, the whole band had diverged from the trail of the warparty, and was heading straight for his place of concealment. It was all up with him. They had lighted upon his trail. It was time to give them the slip.

He sent one more glance at the party. Strung out in single file, the warriors were riding along his trail, like a pack of hounds with their noses to the ground. In their leader he recognised his implacable and untiring foe, War Wolf.

“All right,” he muttered between his teeth, as he twisted the lariat rope into the horse’s mouth. “All right, my friend. You’re bound for the Happy HuntingGrounds this time. We’ll get there together.”

His horse, fresh and rested, bore him bravely as he dashed forth, leaving the hill and the covert between himself and his pursuers. Well he knew what would happen. The Indians

would not ride straight up to the bushes. They would halt and cast round the hill to see if his trail led away again. This would give him a start.

The face of the country on this side was a series of rolling slopes freely dotted with clumps of straggling timber. Some distance ahead he noted a long dark line of forest. Night was at hand; could he reach this in time he might yet hope to escape.

Then a long, pealing whoop went up. The Sioux had discovered him, and with exultant shouts each warrior lashed his pony into the utmost speed.

For half an hour the furious chase continued. Vipan, glancing over his shoulder, became aware that his pursuers were slowly gaining on him. Onon. The forest belt would soon be reached, and meanwhile the dusking shadows were lengthening around.

He gained the first straggling patch of scrub. A few hundred yards and he would be within the welcome refuge, when his horse put a foot on the crusted surface of a mudhole, turned a somersault, and his rider came whizzing to the earth.

Vipan arose. Throughout the horror of the shock his selfpossession did not desert him, for he retained firm hold of the lariat rope. He was on his feet again, active as a cat, though stiff and bruised, but his steed stood shaking with alarm, using its right foreleg limpingly.

A yell of exultation went up from the pursuers. Halfadozen warriors, better mounted than the rest, were some distance ahead. So easy a capture would be that of the unarmed fugitive that they had not troubled to hold a weapon in readiness. Now they began to whirl their lassos ready for a throw.

Vipan, perfectly cool, crouched behind a bush, his revolver pointed. On they came, War Wolf leading, a grin of triumph wreathing his fierce features. A hundred yardsthen fifty. A ringing reporta jet of flame in the glooming twilight. War Wolf threw up his arms and lurched heavily forward upon his horse's neck. The terrified animal, snorting and rearing, dashed away at a tangent, dragging his rider, who had somehow become entangled in the caparisonings.

And what a howl of rage and consternation rent the air! They had not bargained for this, for they believed the fugitive to be unarmed. Panicstricken for the moment, they halted, then some of them dashed off to the succour of their leader. But they need not have done so. The bullet had sped true. The young partisan had shouted his last warwhoop.

Profiting by this temporary check, the hunted man had again sprung on the back of his horse. Lame or not, the animal must carry him further yet. Onon. The forest belt was gained. He plunged beneath its shadows, only to find it was mere straggling timbernot thick enough for hiding purposes. The frosty air cut his face and the leaves crackled crisply under his horse's hoofs. He drew his knife and pricked the poor brute furiously in the hinder quarters. The fierce yells of the savages drawing nearer and nearer told only too plainly that they had no intention of relinquishing the pursuit, and the horse was beginning to go dead lame.

"Cauaak!"

He glanced involuntarily upward. A huge raven disturbed on its roost flapped away in alarm. But another sight met his eye. Extending horizontally from two sturdy limbs of a Cottonwood tree, cleaving the wintry sky, was a long dark object. Vipan recognised one of those platforms on which the Indians deposit their deadlike Mohammed's coffin, midway between earth and heaven.

His mind was made up in a flash. Checking his horse he dismounted, and tearing a bunch of thorns from a bush, proceeded deliberately to insert them beneath the poor animal's tail. Then, as the horse galloped off in a perfect frenzy of pain and terror, he slipped up the tree and gained the burial platform, literally flattening himself against its ghastly burden. It was a hideous alternative.

