

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tenney.

No. 28.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 4, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS OUT WEST; OR WINNING A HARD CASE.



Mosely, the leader of the desperadoes, rode beside Old King Brady. He and his companions were securely bound, and escape seemed impossible.

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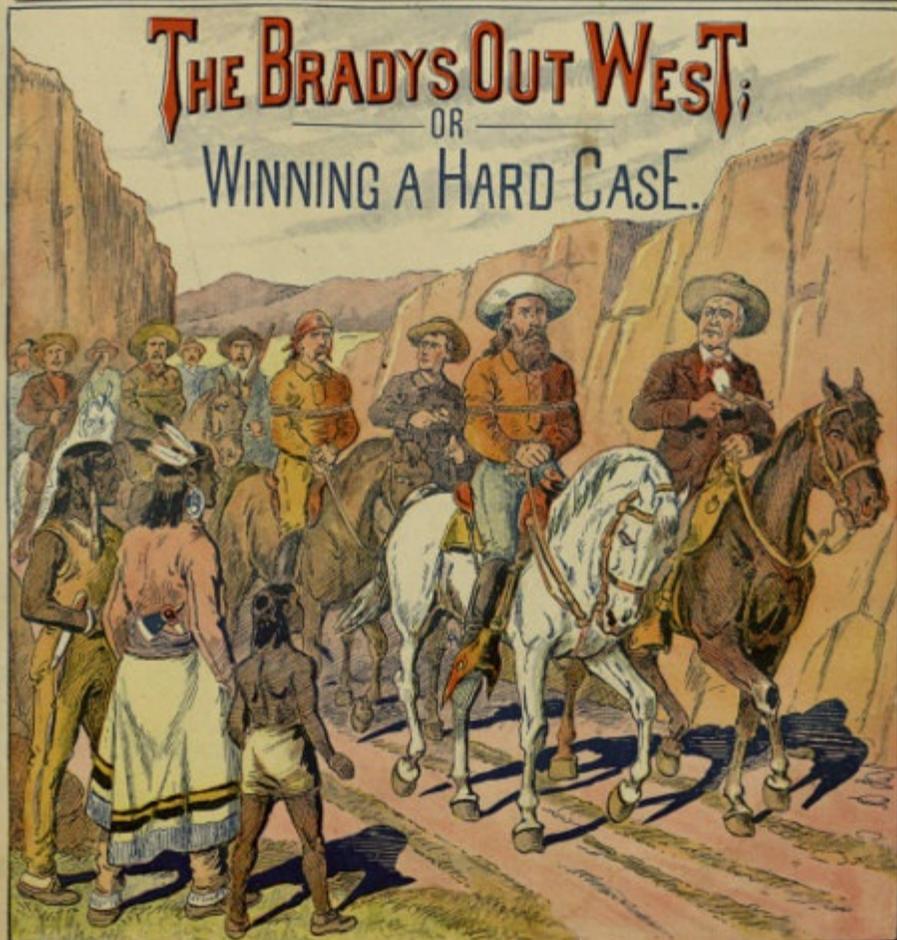
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THE BRADYS OUT WEST; OR, WINNING A HARD CASE.

A Thrilling Detective Story.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

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CHAPTER I.

WHICH STATES THE CASE.

“Now, Old King Brady,” said the Chief of the Secret Service, as he glanced down the page of the note book, “I think you will find this case a hard one.

“It has been recorded in detective annals for over ten years. Just the other day I received this letter.”

The chief handed the letter over to the great detective. Young King Brady sat at his elbow and also read it.

Thus it read:

“Chief of the Secret Service, New York City.

“Dear Sir: You no doubt have on record the details of the Jacobs murder, committed in New York city over ten years ago, and for which Jack Mosely was arrested and tried, but who managed to escape from his keeper in the court-room, and who has since never been heard from.

“Now, I have pretty good evidence that Captain Vail, the leader of a gang of road agents in the Black River Hills, near this town, is no other than Jack Mosely. If you are desirous of securing this man, let me know, and send a couple of detectives out here at once. Yours truly,

“CLIFTON BROWN,
“Captain of Vigilantes, Red Cliff, Wyoming.”

Old King Brady read the letter carefully and exchanged glances with his young protege, Harry Brady.

These two detectives were leaders in their profession.

Harry Brady, though of the same name, was no near relation of James Brady by any tie of blood. The old detective had taken a deep interest in him and had given him many valuable points, until now Harry had become second only to his teacher.

The two Bradys were the dread of the entire criminal world.

They never failed to win a case. This gave them a prestige which nothing could destroy.

So the chief knew that he was putting the Jacobs case into good hands.

This was one of the most mysterious crimes ever committed in Gotham.

Ten years before Alden Jacobs had been known as one of the leading bankers of the city.

Jack Mosely was his nephew and one of the “bloods” about town.

One day the old banker was found dead in his office from a blow on the back of the head with a bludgeon.

Jack Mosely was known to have been the last person seen with him alive.

Suspicion naturally pointed to him.

But for a time he enjoyed his freedom. He inherited his uncle's property and proceeded to lead a riotous life.

Had he been more shrewd and gone to another part of the world, the evidence against him might never have been resurrected.

But certain circumstances led to positive proofs that he was the murderer of his uncle.

As a result he was arrested, tried and found guilty.

But he managed to elude the court-room keeper at the close of the trial and made his escape.

He dropped from sight utterly.

It was reported that he had committed suicide. A body was found in the North River answering his description.

But this could not be proved, so a current belief remained extant in police circles that he was still alive and at large.

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But all efforts of the detectives were baffled, and the case was dropped long since.

Now, however, this letter from Clifton Brown meant the reopening of the case beyond a doubt.

Old and Young King Brady exchanged glances.

The chief watched them closely.

“Well, what do you think of it?” he asked.

“It is all right,” said Old King Brady. “There is no doubt but that Clifton Brown is right.”

“You think so?”

“We do.”

The chief was interested.

“Have you any reason other than this assertion of Brown’s for believing that Captain Vail, the road-rider, is identical with Jack Mosely?”

Old King Brady nodded.

“I do!” he said. “I am positive that they are the same!”

The chief looked surprised.

“Then you know something about this case already?” he asked.

“It is not new to us,” replied Old King Brady. “We run across a thread of it while looking up quite another affair.”

“Ah! May I ask what?”

“The May disappearance case.”

“Oh, I remember,” said the chief, turning to his note book. “On my word, the locality is the same. Colonel May and his daughter Helen about three months ago were on their way to their ranch

in the Black River Hills when the party was set upon by bandits. Colonel May was wounded, a number of his party killed, and his daughter Helen abducted. No trace of her has since been found.”

Old King Brady nodded.

“The same case,” he said.

“You have been working on it?”

“Yes.”

The chief closed his note book.

“Well,” he said slowly, “that is all right. Go ahead and combine the two cases. I’ll wager you will come out all right.”

The two detectives arose and gripped the chief’s hand in parting.

“You shall hear from us soon,” said Old King Brady. “As soon, at least, as we have gained the case.”

In the street a moment later Old King Brady bit off a chew of tobacco from a big plug and said:

“Well, Harry, I told you that woman was here for money. Now what do you think of it?”

The young detective whistled.

“I think we’d better keep close on her track,” he said.

“First we had better see Colonel May.”

“Yes.”

“If he pays the ransom, as he may be foolishly tempted to do, the case is lost.”

“Correct.”

The two detectives crossed Broadway.

They entered an office building.

They ascended to an upper floor by the elevator.

Then they stood before the door of an office on the glass of which was printed: “Alston May, Banker and Broker.”

Old King Brady entered.

A number of clerks and typewriters were busily at work. At a desk sat a man of fine soldierly appearance, with side whiskers and handsome features.

He looked up as the detectives entered.

“Is this Colonel May?” asked Old King Brady.

“It is, sir.”

“My name is Brady. I am a detective.”

The Colonel gave a start.

“I have heard of you,” he said. “Do you bring me good news?”

“Neither,” replied Old King Brady. “I have dropped in to ask you a few questions.”

The Colonel indicated a chair.

“Sit down,” he said. “I am ready to answer them.”

“First,” said Old King Brady brusquely, “have you had a lady visitor to-day?”

Colonel May looked startled.

“Why—I—yes,” he stammered. “A lady did call this morning.”

Old King Brady smiled.

“I thought so,” he said. “Did she give this name?”

He tossed a card on the table.

“Beatrice Vail.”

The banker glanced at it.

“That is the woman,” he said. “Do you know her?”

“I know about her,” replied the detective evasively.

“Well, I think she is a detective,” said May with conviction.