Scarcely had he gained this gruesome refuge than the pursuers passed beneath. They were barely fifteen feet below him as he lay flattened there, not even daring to breathe as the savages swept by, guided by the frenzied gallop which, seeming to have gained redoubled speed, they could hear still ahead of them. It was a desperate expedient, but it had answered so far.

"Cauaak! Cauaak!"

Like an evil spirit let loose beneath the frosty heavens came the black swoop of the raven he had disturbed, and the hunted man saw it with a cold shiver. He dared not even turn his head. The warriors might return at any moment from their fool's errand, and then even a breath might seal his fate. A strong shudder of disgust ran through his frame. The hideous croak of the illomened bird brought back vividly that other scenethe two grinning bloodstained skulls lying there in the dark forest by Burntwood Creek, and the startling challenge of their wouldbe avenger. Involuntarily he turned his head, and a revulsion of horror caused him to shrink back in spite of himself, and nearly to fall from his precarious restingplace. For within six inches of his face his glance lighted upon a fearful sight. A human countenance scowled upon himbut such a face. From the

blackened and mummified skin drawn tightly over the protruding bones, the glazed eyes seemed to glare anew with menace and hate towards the violator of their restingplace. Shadowy yet distinct in the light of the new moon this horrible countenance, peering as it were from the fantastic cerements of barbarous sepulture, was enough to unhinge the stoutest nerves. A grisly skeletonclaw raised in midair, as though about to grapple with the impious intruder, completed the horror, while overhead, like the fierce spirit of the departed warrior yet hovering around its decaying tenement, the grim raven flapped in circles, emitting its gruesome croak.

“Pooh!” said the fugitive to himself, making a strong effort to overcome his not unnatural horror. “Pooh! While the country’s swarming with live redskins hunting for my scalp, am I going to be scared by one dead one? Not muchnot much!”

An hour wore onthen two. Wolves howled dismally over the midnight waste, and still that grisly countenance glared menacingly in the moonlightand still they lay side by side, the dust of the halfforgotten dead, and the living, breathing, vigorous framewelded together in that weird partnershipits object the saving of a life.

Thus they lay, side by sidethe dead warrior preserving the life of the hereditary enemy of his race.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

Another Bomb for the Rev. Dudley.

Once more we must peep into the library at Lant Hall.

Mr Vallance sat in his accustomed chair, thinking. His gaze would wander from the window to the blazing fire and back again, and the frown of anxiety deepened on his features. Without, the wind howled shrilly through the bare boughs, and a few scattered flakes of snow whirled in the air.

“Why did we ever let him go?” he exclaimed aloud. “Why did we ever let him go?”

Even as when last we saw him, Mr Vallance was terribly anxious on behalf of his son. His former misgivings had been allayed by the subsequent receipt of a letter from Geoffry; which missive, however, had given him to understand that it was the last the writer would have an opportunity of sending for some timein fact, until he should be on his way home again. Characteristically, too, this letter contained only vague and general information that the writer had fallen in with and joined Winthrop’s outfit; and of his meeting with Yseulte Santorex, not a word. It was of no use worrying about the matter, decided the Rev. Dudley. Any post might now bring intelligence that the boy was on his way home. It was poor comfort, and again he found himself repeating:

“Why did we ever allow him to go?”

Of the other affair which had so sorely troubled himhis cousin’s unexpected and preposterous claimhe had heard no more. His apprehensions first were lulled, then subsided altogether. The whole business was palpably a “try on.”

A sound of subdued voices outside, then a knock.

“A gentleman wishes to see you, sir.”

In his then frame of mind, Mr Vallance could not but feel startled by the interruption.

“Who is he, James?” he asked, quickly.

“He wouldn’t give his name, sir. He said as how you’d be sure to see him, sir.”

“Quite right, quite right,” said a deep voice, whose owner entered behind the astonished flunkey. “ErHow do, Dudley!”

If Mr Vallance had been startled before, the expression of his features now betokened a state of mind little short of scare. His face had turned as white as a sheet, and his jaw fell as he stood helplessly staring at his visitor.

“Whybless my soulRalph,” he stammered. Then advancing with outstretched hand, “WhyRalphI’mI’m glad to see you. I hope you have come to stay with us for a time.”

The visitor’s reception of this friendlythis hospitable overture, was singular. Standing bolt upright, he deliberately put his hand behind his back.

“Glad to see me!” he echoed, with a sneer. “No, you are not. Why tell atarradiddle. Such a tarradiddle, tooand you a preachererI beg your pardona priest, it used to be, if I remember right. You would sooner see the devil himself at this moment than me.”

Under the sting of this reply, the parson recovered a certain amount of dignity.

“Really,” he said, stiffly, “your behaviour is strange, to put it mildly. May I ask, then, the object of your intru your visit.”

“Certainly, if it affords you any satisfaction.” Then glancing around the room, and finishing up with a look out of the window, he went on. “Say, cousin Dudley, this is a pretty shebang enough. The object of my visit is this: You’ve bossed up this show about long enough. Suppose you abdicate now and let me have a turn?”

“Have you taken leave of your senses?”

“Not much. Have you?”

There was a sternness about the speaker’s laconic reply which caused Mr Vallance to quail involuntarily. He made a step towards the bellpull. The other laughed.

“No, no. Don’t exert yourself. I’m not going yetand if you bring in all the papfed flunkeys and swipeguzzling stablehands on your establishment, the poor devils’ll only get badly hurt without furthering your object. I mean what I sayyou’ve got to quit sooner or later. If you’re wise it’ll be sooner.”

“Indeed! And why?” was the answer, given with cutting politeness.

“Well, it’s this way. If you agree to clear at once, I’ll give you five hundred a yearno, I’ll make it sixout of the property for your life. That and the parsonic pickings will keep you

in clover. If you mean fighting, I'm your man. But I warn you I'm prepared to plank down ever so many thousands of pounds to get you outand when I've got you out I'll come down on you for every shilling of arrears, by George, I will!"

"Oh, you will?"

"You may bet your life on it."

For some moments the two men looked full in each other's faces without speaking. The sneer of conscious power on that of the one was matched by the expression of defiance, hatred, mingled with fear, on that of the other.

"Well, well," said Mr Vallance at length. "Take your own course. Only, let me remind you that you are in England now, and that in this country we don't settle important matters in any such rough and ready fashion."

"Oh don't make any mistake; I'm not going to hurt you, if that's what you're thinking about. You see, I've been knocking around a goodish few years, and now I've a fancy for settling downsettling down in my own place, you understand."

There was a smug smile of triumph on the parson's face now. His cousin was merely "bouncing" to extort terms. It would come to that in a few minutes. But the look aroused a very demon in the other. His eyes burned like live coals, though when he spoke his voice was under perfect control.

"Again, I say, you needn't be afraid," he said. "Everything shall be done in due course of law."

"Butbut, my good fellow, surely you are aware you haven't a leg to stand on?"

"I reckon I'm the best judge of that. See here, most reverend Dudley. Do you remember our last interview, here, in this very room? Safe in the triumph of your successful fraudfraud, I say, if you prefer it, forgeryyou jeered at me, jeered at the man you had robbed. Remember?"

"'Fraud!' 'Robbed!'" sputtered the parson, trying to lash himself into anger to drown the sinking sense that had come over him. "Do you know, sir, that you are using actionable words?"

"Ah, ah! History repeats itself. That is precisely as you spoke on the former occasion, friend Dudley. I will say it again, call in witnesses if you like. Having defrauded and

robbed me of my patrimony by lies and intriguing, and worseyou, a preacher of the Gospel, a teacher of Christian moralityyou threatened me with the law. You made your lawyers write to threaten me with an action for libel if I dared so much as venture an opinion on your behaviour. Do you remember my words to you as I left this room?"

Well, indeed, did he remember. And now at the sight of the deadly wrath on this man's features, all the more terrible because so completely held in handof the towering form with its back just half a yard from the door, precluding alike entrance or exitagain Mr Vallance could not restrain a shiver of physical fear.