“She intimated that she knew where my lost daughter Helen is and with a certain sum of money could procure her ransom.”

The two Bradys exchanged glances.

“Just as I thought,” said Old King Brady.

“This is all a mystery to me,” said Colonel May anxiously. “If you know the woman, tell me who she is.”

“You did not give her the money?”

“No.”

“Well, don’t do it.”

“I shall not.”

“She is Beatrice Vail, the wife of the bandit Vail, who has your daughter in his mountain retreat in Wyoming.”

Banker May nearly leaped from his chair.

“The deuce!” he gasped. “If I had only known that, she would not have gone from here. I will arrest her on sight.”

“I fear that you will not see her again.”

“What do you mean?”

“She will not come here again. She has left the city.”

“Ah!” said the Colonel with a deep breath. “Then you fancy that was really her purpose in coming to New York?”

“I know it was,” replied Old King Brady. “But she has taken the alarm and has undoubtedly left for Wyoming before this.”

The Colonel looked disappointed.

“That is too bad!” he declared. “If we could capture her——”

“It would amount to nothing.”

“You think so?”

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“Certainly.”

“But—why not?”

“That is very easy to see,” said Old King Brady. “The danger of your daughter’s position would be only increased.”

Colonel May arose and paced the room in great agitation.

Finally he cried:

“Is there not some way to secure my child? I think the horror of this thing will drive me mad! I am not even sure that she is alive!”

Old King Brady chuckled.

“The mere fact that Beatrice Vail has visited you for a ransom is sufficient proof that she is.”

“Oh, if I could only be sure! Take my fortune—take all I have, but give me back my daughter.”

“We do not want your fortune, nor any part of it,” said Old King Brady, rising. “But we will get your daughter back for you safe

and well. Keep up your courage, and above all, keep dark. That is important.”

CHAPTER II. THE HOLD-UP.

The scene of our story now will change.

From New York to the mountain passes and canyons of the Great West is a great transition.

But thither we must follow the two Bradys.

One warm evening a six-horse coach toiled over the high divide beyond which was the little town of Red Cliff.

The coach had six passengers besides the driver.

The latter was alternately coaxing and swearing at his horses as they struggled up the steep road.

The six passengers consisted of five men and a woman.

The woman was deeply veiled and sat on the rear seat of the coach.

All were on the outside of the coach, for it was hot and stuffy inside.

Two of the men were dressed in Quaker gray, with broad-brimmed hats and spectacles.

Of the other three, one was a miner with his kit, the second was a young student, and the third a commercial traveler.

The young student was much inclined to be talkative and at odd intervals shot inquiring glances at the woman with the veil.

“Phew!” he exclaimed for the hundredth time. “This is hot enough to bake a salamander!”

“Humph!” said the miner. “If you think this is hot you ought to travel in Mexico a while.”

“Yerp!” said the driver. “Chuck! G’long there! Yew bet Mexico is a warm kentry!”

“That’s all right,” declared the commercial traveler; “but I know a hotter place.”

“Whar?” asked the miner.

“Cuba in the month of August.”

“You’re right!” cried the student eagerly. “I remember being held up in Cuba one hot summer day by the insurgents. I was studying the flora of the country with Professor Wiseman of our university.”

“Sho!” exclaimed the commercial traveler. “They didn’t hang you, then?”

“You can see for yourself,” replied the student. “But they might as well, for they nearly scared us to death.”

“Speaking of being held up,” said the miner carelessly, “we are likely to be held up before we get to Red Cliff.”

“Eh?” exclaimed the student.

“Jupiter!” gasped the commercial traveler. The driver chuckled, but said nothing.

The two Quakers were immovable, though one was seen to cross his hands as if in prayer.

“What do you mean?” asked the student. “Are you joking?”

The miner lit his pipe.

“You may find out,” he said. “I hope you brought no valuables with you. If you have, then Captain Vail will have ’em in no time.”

The student instinctively gripped his bag; the commercial traveler drew his sample case nearer.

But the Quakers never moved.

The woman bent forward a little, as if interested.

The woman swept a cursory glance over her shoulder at the Quakers, and said:

“I hope you gentlemen will take no alarm. It is hardly likely Vail will put men of your cloth to trouble.”

“Yea, verily,” said the older of the Quakers, “we are in the hands of the Lord.”

Silence reigned for a time.

The coach had topped the divide.

Below was a steep descent, with dark groves of mountain cedars on either hand.

The driver gave his horses free rein now, and they went fleeing down the trail like frightened sheep.

An angle in the mountain wall was turned.

Suddenly the driver set back on the dashboard with all his weight on the lines.

His face was ashen pale.

His voice rattled huskily as he shouted:

“Whoa! Whoa, thar!”

But the frightened horses at first did not seem to heed the startled voice of command.

A gasping cry of horror escaped the lips of every person on the coach.

There was reason for this.

Squarely across the mountain trail were drawn a body of mounted, masked and armed men.

Seated on their horses, their rifles were aimed at the coach.

The driver knew well what all this meant.

He must stop.

If he did not, and at once, the mounted men would themselves stop the coach by shooting the horses.

The result would be most unpleasant, for besides being robbed they would have to walk all the rest of the way to Red Cliff.

So the driver did his best to hold his horses in.

A clarion voice rang up the gorge:

“Stop, or we fire!”

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“All right!” yelled the driver. “I’m trying to.”

Then, by throwing the lead-horses in against the mountain wall and pulling the pole horses together, the swing-horses came up with a slide and a jerk, the brake was set and the coach came up standing, though it slewed half way around on the smooth rock.

A harsh, mocking laugh rang out:

“Well done, Jeff Haines. You saved your horses and your neck that time. Now throw out those mail bags.”

This request was complied with.

The mail bags were rifled while two polite road agents came along and went through the pockets of the travelers.

When they had robbed the miner, the commercial traveler and the student, the bandits glanced at the Quakers.

They exchanged glances.

Then they shrugged their shoulders and said:

“There’s no meat on a crow, nor even any money on a parson. Keep what you’ve got, gentlemen.”

“Verily thou sayest well,” retorted one of the Quakers. “It is safer to have treasures in heaven, for there thieves cannot break in and steal.”

The outlaws returned to their leader, and a conference was held.

All this while the veiled lady had made no sign or movement.

Suddenly the leader of the bandits rode up and flashed a keen glance at her through the eye-holes of his mask.

“Ah, madam!” he said with a smile. “It is unusual to see one of your sex traveling alone in this part of the world.”

“I have no fear,” replied the veiled woman in a low tone.

“That is fortunate for you. Perhaps you have friends who would pay a small ransom for you?”

“You are quite mistaken.”

The bandit laughed carelessly.

“We shall see,” he said. “Here, men, bring her down from there and take her along. I am sorry, madam, but you are a valuable commodity.”

The woman shuddered and seemed to shrink back.

One of the Quakers leaned forward.

“Thou wilt not do so wrong a deed,” he protested.

“Keep your own counsel, old gray-frock!” retorted the bandit.

Two of the bandits assisted the woman down from the coach.

She was very calm and made no comment. She allowed them to place her on a horse without a word.

Then the bandit chief with his men waved an adieu to the coach and dashed out of sight down the trail.

The commercial traveler was the first to regain composure.

“Well, I’m out two hundred,” he said. “What did they strike you for, book-worm?”

“One hundred and forty,” said the student. “But they overlooked another hundred in my boot leg.”

The driver, to whom all this was no new experience, had recovered his spirits.

He pulled his leaders out, cracked the whip over the rumps of the swing horses, and rode away down the trail.

But while the party were discussing the robbery the Quakers had been conferring with each other.

One of them now reached forward and touched the driver on the arm.

“Wilt thou stop thy horses?” he asked.

“What fer?” blurted the driver.

“We are men of the Lord and follow his teachings, but we know that he will despise us if we go not back—yea, verily—and rescue that helpless woman.”

The driver pulled up his horses.

This declaration created a sensation.

The miner looked sheepish and the commercial traveler and the student were crestfallen.

“What are the chances for a rescue?” asked the student.

“I don’t see what a handful of men like us could do,” said the traveler.

“Wall, ye wouldn’t amount to a flea-bite,” declared the driver. “Captain Vail ain’t the man to be juggled by a slim crowd like us.”

But the Quakers had slid down from the coach.

They started back up the trail.

“Go thy way,” they said, contemptuously. “We are armed with the vengeance of the Lord. He will repay.”

For a moment those on the coach looked irresolute.

But the driver settled it.

He laughed harshly, and cackled to his horses.

The next moment the stage was out of sight around a bend.