"I told you my time would surely come, didn't I? How many years ago was it? Nearer twenty than tenyes. You slandered my name and stole my possessionsyou, a sacred dispenser of sacramentsand I went forth a beggar, followed by your jeers of triumph. If you go where I have been during those years, and take the trouble to enquire, you will learn that few persons have played me a scrofulous trick without bitterly rueing it. You have played me the most scrofulous trick of all, and you are going to rue it."

"Well, I must trouble you to let me pass, please. I shall ask you to excuse me wasting my time any longer," said Mr Vallance, making a move as if to leave the room. But the other only smiled.

"Not yet. Not quite yet," he said. "By the way, Dudley. Heard anything of Geoffry lately?"

The tone was easysmilingbut it struck a chill to the parson's heart. He glanced up quickly at his interlocutor's face, his own white with deadly fear. His lips parted, but he was powerless to articulate. The other stood immovablesmilingly enjoying his apprehension, but the smile was that of a fiend.

"Not heard anything of him?" he said, slowly, while like the hellish hiss of redhot irons in quivering flesh there passed through his mind the recollection of his cousin's defiant sneers over the successful intrigue that had robbed him of his patrimony, there in that same room, whose very walls seemed to echo their refrain even now. "Not heard anything of him? Well I'm not surprised, forhe's dead."

"Dead?" echoed Mr Vallance blankly, as though in a dream.

"As the proverbial doornail."

"Murderer!" gasped the wretched man, spasmodically clutching the air with his fingers, and gazing at his tormentor as through a faroff mist.

“Oh, no. You are under a delusion,” was the cool reply. “It’s odd that it should devolve on meon me above all peopleto give you the latest news of him. He died at an Indian stake.”

Even the pitiless, revengeful heart of the man who stood there smilingly unfolding his horrible news was hardly prepared for the awful metamorphosis that came over the smug, smoothtongued, purring parson at those words. With a scream that rang through the house from top to bottom, and froze the blood of all who heard it, the miserable man leaped at his tormentor’s throat like a wild cat at bay. But he might as well have leaped at a rock. The powerful arm was raised, and the mere shock of the recoil sent the poor wretch sprawling. He layhis livid features working in maniathe foam flying from his lips in flakes.

The other glanced at him a moment, then opened the door.

“You, James?” he said, coolly, to the trembling flunkey, who had not been many yards from the door during the interview. “You, James? Your boss is taken bad, I guess. Better see after him. Tell him, when he comes round, I’ll call again byandbye, and give him further particulars.”

With the same easy smile upon his lips he passed through the crowd of frightened womenfolk who met him on the stairs, and who shrunk back before his glittering eyes and towering form, and gained the front door. Then he smiled in fearful glee.

“The last time I passed out this way,” he said to himself, halfaloud. “The last time I passed out this way, I was saying my time would surely comeand it has. Aha! my exemplary and most reverend cousin I think I’m nearly even with you nowvery nearly!”

Chapter Thirty Nine.

In the Twilight Oakwood.

Yseulte Santorex was slowly wending her way homeward through the now leafless oak woods which overhung Elmcote.

The lonely ride looked ghostly and drear in the early dusk of the November afternoon. A chill and biting wind moaned through the covert, and now and again a pheasant or rabbit scuttling among the undergrowth, raised a stealthy rustling sound that would have been somewhat startling to any other of her sex who should find herself belated in that lonely place. But in this solitary pedestrian it inspired no fear, only a sweet, sad recollectionalbeit reminding her of the most perilous moment in her whole life. For it brought back vividly, by an association of sound and surroundings, the shadowy timber belt, and the stealthy tread of the grim painted savages advancing to seize her on the lonely riverbank in the far Wild West.

But what a change had befallen her! The happy, eventempered girl who had so gleefully left her home in keen anticipation of a period of adventurous travel amid new and stirring scenes had disappeared, and this pale, wistfuleyed woman walking here seemed but the mere ghost of the Yseulte Santorex of yore.

Often in her dreams she again goes through those terrible experiencesthe perilous flight with the scout across the rugged ranges, momentarily expecting the volley of the lurking Sioux ambushed in the dense timber. Often in her dreams she is once more fleeing for dear life across those wild plains, the warwhoops of the painted fiends ringing in her ears, the thunder of their pursuing steeds shaking the ground. Often in her dreams she is again entering the frowning portals of that dread Thermopylae, where one man had unhesitatingly laid down his life in order that she might reach a place of safety. Often, too, she is once more amid her genial, kindly, travelling companions, only to wake up with a start and a shiver to the remembrance of their horrible fate.

But never as long as she lives will she forget the moment when her brother, finding her out at Fort Vigilance, brought the news which had confirmed her fears to the uttermost. He who had offered his life for her was deaddead amid the horrid torments of the Indian stake, as the savages themselves affirmedand to her, thenceforward, life seemed a grey and valueless thing. There was nothing further to be gained by opposing her brother's wish that she should at once accompany him home to LantHanger. Travelling through the British possessions safe beyond the reach of the hostile Sioux, who still carried terror

and pillage over the plains of Dakota and Wyoming, they had set forth on their journey and had reached home in due course.

Shocked out of even his philosophy by the change, nothing could exceed the affectionate consideration her father had show for her since her return. Even her mother forgot to grumble and scold in her relief at having the girl back again safe and sound, for George had judiciously put them up to the real state of affairs. It was not in the nature of things that her parents should be well pleased that she had buried her heart in the grave of an unknown adventurer, who had, moreover, met with a horrible death, but time, they hoped, would work a gradual cure, and she was young yet. Then, too, apart from this unfortunate affair, her experiences had been terrible for a refined and luxuriouslynurtured English girl. So no care or trouble was spared to induce her to forget them.

But Yseulte herself was the last to second these wellmeant efforts. She would brace herself up to appear cheerful and at ease, but seemed never so happy as when alone, rambling for hours through the fields and woods, to her parents' concern and alarm. But any expression of the latter would be met by a wan smile and a remark that one who had heard the warwhoop and shots fired in grim earnest, and had twice been chased by red Indians on the warpath, felt pretty secure among the peaceful lanes and meadows of tame Old England. And one other thing noteworthy was that she avoided Lant Hall and its denizens with a horror and a persistency that was little short of feverish. She had never divulged poor Geoffry's presence with the waggon train, and shrank morbidly from doing so now. He might have escaped, but that he had fallen in the general massacre which overtook the unfortunate emigrants she could hardly doubt.

This evening she was returning from a long walk, having gone out to join at luncheon her father and brother, who were shooting some distant coverts, and who would drive home by the road. She, preferring her solitary ramble through the fields and plantations, had left them early in the afternoon.

The sharp air had brought a tinge of colour to her pale cheeks, as, defying its rigours in her warm winter dress and toque, she stepped along the woodland ride with the easy grace of a perfect physical organisation. An owl dropped softly from overhead, hooting as it glided along on noiseless pinions, the bark of a fox echoed from the depths of the brake; but these weird sounds amid the gathering mists of night caused her no uneasiness, let alone fear. She even stopped to listen to them with a wistful yearning, for in the cry of the wild creatures of the woods, and the swirl of the wind through the denuded branches, she seemed to feel once more borne back to those nights of peril and of fearbut oh! how sweet the recollectionin the wild and bloodstained West, to walk alone in the spirit presence of him whom her mortal eyes should never more behold.

“Would to God we had died together!” she exclaimed aloud, her eyes dimmed with a rush of blinding tears. “Ah, why did I not die with him when it was still in my power to do so? Ah, why?”

And the owl flitting ghostly through the brake, answered:

“Tuwhoowhoowhoo!”