The Quakers were left on the mountain trail.

The elder lifted his broad-brimmed hat and said:

“Well, Harry, we’re in for it.”

“Yes; you’re right. Here we are, right in the howling wilderness of the Wild West. I’m sure we are on the right lead. Didn’t the veiled lady put up a good bluff?”

“Well, I should say! Of course nobody but us knew that she was Beatrice Vail.”

“Just so.”

“Now our game is clear.”

“Yes; we must track the road agents until we get trace of Helen May.”

The two Quakers, as the reader has doubtless guessed, were far from being members of that sober sect.

They were no other than the two Bradys, detectives, in very clever disguise.

Certainly they had played their cards well, having come all the way over the stage route in company of Beatrice Vail, who never suspected their identity.

The Bradys were dropped right in the heart of the region where Vail carried on his nefarious trade.

This was just what they wanted, and they were ready for business.

Thrilling incidents were before them, which we will leave to another chapter to tell.

CHAPTER III. ON THE TRAIL.

The Bradys were reasonably sure that Vail and his gang had a rendezvous somewhere in the Black River Hills.

Just where this was it was now their province to find out.

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It did not take them long to hit upon a plan of action.

They left the trail and cut through a rough defile.

After some climbing they came out upon a spur of the mountain.

From this point they had an extended view.

They saw that which was to them most important.

Far down in the valley below was the little frontier and mining town known as Red Cliff.

It was situated on the banks of a winding river.

In the wilds which surrounded it were rich mines.

These were operated by means of the placer.

The miner, however, found many foes in the pursuit of his calling.

The Blackfoot savages had a number of villages in this region, and they were notorious thieves and murderers.

On the other hand was the desperate gang of outlaws under the lead of Mosely or Vail.

So bold were these desperados that often the very precincts of Red Cliff were invaded.

The brave band of vigilantes under Clifton Brown had in vain tried to overthrow them.

But though stray members were caught and at once strung up to the branches of some mountain pine, the main body of the road-riders set the vigilantes at defiance.

In vain Brown tried to root them out.

In all cases he was worsted.

In open ground no doubt he could have whipped the gang.

But in their mountain fastnesses the bandits were simply unconquerable.

The two detectives had formed a daring and resolute plan.

It was a complete departure from any usual method.

This was to employ no co-operation of any sort. It was not even known by any person but themselves that they were in this part of the West.

They did not call upon Clifton Brown for assistance.

Their plan was to invade the enemy's country "incog." and

unknown.

Their force of two was small, to be sure, but they believed more efficient than numbers.

First they desired to locate by secret work the stronghold of the robbers.

Then they would devise a plan to rescue the captive girl.

If need be, it would then be time enough to call on the vigilantes for assistance.

The two detectives stood on the mountain spur.

They looked far down the mountain trail and saw a black speck with what looked like ants attached to it.

It was the stage on its way into Red Cliff.

“Humph!” said Old King Brady. “That was a plucky crowd on that stage, Harry.”

“Well, I should say so. Not much of chivalry in their make-up.”

“Pretty wild region.”

“Yes.”

“It’s the first western case we’ve had for a good while.”

“So it is.”

“Nobody suspects that we are out here.”

“Not a soul.”

“I believe we shall win.”

“But it will be a hard case.”

“Very likely.”

The detectives scanned the country and took in every detail, making a mental map of it.

Suddenly Old King Brady started.

“Look!” he cried.

He pointed far up through the mountain defiles.

There were a number of horsemen filing through a gorge.

They looked like ants at that great distance. The detectives watched them curiously.

It was not difficult to guess who they were.

No doubt Vail and his wife Beatrice rode at the head of the party.

The detectives made a note of the locality.

Then Old King Brady said:

“Come, Harry; let us try and reach that spot.”

The old detective took a compass and set his course.

The sun was two hours past the meridian. A good part of the day was yet left.

The two detectives started on their course.

But before they had gone far Old King Brady called a halt.

“There is no better time,” he said, doffing his Quaker hat and coat. “Let us change our disguises.”

“A good idea!” agreed Young King Brady. “What shall it be?”

“Miners or prospectors.”

“Good!”

The transition made by the detectives was sudden and wonderful.

The coats turned inside out were rough and coarse. The surtouts of gray were removed and showed the red shirts of the miner.

The trousers were turned inside out and rolled into the boot legs.

The flat-brim hats were collapsed and worn under the shirt. Then rough slouch hats were donned.

Beards finished the make-up.

The erstwhile sedate Quakers could never have been recognized in this rough garb of the miner.

To be sure, they had no kit of tools.

But this would hardly tell against them, for any sort of a plausible story of getting lost could be told.

Thus equipped they started again on their course.

For over an hour they clambered on.

They passed through dense groves of mountain pine, along the brinks of cliffs, over huge piles of ledge, and finally came upon a well-beaten path.

Human footprints were easily distinguishable upon it.

This was deemed important.

A footpath in these wilds meant the presence of human beings.

As the detectives could think of no other than the outlaws they presumed of course that they must be near their stronghold.

They proceeded cautiously now.

It might be that they would stumble upon the gang at any moment.

Along the path they cautiously made their way.

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Suddenly Old King Brady paused.

“Sh!” he exclaimed. “I hear a human voice.”

The detectives listened.

A strange sound came to their ears.

It was a human voice raised in singing. What was more, the words were those of a hymn.

The detectives stared.

What did it mean?

Surely Vail's men could hardly be in the habit of singing hymns.

Old King Brady pushed nearer and peered through the thicket. He beheld a strange sight.

He saw a small cabin of logs placed against the side of a cliff.

In its doorway sat a character as strange as any he had ever gazed upon.

He was patriarchal in appearance, dressed in buckskin, with long, flowing white hair and beard.

He was singing in a melodious voice a sacred hymn. No other person was near.

But on a bench by the door sat a sable crow. Under the bench crouched a wolf-dog. In a cage near was a cub bear.

This strange array of pets seemed engaged raptly in listening to the singing.

It was a curious spectacle.

The detectives were wonder-struck.

What did it mean?

Who was this curious old man with his array of pets? Was it possible that he lived here alone?

But at this moment the wolf-dog started out from under the bench with a growl.

He had scented the detectives beyond a doubt.

The old man ceased singing and looked up.

“Down, Tiger!” he exclaimed in a stern voice. “Where are your manners, sir? Advance, stranger! Whoever you are, welcome to the abode of Milo the Hermit!”

The Bradys saw that their presence was known.

At once they stepped out into view.

They approached the strange habitation and its stranger inhabitant.

Old King Brady saluted the hermit, and said:

“My good sir, I salute you! We are out of our way and came upon you wholly by chance.”

“Many do that,” replied the hermit. “But they are always welcome. You are hungry and a-weary.”

“Both,” replied Young King Brady.

“Pray seat yourselves on this bench and I will bring you food and drink.”

The detectives complied.

The hermit soon emerged with a jug of water and some coarse bread and bear’s meat, with haunch of deer.

The meat was sliced cold, but cooked to a fine turn, and the detectives ate with relish.

It was not the sort of fare they were used to, but it was none the less good.

After they had eaten, the hermit, who had watched them, said:

“You come from the world outside. Little news reaches me here. Tell me, is the country at peace?”

“It is,” replied Old King Brady. “We have a quarrel with no one.”

“Heaven be praised!” said the hermit fervently. “When I took up my abode here we were at war with each other—the North against the South.”

“What!” exclaimed Old King Brady in surprise. “Have you been in this out-of-the-way place since then?”

“It is true,” replied Milo.

“And you have heard nothing of what has transpired since?”

“Only vague reports. People seldom come here.”

“But,” exclaimed Young King Brady, “why do you exile yourself thus?”

A spasm of pain contorted the features of the hermit.

For a moment he seemed overcome and unable to reply.

CHAPTER IV. IN THE HERMIT'S HUT.

Young King Brady regretted his hasty question almost as soon as he uttered it.

But the hermit was affected only a moment.

Then he said:

“It is a story which I may not tell. I was once of the world as worldly as you. But sin and trouble and misery has brought me to this.”

“I ask your pardon,” said the young detective. “The question was made on impulse and——”

The hermit put up his hand.

“You have a right to ask,” he said with a pleasant smile. “And I am glad to answer.”

“Has not life seemed dreary to you in these wilds?”

“To me life has been a question of physical existence. I have had to devote most of my time to the chase.”

“That is nomadic.”

“Yes, and strangely fascinating. I have been nearer to Nature's heart than the ordinary man. And I tell you that you men of

worldly wisdom know little of her grand secrets.”

“That is true,” agreed Old King Brady.

“There are grand and awful things in nature,” said the hermit. “Only life close to her, as mine has been, can prove this fact. I would not exchange my knowledge of her wonders for the greatest fortune and the highest position on earth.”

“Very good!” agreed the detective. “I cannot wonder. But do not the denizens of these hills ever trouble you?”

Milo looked furtively at the detective.

“What do you mean?” he asked. “Of whom do you speak?”

“The Indians.”

“Ah! they are my friends. They are the true children of Nature. They know me as a friend. No, I have never a quarrel with them.”

“But the road agents, or outlaws. Do not Captain Vail’s men come here?”

The hermit’s eyes flashed.

“Nothing would reward them for their pains.”

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“Yet they are villains, and malice might prompt them to do you harm.”

“I do not fear them,” replied the hermit. “Once Vail himself

came here. I fed him and was kind to him, for he was wounded from a fight with a bear. His men do not trouble me.”

“Is his stronghold near?”

The detectives waited with tense nerves for this answer.

Each instinctively hoped at that moment that it would be what they most desired.

But the hermit only said:

“I have never seen their home, nor do I know where it is located.”

Further inquiry was of no avail.

It would not do for the detectives to disclose their identity.

Persistent questioning might arouse the suspicion of the old man.

They knew this well.

For aught they knew he might be in league with the outlaws, or at least in sympathy with them.

So very guardedly the detectives changed the subject.

But they were satisfied of one thing. The stronghold of Mosely and the probable hiding place of Helen May was not far distant.

The sun had dropped in the western sky.

Night would soon be at hand, and the detectives knew that it

would be of little use to continue the quest much further after dark.

So they conferred while the hermit was in his cabin.

“Why not stay here to-night?” asked Young King Brady. “We can go on in the morning.”

“It is not a bad idea.”

“I believe it is best.”

“Will he keep us?”

“We can ask him.”

When Milo reappeared Old King Brady said:

“Good hermit, we are weary, and done with our day’s wanderings. We feel hardly able to find our way after dark. May we not stop with you to-night?”

The hermit bowed graciously.

“You are welcome,” he said.

“We will gladly pay——”

Milo turned almost fiercely.

“It is not yours to pay,” he cried forcibly. “But, gods! What we do for our fellow men we should look only to the Great Father for reward.”

The Bradys were silenced.

There was something grand and magnificent in the simple theories and utterances of this exile.

They felt instantly a profound respect, mingled with awe.

Milo quickly put them at ease by exhibiting his trained crow and displaying the curious antics of his cub bear.

The detectives were highly entertained until darkness shut down and night fell upon the country.

Then, as the air was chilly in this altitude, the hermit made a bit of a hearth fire with birchen wood, and in the little cabin they made themselves comfortable.

At an early hour the two detectives climbed up onto a bit of scaffolding overhead and lay down upon a couch of hemlock boughs covered with bear skin.

From this position they could look down into the room below.

Milo sat crooning and psalm singing over his fire.

The Bradys had just lapsed into a doze, when suddenly a curious whistle was heard outside the hut.

Then the tramp of horses' feet and the murmur of voices.

It need hardly be said that in a moment the detectives were wide awake.

They felt instinctively for their pistols.

It began to look as if there was trouble ahead.

“Who can it be?” asked Young King Brady in a whisper.

“Who but Vail or his men?”

Milo had started up from the fire.

Old King Brady leaned over the edge of the loft and whispered:

“Good hermit, betray us not to those outside. They seek our lives!”

Milo looked startled, but replied with a nod.

Then there came a vigorous rap on the door.

“Who comes to my humble dwelling at this unseemly hour?” hoarsely asked the hermit.

“It is a friend,” was the reply.

“A friend will give his name.”

“And an honest man will never fear a visitor.”

“I am an honest man.”

“Then open.”

“But I know not that you are also honest.”

A harsh laugh followed this.

“Come, old man, open up, or we’ll hamstring you and leave you to rot. No fooling! You saved my life once, but I believe you are a traitor.”

“It is he whom God can only despise as a robber of other men,” said Milo fearlessly. “I have nothing to fear from such as you. Enter!”

The hermit flung the door open.

A man, tall, and dressed in a dark cloak, boots and a slouch hat, entered.

It was Captain Vail.

He glanced about the cabin.

Then he struck an attitude and gazed at Milo.

“I can see that you are not more inclined than ever to bridle your tongue, old man,” he said.

“I am the guardian of my speech,” replied Milo.

“That may be, but fools only speak their mind at all times. I could hang you up by the heels if I chose.”

“You will be hung over Hades that way if you do not abandon your lawless life,” replied Milo. “Repent while there is yet time.”

“Spare your preaching!” said Vail with a curse. “I have come here for a purpose.”

The hermit folded his arms.

“You will not gain it,” he said.

“What? You know what it is?”

“You suspect me.”

“Well, of what?”

“Of conspiring against you.”

Vail was surprised.

“Well, that is a good guess. How did you find it out?”

“I have read it in your face.”

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“I believe you deal in witchcraft.”

The hermit looked contempt.

“But, seriously,” said Vail, “two men were seen to come here to-day by our scouts.”

“Yes, two men came here,” replied the hermit.

“Ah, you admit it!”

“I do.”

“Who were they, and what was their errand?”

“I never ask any person their business.”

“Ah, but you have an idea!”

“Well, then, they are honest miners who lost their way.”

Vail seemed relieved.

“Then they did not wear long gray coats and wear broad hats? They were not Quakers?”

“They did not answer that description.”

“Where are they now?”

“I cannot tell.”

Vail seemed to change his manner at once. He assumed a less censorious tone, and said:

“You will pardon me, Milo; but I am on the lookout for a couple of rogues who are trying to work evil against me. They are detectives, and were suspected of being on the Red Cliff coach in the guise of Quakers. It is known that no Quakers arrived on the coach at Red Cliff.”

“There are no Quakers here.”

“Ah, well, that settles it, then,” said Vail, turning to the door. “I shall disturb you no more.”

He went out and closed the door. The rattle of bits and bridle reins could be heard outside.

Milo's head was bowed as if in prayer.

Then he looked up to the scaffold and whispered:

"I told no lie by speech, but I evaded his question. It may be deception, but the Father will hold it no misdemeanor."

"You have saved our lives," whispered Old King Brady.

"They are your foes?"

"Yes."

"And you are really detectives?"

"We are."

At that moment the door swung open again.

Captain Vail strode in.

"We are not satisfied," he said. "My men must search your hut."

Milo the Hermit towered aloft like a giant.

What answer he might have made was never known. At that moment a most startling and unlooked-for thing occurred.

It was of a nature to precipitate serious results.

CHAPTER V. PRISONERS.

The little scaffolding on which the two detectives were was of the thinnest of hewn beams.

The weight upon it was sufficient, as chance had it, to loosen one of the supports. This was enough to weaken the rest.

And suddenly, and without warning, the entire structure collapsed and came crashing down into the hut floor.

The two detectives of course fell with it.

In the midst of the debris they were for a moment helpless.

But such a startling denouement was so unlooked for by Vail that he was held powerless.

Not until Young King Brady leaped to his feet did he act.

Then he covered the young detective with his pistol and blew a shrill whistle.

It was answered.

Into the hut rushed half a score of rough men.

The Bradys had by this time gained their feet.

They were unable to draw weapons, for they were already

covered.

But they played their parts well.

They affected to have been just aroused from a profound sleep, and were much confused.

Milo was calm and mobile.

“What is this?” thundered Vail. “Two men in hiding, eh? Did you not tell me they were not here?”

Milo looked straight at Vail.

“No!” he replied. “You know that I did not.”

“Who are they?”

“Ask them. Milo calls them his guests. He refuses no one the hospitality of his humble abode.”

Vail took a step forward.

He peered into the faces of the two detectives.

But they did not look familiar to him.

“I’ve never seen them before. I say, Jeff Black, are these the men you saw come here?”

One of the bandits came forward.

He looked sharply at the two detectives.

“They are the men,” he declared.

“Who are you?” asked Vail.

“We are miners,” replied Old King Brady. “You can call me Tim French.”

“And me Sam Jenks,” said Young King Brady.

“Humph!” said Vail. “This is an unhealthy locality for miners. You would do just as well to move on.”

“We’re going to in the morning.”

“Well, see that you do. And you, hermit, see that you keep no more strangers, or we’ll pull your hut down over your ears.”

Vail turned away.

The affair might have ended thus, and all in the detectives’ favor, but for an unfortunate incident.

One of the bandits had been keenly scrutinizing the detectives.