A sound smote upon her ear as she turned the bend of the patha sound as of the footfall and snort of a horse. She looked up, and the sight that met her eyes rooted her to the ground, while the blood at her very heart stood still. But not with fear. Yetwhat was that but a phantoma phantom horsemanadvancing towards her at scarce thirty paces? For the noble proportions of the coalblack steed there was no mistakingand his riderah!through many a night of horror and anguish she had seen in her dreams that towering frame, mangled and mutilated by the barbarous vengeance of the red demons, that splendid face, drawn and livid in the throes of an agonising death. Rider and steed had been parted in lifehere in the lonely woods, in the glooming twilight, they were together again.

Her eyes met those of the phantom. An ecstasy shook her frame, and she was powerless to articulate. A sweet smile played on her lips; her gaze was strained upon the apparition, as though in the very strength of her yearning she could constrain it to remain with her, could retard its return to the shadowy unknown.

“YseulteloveI am no spectre,” said the voice she knew so well. “I have come straight to you as soon as I learned where to find you. Come to me, darling!”

He had sprung to the ground, and stood awaiting her. The spell was broken. A loud cry rang through the wood, and then she was in his armslaughing, weeping, sobbing, then laughing again. Words were out of the question.

The wintry night fell black upon the glooming oakwoods, weirdly musical with the mournful hooting of the owls. But there was no gloom in the hearts of these two who now stepped from those thickening shades.

A crunch of wheels on the gravel, a flash of lamps, and the dogcart deposited the two shooters at the front door.

“Hallo, Chickie! What’s in the wind, now?” exclaimed Mr Santorex, staring in amazement, as his daughter, hardly giving him time to alight, had flown at him and

flung her arms around his neck, her face all aglow with more than the happiness of former days.

“Father! He’s in there. Go in and see him!”

“He? What the deuce! In where? Give a fellow a chance! Who’s he?”

“Mr Vipan.”

“Oh, ahI remember. The champion scalphunter. Come to life again, has he? Let’s have a look at him.”

As the door opened a tall figure rose from a chair, advancing with outstretched hand.

“How do, Santorex?”

He thus unceremoniously addressed stared, as well he might. This was Western brusquerie with a vengeance, he thought.

“Confound it! am I altered so dead out of all recognition?” said the other with a careless laugh, standing full in the light.

“Why, nothat is, yes. We none of us grow younger in twenty years. Well, well, Ralph. I’m heartily glad to see you, heartily glad.” And the two men grasped hands in thorough ratification of the sentiment.

“No, by George! I should never have known you,” went on Mr Santorex. “And Chickie, here, called you something else just nowwhat the deuce was it?”

“Vipan? Yes, it was an old name in the family at one time. I’ve revived it lately for my own convenience. That’s how I was known out West.”

“Think you’d have known the child here?” went on “the child’s” father, turning to Yseulte, who had followed him into the room, and was now staring in amazement at this new revelation.

“Well, I’ve had rather the advantage of her; a mean advantage she’ll say.”

“She” was incapable of saying anything just then. That photograph of the disinherited Ralph Vallance, which, since her return home, she had managed to conjure out of her

father's boxes of old correspondence, and had treasured because it bore some slight resemblance to her dead lover, now turned out to be nothing less than his actual portrait. Yet during all their daily intercourse, so well had he guarded his secret, that not a shadow of a passing instinct had ever warned her of his identity. It was astounding.

"Been to call on Dudley yet, Ralph?" said Mr Santorex, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, yes. We had a talk over old times. By the way, that's another misnomer. My real name's Rupert. They used to call me the other for short. Heaven knows why, but they did, and I dropped it when I went West. Shan't revive it."

If ever there was a snug family party gathered together, it was that at the Elmcote dinnertable that night, when Rupert Vallance, as we must now call him, yielding to general request, but especially to an appealing glance from Yseulte's blue eyes, narrated his experiences from the time of his capture to his escape from the camp of the hostiles, only generalising however as to the agency of this latter event, and omitting for the present all mention of poor Geoffry's horrible death. But when it came to the narrator literally tucking himself in with the grisly denizen of the Indian grave, in the ghostly silence of the darkling forest, Mrs Santorex shivered and announced her intention of fainting; however, this effect was soon dispelled by the more pleasing dénouement of the stirring tale, how just in the nick of time, when alone, dismounted, barely half armed, and the savages still in search of him, he had been found by Smokestack Bill, who all this while, in hourly peril himself, had unweariedly watched his chances of coming to the aid of his friend. Smokestack Bill, too, with no less a companion than old Satanta, who had been wandering the country ever since his escape from the Ogallalla warparty, defying white or red to capture him, until, seeming to recognise his master's friend, he ran whinnying to the latter of his own accord.