Suddenly he blurted out:

“Ye’re all blind. Look at ther false chinchillas.”

In an instant Vail wheeled.

“What?” he ejaculated.

“I’ll bet my life on it.”

“Do you mean that, Martin Mills?”

“Try ’em and see!”

The Bradys saw in that moment that the game was up.

They were betrayed.

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But what could be done?

There was a vague thought in the breast of each of resistance.
But it did not develop.

Vail strode up to Old King Brady and made a grab at his beard.

Off it came.

The change was startling.

A hoarse cry went up.

“Old King Brady!”

“Detectives!”

“Treachery!”

Then Vail cried:

“Upon them, men! Bind them, hands and feet! We have struck it rich! Hurrah! How the game has played into my hands!”

In the twinkling of an eye the detectives were helpless.

Then Vail began to deride them.

“Ho! ho! Fine detectives you are! Thought you had us, eh? Well, well, here is a go!”

Some of the bandits had seized Milo and were about to place a noose about his neck.

But Old King Brady cried:

“Whatever you do to us, don’t punish an innocent man. He did not know who we were.”

“Is that true?” asked Vail.

“I swear it!”

“Let the hermit alone, then, boys,” commanded Vail. “He is all right.”

The detectives were led out of the cabin.

Then they were blindfolded.

Next they were put upon horses and started away into the night. There was a long ride over rough ground.

Then the bandages were removed, and the Bradys saw that they were in a great, high-arched cavern.

Torches and lanterns illumined the place, and a great fire burned in the centre of the stone floor.

Two score of the road-riders lounged about the place.

The detectives were assisted from the horses and left upon the cavern floor, helplessly bound.

Vail and several of his men disappeared.

The detectives remained in a most painful position for much more than an hour.

Then one of the bandits cut the ropes which bound their ankles. They were given some dried meat and water.

An armed guard remained over them during the night.

A hundred daring schemes for escape were thought of.

But the Bradys were unable to make them feasible.

So the night wore on.

Morning came at last.

Vail appeared once more.

There was a fiendish light of triumph in his eyes.

“Well, my fine detectives,” he said mockingly, “I trust you have had plenty of time to repent your rashness.”

“What are you going to do about it?” asked Old King Brady.

“Are you curious?”

“Yes.”

“Well,” said Vail, ominously, “you of course understand that you are a menace to our safety.”

“I agree to that.”

“It is therefore only natural that we should dispose of such a menace.”

“Well?”

“Now, just outside this cavern is a high cliff. It is a sheer descent of four hundred feet. Down that you are to take a slide.”

Old King Brady’s face paled a trifle.

But that was all.

“Then you mean to murder us?”

“That is not murder.”

“It is nothing else.”

“Pshaw! You would hang me if you could. It is not murder to destroy an enemy.”

“But your method is not merciful.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Vail. “Do you think it ought to be?”

“For humanity’s sake, yes. Shoot us, at ten paces.”

An evil smile shone in his eyes as Vail said jeeringly:

“I would not miss the spectacle of your slide down that cliff for any price. Don’t you wish you had stayed in New York?”

“We have not taken the slide yet,” said Old King Brady.

“Indeed! Well, the time is not far distant. In half an hour men will come for you.”

Vail turned away.

When he had gone the detectives were able to realize the utter hopelessness of their position.

That Vail meant what he said there was no doubt.

Unless something intervened in the meantime their fate was sealed.

Time passed slowly.

Suddenly the notes of a whistle rang through the cavern chamber.

In an instant there was a stir among the outlaws. A scene of excitement followed.

The outlaws rushed hither and thither. Horses were brought out and saddled.

Then a general exodus followed.

In a few moments hardly an outlaw remained in the place.

The detectives were left alone in the place.

Something was up.

What was it?

The detectives glanced at each other.

“Now is our time,” said Old King Brady. “If we could only cut our bonds, Harry, we might escape.”

“Ah, but how can we do that?”

“I have good, strong teeth. Roll over here and let me try them on the rope about your wrists.”

The half hour mentioned by Vail had passed.

It was evident that the outlaw chief would postpone his threat to another time.

Something had for the nonce claimed his attention.

Perhaps an attack had been made on the stronghold.

Or, what seemed more likely, some sudden raid had been planned.

At any rate the prisoners seemed to have been forgotten in that moment.

There was no one near to watch them or to interfere with

their plans.

It is needless to say that the Bradys made the best of their opportunity.

Old King Brady tried his teeth on Harry's bonds.

In spite of his age the old detective possessed a set of perfect and powerful teeth.

He gnawed at the hempen strands persistently.

They gave way one after another.

Good progress was being made.

Suddenly Harry whispered:

“Sh! Desist a moment. Here comes some one.”

One of the outlaws galloped into the cavern.

He flung himself from the saddle and walked to the fire.

He threw a packet of papers into the coals, and then chanced to catch sight of the prisoners.

He stared at them, and an evil smile illumined his features.

The Bradys lay on their backs, Young King Brady taking care to keep his half-severed bonds out of sight.

“Wall!” exclaimed the outlaw. “Ye’re a handsome-looking pair, ain’t ye? Must be ye’re the detectives they told me about.”

With that he walked up and administered a kick to each.

The detectives at that moment feared that their chances were lost.

CHAPTER VI. A CLEVER ESCAPE.

Old King Brady feigned a grimace, and cried:

“What do you want to hit a man for when he’s down?”

“Down, eh?” jeered the villain. “Wall, ye air down, fer a fact. Haw! haw! Ye’ll make fine meat fer the crows.”

Then he kicked the recumbent detectives again and strode away.

The detectives drew a breath of relief.

The fellow went to the other side of the cavern and threw himself on a couch of skins.

Fortunately his back was turned to the Bradys.

Once again Old King Brady renewed his work on Harry’s bonds.

And just then he cut the last strand with his teeth.

Young King Brady silently drew his hands out of the ropes.

Then he began work dexterously on the cords about his ankles.

It did not take him long to untie the knots.

He was free.

He now rolled over and began to work on Old King Brady's bonds.

In a few moments he had untied them.

There was a chance.

The detectives could make a run for their lives.

The outlaw, who was the only one of the band in the cavern, still remained with his back turned.

He seemed asleep.

The detectives listened for his respiration. They could not hear it, but were well satisfied that he was asleep.

Silently they arose.

It did not require a moment for them to glide into the shadows near.

Then they entered a passage.

It was dark, and led they knew not whither. But they cared not, so long as it promised them liberty.

On they kept for a long way.

Suddenly a faint light showed ahead of them.

It was the sky. A moment or two later they came out upon a shelf of rock, from which they could look down upon the dense

forest-clad hillsides.

This was not the usual outlet used by the road agents.

No horse could descend by this path.

Indeed, for some moments the detectives were at a loss how to descend.

But they were enabled at length to find a narrow place close to the ledge by which they might climb down.

But Old King Brady now paused.

“Harry,” he said, “we have acted hastily.”

“What do you mean?” asked the young detective.

“We are throwing the game away.”

“How so?”

“We ought to have stayed in that cavern chamber. Why did we come out here?”

“To insure our safety, of course.”

“Pshaw! We had only one man against us. We ought to have looked for Helen May.”

The young detective saw the point.

“That is so,” he said. “We could have had no better chance.”

“That is my idea.”

“What shall we do?”

“We can go back.”

The detectives looked at each other. It seemed as if this was a correct view of the matter.

It did not take them long to decide what to do.

Back they started.

But they had not gone a rod before they halted again.

A startling sound had caught their ears. The tramp of many feet and a hoarse roar of voices was heard.

It told the story.

The outlaws had returned and their escape had been discovered. They were in hot pursuit.

“They are after us!” cried Young King Brady. “They have returned!”

“Then the game is up!”

“Yes.”

“We must hustle for our personal safety.”

“Sure!”

The detectives sped back to the cavern exit.

They swung themselves down from the shelf of rock.

The next moment they were plunging down through the dense woods into the ravine below.

It was easy now to give the road agents the slip.

The Bradys sped on until the light of day began to show in the east.

Then they came out, fortunately, upon the stage road which led down to Red Cliff.

They were yet in their disguise as miners, barring their beards.

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However, these were not absolutely essential, so they went on down the trail toward the little valley town.

Day had come and the sun was well up when they entered Red Cliff.

It was not unlike other mining towns of its class, and the detectives in their miners' guise did not attract special attention.

One street ran through the place, and before the door of the hotel lounged a heterogeneous collection of characters.

Cowboys, half-breeds and Mexicans with miners and prospectors made up the conglomeration.