"He's a grand fellow, that scout," said Mr Santorex. "Why didn't you bring him over with you, Rupert?"

"Wouldn't come. He's going as chief scout to an expedition just about to be sent against the hostiles. I made him promise, though, to come over directly after the war."

But the acme of this marvellous and stirring life's romance was reached when laterafter the ladies had retired to bedRupert Vallance recounted, in strict confidence, the circumstances of his meeting in the Sioux camp, the unfortunate woman who had ruined his career hitherto by allowing him to suffer for another's intrigue.

"By Jove!" said George Santorex, junior. "I've heard of that party. Always supposed, though, she was a common sort of woman. A lady! and prefers to live among a lot of

dirty redskins! Why, the tallest yarn of old Mayne Reid's is skimmilk to this. But I guess she pretty well wiped out old scores by chousing the reds out of your scalp in that clever way, eh, Rupert!"

He nodded. "That's so."

Just then there was an interruption. A messenger had arrived from Lant Hall. The Rev. Dudley was not expected to live through the night, and particularly wished to see Mr Santorex.

"Pheww!" whistled the latter. "I suppose I must go. What on earth can he want to talk to me about? Perhaps it's about you, Rupert."

"Maybe it is," replied the latter, puffing out a cloud of smoke with as complete nonchalance as though they were discussing the weather. And George Santorex, junior, furtively watching the unconcerned, relentless face, thought he could well understand the reputation which this man had set up in those Western wilds which had been for so many years their common home.

Chapter Forty

Conclusion.

Summer has come round once more, and again, amid all the glories of a cloudless evening, we stand beside the banks of the rippling Lanthowbeit not without misgiving, for are we not about to enact the part of eavesdroppers towards those two strolling languidly, contentedly, there by the shining water?

“It strikes me, child, you seem inclined to find life rather a happy thing,” a voice wellknown to us is saying. “And you’ve no business to.”

A loving pressure of the strong arm on which she is leaning is the only answer Yseulte deigns at first to make. Then:

“Why not?”

“Because you’ve done a very wrong thing. If the late lamented Dudley were alive, he would tell you that a man may not marry his grandmother, and by parity of reasoning a woman may not marry her grandfather. Now this is just what you have done, and it’s very wrong of you.”

She gave his arm a pinch.

“I never likedboys!” she replied with a sunny smile. And then she sighed. For it was on this very spot, beneath this same spreading oak here on the riverbank, that poor Geoffry had made his passionate and despairing declaration barely a year ago. And now at the thought of the poor fellow and his miserable end far away in that savage land, she could not repress a sigh.

“By Jove!” cried Rupert Vallance, flinging a stone into the river. “Something here seems to remind me of that evening when I came upon you staving in the red brother’s grinders with the butt end of a fishingrod. I wonder, by the way, what became of that same weapon? I expect Mountain Cat’s band still keep it as a big medicinestick. Deuced bad medicine it was for the buck you were laying it into. Ho, ho!”

“Don’t remind me of that horrible moment,” she said, coming closer to him with a slight shiver. “Let us go home, it’s getting cold.”

The Rev. Dudley Vallance was dead. The shock of learning his son’s horrible end had brought on a stroke, and the following day he had breathed his lastnot, however, before

he had made what reparation he could for the wrong he had done his cousin, who, by the way, had so far relented as to satisfy him that he had borne no hand in poor Geoffry's death, and, in fact was powerless to prevent it; added to which he had himself rescued him from the same fate on a previous occasion. So on his deathbed he had signed a hastily drawnup will, bequeathing the Lant property to Rupert Vallance absolutely, save and except a yearly charge on the estate for the support of his widow and daughters. To this Rupert had added with ample liberality. Once "the old man had climbed down," as he euphemistically put it, he himself was willing to let bygones be bygones, and had endowed the widow accordingly; needless to say, without earning the slightest degree of gratitude from the latter.

They strolled homeward across the meadows in the falling eve, and, lo, as they entered the gate of the home paddock there arose a whinny and a stamp of hoofs.

"Dear old Satanta!" said Yseulte, stroking the velvety black nose which the noble animal thrust lovingly against her hand. "You have well earned your ease for life, at any rate."

"I should rather think he had. No more arrows flying in his wake. No more brack water or willowbark provender. All oats and fun for life. We shall have to give the warwhoop occasionally, just to remind him of old times."

"Please, sir," said a manservant, meeting them in the hall. "Postman says was he right in leaving this, sir?"

His master took the letter, glanced at the address, and exploded in a roar of laughter. It bore the United States stamp, and was directed

"Judge Rupert Vipan, Lant Hall,
Brackenshire County,
Great Britain."
"Nat Hardroper's fist! Come along, Yseulte, and let's see what that 'cute citizen's got to say. 'Judge!' Great Scott! With infinite trouble I got him out of calling me Colonel, and now he's elevated me to the judicial bench! 'Vipan,' too! The old name seems to stick, anyway."

He broke open the letter and began to read

Henniker City, Dakota, 14th July, 1876.

Dear Rupe,Seems to me you're fixed up pretty tight and snug, after "baching" around all these years. My respects to Madam.

May be you'll not be sorry to hear I've sold your interest in the Burntwood Creek Mine to a New York Syndicate for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and five hundred fully paidup shares in the new Co. If you weren't so keen on settling down in Great Britain again I reckon this find would make you more than a millionaire. However, I've banked the specie here, where it'll be safe enough till you undertake to ship it to Great Britainsafe enough, that is, while I'm Sheriff of Henniker Citythough they did "hold up" the bank in Jabez Humbold's time.

The pesky Sioux are still on the warpath, as I judge you'll have learned even in Great Britain, but they're in a fair way of being soundly whipped. And now I've got to tell you what you'll be dead sorry to hear.

Yseulte, watching her husband's face, marked the change that came into it, as he turned the sheet and glanced hurriedly down it. A terrible frowna frown similar to that which she had seen there when, dismounted and alone, he had turned to face the savage pursuers at the entrance of the cañon that nevertobeforgotten evening of her escape. Mastering himself, he continued to read:

Your old pard, Smokestack Bill, is rubbed out. He fell at the Little Bighorn with Custer and his command, and I reckon the red devils have had many a dance round his hair by this time. Poor Bill! I allow it's kinder rough when men have been pardners all the years you and he have; but he fell in fair fight, and that's better, as he himself would allow, than dying of a slow sickness, or being knifed in the back by some slinking walleyed rowdy in a saloon. Well, well! There wasn't a straighter, stauncher, allround man, nor a better scout on this continent than Smokestack Bill, and if so be as any man says there was, why he'll be illadvised to make the remark anywhere around this section. I judge that's about all the news you'll care for just now, and with my respects to Madam, now as ever, old hoss, your sincere:

Nathaniel J. Hardroper, Sheriff of Henniker City.

For some time Rupert Vallance stared vacantly at the hateful paper in dead silence. All the stirring experiences they had gone through together crowded upon his mind, and the fate of his friend, staunch, unswerving, true as steel, moved him more than he cared to show, even to his wife.

"Ah, well!" he said at last, laying down the letter with a sigh. "It's bitterly rough on a fellow. For upwards of a dozen years we've chummed together like twin brothers, in tight fixes and out of them, and now the poor chap's wiped out. Yes, it's rough!" An arm stole round his neck. "Darling, can I forget that the noble, unselfish fellow saved your

life and brought you back to me! And don't think me unfeeling, but if I had never gone out there you might be lying there too, at this moment, having shared the poor fellow's terrible fate."

"That's so," he assented. "I hadn't thought of it in that light."

The End