The two Bradys sauntered leisurely up to the hotel and mingled with the crowd.

A group of men were talking near the entrance to the place.

There seemed to be much excitement.

“I tell ye, Cliff Brown will git old Vail yit,” said one of the men.

“I dunno about that,” said another, doubtfully. “He’s a pooty sly old hoss.”

“Thet’s all right; but every dog has his day, an’ you kin be sure Vail will hev his.”

“Humph! When Cliff onct gits his paws onto him there won’t be no chance for him.”

“Yas, when he does!”

Thus the conversation ran.

The Bradys listened with interest.

Then they went into the hotel and paid for a breakfast.

It was not of the best quality, but they paid for it, and ate as only hungry men can.

After this they once more strolled out to the door.

And just then a cavalcade of Indians mounted on ponies came dashing up the street.

They tumbled from their steeds in front of the hotel.

Then began barter between them and the miners.

Powder and shot and articles of that sort were exchanged for skins and moccasins and various things of Indian make.

Suddenly from the crowd a tall, fine-formed man stepped.

He made a gesture to the Indians, and his voice was full and ringing as he asked:

“I say, redskins, did you come down by the lower trail?”

One of the braves grinned and nodded.

“If that is so, did you cross a trail on the way over the upper fork of the Black River? You know the trail I mean.”

“Many horses. Much more as that?” asked the Blackfoot savage, extending his arms.

“Exactly.”

“Yep. We seen trail. Many white men going so,” pointing to the north. “Cross river and back, so,” pointing west.

The interlocutor gave a sharp cry.

“Boys!” he shouted. “The game is on. They are certainly going to raid the Powder Horn!”

At once a loud roar arose from the crowd, which had been

suddenly augmented by a score of armed men.

Old King Brady turned to a bystander.

“Who is that man?” he asked.

The fellow stared.

“I reckon yew are a stranger,” he said.

“Yes,” replied the detective.

“Yew must be, or you’d know Cliff Brown. He is the captain of ther vigilantes.”

Cliff Brown now seemed all excitement and eager haste.

“Bring out your horses!” he shouted. “Let every man report here jest as quick as he can. There’ll be hot work cut out fer us to-day.”

Old King Brady stepped forward.

“Do you want volunteers?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the vigilante leader. “Are you a good fighting man?”

“Myself and my friend here will go,” said Old King Brady. “But where can we get horses?”

“There’s a hundred of ’em about here,” replied Brown. “Here, Longlegs,” to a Blackfoot chief, “bring up some of your ponies.

Here are two men want them.”

The Indian quickly brought forward a number of smart little Indian ponies.

They were capable of a long ride, and as they could be purchased for five dollars each in gold the detectives selected two.

An Indian saddle went with each. The detectives had no weapons, theirs having been taken by the outlaws.

But a couple of Winchesters, some cartridges and two revolvers were purchased in the crowd.

Thus fitted out, the detectives were ready to ride with the vigilantes.

Very quickly now the party was made ready.

In less time than it takes to tell it all were ready.

They rode out of Red Cliff at a swinging gallop.

The detectives were with them.

Hot work was ahead.

It was explained to the two Bradys what the hunt was.

Far out in the Wyoming valleys was a rich ranch owned by an eastern millionaire.

It was called the Powder Horn, from the configuration of the park or valley in which it lay.

It was understood that several thousand sheep had been sold in Idaho and the money was held at the Powder Horn for a convenient time to ship East.

The road agents had heard of this.

At once they proceeded to lay plans for a descent upon the Powder Horn.

The ranchmen had made provisions to stand one attack.

But their numbers were hardly sufficient to stand off so strong a body of men as Vail's gang.

Accordingly, word had been sent to Red Cliff to hold the vigilantes ready.

The statement of the Blackfeet in regard to the trail convinced Brown that the road agents had started that morning on the raid.

It was a long way to the Powder Horn, and the miscreants could hardly reach there before dark.

They had a long way the start of the vigilantes.

But as they would hardly be likely to attack the ranch immediately upon arrival, Brown hoped by hard riding to cut them off.

So the vigilantes rode at a swinging lope across the

Wyoming country on their errand of rescue.

CHAPTER VII. A LONG RIDE.

The Bradys had attracted more than a passing notice from the captain of the vigilantes.

As they galloped on the vigilante leader glanced at them curiously from time to time.

Something about these two volunteers impressed him as out of the ordinary.

“It’s queer,” he muttered. “I wonder where they came from.”

Once Old King Brady caught his eye.

The detective seemed to read his thoughts.

He said to Young King Brady:

“I am going to speak to Brown.”

“What for?”

“I will let you know presently.”

“All right.”

Old King Brady urged his horse alongside that of Brown.

“I beg pardon, Captain,” he said, “but I thought you looked as if you wanted to speak to me.”

“Eh?” said Brown with a curious glance. “What made you think that?”

“I saw it in your face.”

“You are a shrewd fellow.”

“Perhaps so.”

“What is your name?”

“My name is Brady.”

“I don’t recall it. I reckon you’re a stranger here.”

“Oh, yes.”

“Humph! What is your business?”

“Detective.”

Brown gave a start which caused his horse to fumble and almost fall.

“Eh?” he gasped. “Did you speak a-right? A detective?”

“Yes.”

“Where from?”

“New York City.”

“What are you doing out here?”

“I was sent here to effect the rescue of Helen May.”

The vigilante captain stared at the speaker. Then he said:

“Did they think that you were given an easy commission?”

“I don’t know what they thought,” replied Old King Brady, “but I have never failed in a mission yet.”

“There is always a first time. I think you will meet your Waterloo.”

“Very well,” said the old detective, coolly. “I am prepared to stand by the result of my efforts.”

“Win or fail?”

“Just so.”

The vigilante captain was silent a moment. Then he said:

“Does anybody else around here know that you are detectives?”

“No,” replied Old King Brady, “and I would beg of you to keep the secret.”

“I will do so. Now, Mr. Brady, I want to ask your advice.”

“Well?”

“What is the best way of approaching the Powder Horn ranch? It may be in the hands of the road agents for aught we know.”

“Approach it with caution. As you say, it may be in the hands of

the road agents.”

“I believe you are right. Ought we to ride up there in a body?”

“No.”

“What then?”

“Send a couple of scouts ahead and find out if possible the true state of affairs.”

“Good! That is correct. I will follow your advice. So you are really detectives sent here by the Chief of the Secret Service in response to my letter?”

“That is the way of it.”

“Well, I can only say that I will co-operate with you to the best of my ability. Now I am not sure where Miss May, the young girl held for ransom, is imprisoned. But I imagine she is in the mountain stronghold of Vail.”

“That is where she is.”

“Ah! you know that?”

“Yes.”

“Have you been there?”

“We have.”

With this, Old King Brady detailed his experiences at the hut of

Milo the Hermit.

Brown listened with deep interest.

“Milo is all right,” he said. “He is a good, honest man. Perhaps he can help us yet to rescue her.”

“I am of that opinion.”

“But if we can only round up Vail, I think we shall be all right. I hope we will find him at the Powder Horn.”

“So do I,” agreed Old King Brady.

The party now galloped on.

At noon they emerged from a deep pass into one of those beautiful parks or valleys for which Wyoming is famous.

Here, by the banks of a cool stream, they dismounted.

The horses were grazed and the riders themselves partook of their dinner.

An hour later they were again in the saddle and galloping on.

In the middle of the afternoon suddenly the hawk-like eye of one of the scouts caught sight of something.

He leaped from his horse and began to examine the ground.

At this moment they were on a stretch of level prairie, extended to dim foot-hills in the west.

That which had attracted the scout's attention was a trail.

He dropped from his horse instantly and examined it.

Others did the same.

The verdict was quickly given.

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“It is the trail of the party of outlaws,” was the decision.

“They passed this way two hours ago.”

Into the saddle leaped the vigilantes.

The horses were now urged forward more swiftly.

There was a vague hope that the gang might be overtaken.

On and on galloped the vigilantes.

Then the sun began to sink.

Nearer and nearer it drew to the horizon line.

Just as it was dipping a great cry went up.

The distant dim outlines of the Powder Horn ranch buildings could be seen.

Then Brown called a halt.

“Now, boys,” he cried, “we must decide what it is necessary to do.”

“Aye, aye!” was the cry.

“Yonder is the ranch. It is evident that the outlaws have not fired it yet. Therefore, it is possible that it has not been captured.”

“Then why not go on?” asked a vigilante.

“On the other hand, it may be in the hands of the gang,” resumed Brown. “In that case our best plan would be to work a surprise and descend upon them suddenly.”

“That is better.”

“I think so.”

“Then we had better wait for darkness?” asked Old King Brady.

“Yonder is a clump of timber,” said Young King Brady. “From it we ought to get a good view of the ranch. Why not ride up from behind it, in which position we will be unobserved?”

“Capital!” cried the captain of the vigilantes. “Come on, boys!”

The vigilantes now galloped away to the southward, and presently came up behind the belt of timber.

This was within a half mile of the ranch.

It could be seen that the stockade gates were open.

But beyond nothing could be seen. All was as still as if the place was a tomb.

And, indeed, the horrible discovery was shortly to be made that it was such.

Darkness was coming on rapidly.

Not a man among the vigilantes but was anxious and impatient.

All were puzzled.

“Queer that they should leave their gates open like that when they expect an attack,” said one of the vigilantes.

“Don’t seem to be anybody about.”

“It is a trap!” declared one of the scouts. “If ye was to ride in there ye’d find the whole cut-throat gang ready to pounce on ye!”

“But whar is the ranch people?” asked one of the vigilantes.

“Oh, they’re done up long ago. That’s just the way of it.”

“Maybe the gang have been here and gone,” said another.

“Humph! That ain’t likely.”

“They wouldn’t be apt to leave a stick or a stone of that ranch behind ’em.”

“I agree with you, Murphy,” declared Brown. “They are lurking in that ranch. It is a trap.”

“What is to be done?”

“Wait for darkness!”

“Send in some scouts!”

“Make a charge!”

All these suggestions were weighed. Finally Old King Brady stepped forward.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I have a plan to offer.”

The vigilantes looked at the detective.

“Wall?”

“Spit it out, stranger!”

“My friend and I,” indicating Young King Brady, “will undertake to ride out to the ranch and investigate on certain conditions.”

“Whew!” exclaimed Brown. “That would be suicide!”

“That will depend upon you.”

“Upon us?”

“Yes.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I will explain,” said Old King Brady. “You are to wait here while we ride into the ranch yard. We will assume to be travelers. We will allow them to rob us if they choose.”

“Well?”

“Then if we do not appear in ten minutes again at the ranch gate you will come to our rescue—charge the ranch!”

There was a moment of silence.

“Have you considered the risk of this thing?” asked Brown.

“I think so.”

“You will be murdered!”

“We are willing to take the chances.”

A short debate followed.

Finally the offer of the detectives was accepted.

The vigilantes looked upon them already as heroes.

It was indeed a daring thing to do. But there was a method in Old King Brady’s madness.

He did not believe that any of the outlaws were in the place.

It was his belief that the place was deserted.

He turned to Young King Brady.

“Come, Harry,” he said. “Are you ready to go?”

“I am boiling over with eagerness,” cried the young detective.

The detectives leaped into the saddle and rode out back of the grove.

They approached the ranch in the same manner. Those left behind watched them intently.

What would be the result?

Would the outlaws fire upon them or would they allow them to ride quietly into the trap? This was the question on every tongue.

CHAPTER VIII. AN AWFUL TRAGEDY.

It began to look as if the latter would be the case. The detectives were soon within fifty yards of the open gate.

They rode close together.

Old King Brady's eye lost nothing. He took in every detail of the place so far as could be seen.

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“What do you think?” asked the young detective in an undertone. “Do you see anything wrong?”

“Not yet,” replied the old detective. “But keep your eyes open.”

Suddenly the old detective reined up his horse.

Placing his hands to his mouth to make a trumpet, he shouted:

“Hello! the ranch!”

No answer came back.

No rancho appeared at the gate, no sign of life resulted. The detectives waited quite a while.

Their horses cavorted and plunged, and finally Old King Brady said:

“I am going through the gate, Harry.”

“I am with you.”

They put spurs to their horses. Through the gate they galloped.

Into the ranch yard, which was a large one, they rode.

To the left was the long row of stables and sheep pens. To the right, some distance away, the horse sheds and low-roofed dwelling, with its broad piazzas.

The Powder Horn was one of the finest ranches in the Northwest.

All this the detectives took in at a glance.

Then a different spectacle claimed their gaze, and did much to explain the mystery which seemed to hang over the place.

No living being was seen.

But it was easy to see that the ranch had been the scene of an awful and bloody tragedy.

Dead bodies of cowboys lay in the sand of the yard. Blood smeared the grass, and dead ponies and broken weapons were everywhere.

It was easy to understand what this meant.

The outlaws had made their visit and gone. This was the result.

Why they had not fired the buildings was easy to understand.

The flames and smoke would have been seen for miles, and doubtless would have attracted many avengers to the spot.

All these things occurred to the detectives and they understood matters thoroughly.

They rode about the ranch yard and saw all the evidences of a literal massacre.

The place had been looted thoroughly and every living being murdered.

Then the detectives rode out to the gate again.

The vigilantes waiting in the timber clump were anxious and excited.

When the detectives rode through the gates they expected to see them close behind them.

Their surprise and relief was great, therefore, when they saw them suddenly reappear.

“Hurrah!” cried Brown. “They’re all right. The place is deserted.”

With cheers the vigilantes broke from the timber.

But their cheers became groans when they rode into the ranch yard and witnessed the deeds of murder and rapine.

It was an impressive moment.

The yard presented a bad enough spectacle, but the interior of the ranch was worse.

The vigilantes went over the place carefully, and found only one thing to guide them in the chase.

This was the trail of the gang as they left the ranch.

This extended to the northward and the plain.

The footmarks were quite plain in the soft soil. But the darkness rapidly coming on, precluded the possibility of following it that night.

This was bad.

With such a long start in the morning it would be almost out of the question to overtake the murderers.

But Brown was loth to remain overnight in inaction at the ranch.

So it was decided to ride away as far as possible that night—on the trail at random.

Accordingly, the vigilantes swung into the saddle. But as they were trotting out of the yard, Brown saw the Bradys come riding up to him.

“Mr. Brown,” said Old King Brady, “I believe we will leave you here.”

The captain of the vigilantes was astonished.

“What?” he gasped. “Leave us here? And why, pray?”

“We think it the best plan for you to go on without us.”

“But—why do you stay? What do you expect to gain here?”

“We do not intend to remain here,” replied Old King Brady.

“What then?”

“Well, we shall return to the Black River Hills. It looks like a splendid opportunity for us to rescue Helen May while you are chasing Vail and his men. Of course the stronghold cannot be very strongly guarded.”

“That is true,” agreed Brown. “On the whole, I am disposed to agree with you. But I think we ought to make it mutual.”

“How so?”

“We will do our best to join forces with you in the hills. If we can round up the gang there while you are rescuing the young girl we shall be all right.”

“Capital!” agreed Old King Brady. “Nothing could be better.”

“Then we will hope to meet you again in the hills?”

“Yes.”

“Good fortune attend you.”

“The same.”

They gripped hands and the vigilantes rode away. The two detectives were left alone at the ranch.

It was now very dark. The Bradys did not lose time in setting out upon the return trip to Red Cliff.

Fortunately, after an hour's ride in the darkness, the moon arose and illumined the country with a silvery light almost equal to that of day.

This enabled them to find their way with ease.

Through the long hours of the night they rode on.

They were obliged to proceed more slowly, however, for the horses were not as fresh.

So when daybreak came they were yet some distance from Red Cliff.

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But Old King Brady had decided to pass to the north of Red Cliff and enter the hills from that side.

At daybreak they came to a little meandering stream. Its waters were cool and tempting and the detectives paused beside it.

The horses were turned out to graze for a couple of hours, while the Bradys took a brief nap.

They were much fatigued after the long ride of night and day and felt the need of rest greatly.

They slept soundly, however, for nearly four hours. When Old

King Brady awoke he rubbed his eyes and saw the younger detective bending over him.

“Do you know what time it is?” asked Young King Brady.

“Have we overslept?”

“I should say so. Only about four hours or so.”

“Well, that is hard luck.”

They partook of a light lunch, which they had in their saddle bags, drank some of the spring water, and then rode on.

It was the middle of the afternoon when they entered the Black River Hills.

The horses were picketed in the woods and the Bradys took the mountain trail.

For another hour they climbed on. Then suddenly Old King Brady peered through the low-hung branches of a cedar and said:

“There you are, Harry. There is the very shelf of rock we climbed down from.”

Young King Brady saw that this was true. Far up the mountain side it was.

The climb up there was a long and hard one. But it was finally consummated.

The detectives cautiously clambered upon the shelf and stood at the mouth of the mountain cave.

They listened, but heard no sound from within. No living being could they see.

The way seemed clear.

Young King Brady started to enter the cavern.

But just as he did so a dark form stepped forth from its depths. A deep voice said:

“Thank heaven! you live!”

Startled beyond expression, both detectives drew their pistols.

At that moment they feared the worst. They were certain that some of the outlaws were at hand.

But this was an error.

Out into the light stepped a form familiar to both. The Bradys lowered their weapons.

“Milo the Hermit,” exclaimed Old King Brady. “This is a surprise.”

The hermit, pallid and drawn, looked from one to the other. He drew a deep breath of relief.

“What is this?” he exclaimed. “I have haunted this cavern ever since that night in the effort to effect your rescue from the

outlaws.”

“You have?” exclaimed Old King Brady in surprise.

“I thought Vail had surely murdered you,” said the hermit. “You can imagine my surprise just now at seeing you here.”

“My friend,” said the old detective earnestly, “we thank you for your kindness. Have you any idea where Vail and his men are just now?”

“They are away upon some sort of a raid,” replied the hermit. “But I cannot tell you where they have gone.”

“They have not returned?”

“No.”

“Who is now in the cavern?”

“Nobody.”

The detectives were astonished as well as startled.

“Nobody!” they exclaimed. “Is no guard left there?”

“No. The place is practically deserted,” replied Milo. “I have been all over it and have not found a soul.”

The Bradys exchanged glances.

“We are beaten!” exclaimed Old King Brady, with a grimace.

“They have changed their headquarters.”

“It was a clever trick!”

“Where shall we look for them now?”

“That is the question.”

For a time there was silence. The detectives were fully convinced of this fact.

They were more than disappointed. The hope of finding Helen May seemed deferred indefinitely now.

CHAPTER IX. A VAIN QUEST.

“Have you any idea where they have removed their stronghold?” asked Old King Brady of Milo.

“Not the slightest,” replied the hermit. “I came here to see if I could not rescue you. I believed you dead when I found no trace of you here.”

“Well, we are euchred,” declared Young King Brady. “They have stripped the cavern?”

“Everything is gone!”

“Then they have also taken the young girl with them.”

To the surprise of the detectives Milo shook his head.

“No,” he said. “I do not believe that.”

“What?” asked Old King Brady in a startled way. “What do you mean?”

“If you will come with me I will explain.”

“Do you believe that the young girl is still kept here?” asked Old King Brady.

The hermit nodded.

“It is the only way in which I can explain a strange phenomenon,” he said.

“Ah, what is that?”

“Come and I will show you.”

They followed Milo into the cavern. For some ways they kept on.

Soon they were in that part which the detectives had been ushered into when they were made prisoners.

Light came in through apertures in the cavern dome overhead. The hermit led the way to the opposite side of the cavern chamber.

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Here was a side passage which led to a blank wall.

Against the wall of this passage Milo placed his ear.

He listened long and intently.

Then he looked disappointed.

“I will explain to you,” he said. “At times by listening at this wall you will hear plainly the voices of females. They seem at a distance and I believe are conducted hither by some strange peculiarity of the wall. It is a sort of whispering gallery.”

“The phenomenon is common,” cried Old King Brady. “It means that the speakers are not far distant and are in some other chamber.”

“So I concluded.”

“How recently did you hear the voices?” asked Old King Brady.

“Within an hour.”

The old detective looked joyful.

“Then it is all right,” he cried. “The outlaws have only temporarily abandoned this place. They have left the lady prisoner here in some secret cavern chamber.”

“Ah!” said Milo. “Now you can distinguish the phenomenon quite plainly.”

All pressed their ears to the wall. It was easy to hear now.

A sweet and wonderful female voice was heard singing gently the words of a hymn.

As the faint notes came through the stone to the ears of the listeners they were thrilled.

As soon as the singer had paused Old King Brady pressed his lips to the stone and shouted.

But no answer came back.

Again and again he tried.

It was the same.

“That is easily explained,” declared Milo. “The wall conducts

sound only in this direction. We can hear her, but she cannot hear us.”

“Where can she be?”

“That is a hard question to answer. She may be above or below, or at some distance on this level.”

“Ah, she speaks again.”

The murmur of voices now came faintly along the wall.

It was easy to hear the accents of two females. It was undoubtedly a fact that Helen May, the captive girl, and possibly Beatrice Vail, the outlaw’s wife, were in some cavern chamber not far distant.

But where was it?

And how to get to it?

This was the problem.

Milo could suggest no plan. The voices could only be heard at this angle of the wall. They could not be traced, therefore.

Every part of the cavern wall was searched for an opening or possibly a secret door.

But no trace of such could be found.

Around the main room of the big cavern the search was continued. But without avail.

Then the various passages were tried. Finally the other entrance to the stronghold was found.

This led them out upon the other side of the mountain and near the trail which led to the home of the hermit.

Milo suggested going thither, as it was late in the afternoon and they were extremely tired and hungry.

“I think I can find you something to eat and drink,” he declared. “No doubt that will be agreeable to you.”

The detectives could not demur.

They were half-famished and could not refuse the kind offer, even at the risk of losing their game.

So all repaired to the humble cabin of the hermit.

Here Milo placed before them an appetizing repast of venison steak, mountain trout and potatoes, the latter of which he raised in a fertile glen in the mountain.

The detectives ate heartily.

Then they seated themselves on a bench outside the cabin to indulge in a smoke and a brief retrospect of the case.

“I am of the opinion,” declared Old King Brady, “that those villains will return here with their booty.”

Milo shook his head.

“I can hardly believe that,” he said. “The fact that you are possessed of the secret of this place is to them sufficient incentive to warrant the finding of a new hiding-place for their plunder.”

“That is my idea,” agreed Young King Brady.

But the astute old detective was resolute in his belief.

“They would not fear the vigilantes in this out-of-the-way locality,” he declared. “They would rather welcome an attack.”

Milo looked surprised.

“How could that be?” he asked.

“Easy enough,” replied the old detective. “They could whip any number of assailants from the vantage of this position.”

This was beyond question.

But Young King Brady was obdurate.

The two famous detectives did not always agree on a question. This pleased Old King Brady immensely.

“The boy has a mind of his own,” he muttered. “He’ll figure the thing out all straight yet. What if he is mistaken. After all, he may be right.”

Then the argument went on. But Old King Brady could not shake the belief of Harry or Milo.

“I tell you those rascals will come back here,” affirmed Harry. “They would not have left Helen May and her woman keeper here otherwise.”

Old King Brady studied the distant and opposite side of the valley silently for a while.

Suddenly he gave a little start.

There was a great reason for this. A distant object caught his gaze.

It was at first something bright flashing dazzlingly in the declining rays of the sun.

Then he saw objects moving through the distant green foliage.

The next moment the figures of men and horses were seen emerging from the forest and making their way down into the valley below.

Old King Brady’s jaw fell.

He stared at the spectacle.

Then he said:

“Harry, you have beaten me. You have hit it right.”

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“Sh!” exclaimed the young detective. “What do you mean?”

“It is easy to see.”

Old King Brady pointed to the distant moving body of men. A sensation was created.

Young King Brady sprang up and Milo ran into the cabin for a field glass.

He came out with it and passed it to Young King Brady.

Both detectives in turn scrutinized the distant body of men. At first Old King Brady had been sure that they were the outlaws.

But now both detectives exchanged glances.

“Indians!”

There was no doubt of this.

A large body of mounted savages were making their way down into the valley. What did it mean?

Even at that distance it could be seen that they were in war paint. Then Milo said:

“I have heard rumors for months past of the uprising of a tribe of Blackfeet Indians. It may be that they are coming over thinking to attack the outlaws.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Young King Brady. “This is a go. No doubt they will come here.”

Milo looked much disturbed.

“That will mean the burning of my humble home,” he said. “I

have long dreaded such a contingency. What can we do?"

"What have we for weapons?" asked Old King Brady. "We might try and make a stand."

"I have rifles in the cabin, four of them," declared Milo, "and plenty of ammunition."

"That is enough," cried the old detective. "Bring them out. We will hold the savages off if we can."

Milo brought out the rifles and a number of rounds of ammunition. Then the party started along the mountain side to watch the course taken by the savages.

Presently they entered the tortuous defile which led up to the outlaws' stronghold.

Here for a time they lost sight of the savages.

But finally they came upon them again at a nearer point. They now perceived with astonishment that the savages had come around behind them and were now entering the same defile.

There was no longer any doubt that they meant to raid the outlaws' den.

They did not dare to attack so strong a place as Red Cliff.

But the outlaws were of limited numbers and their den would be rich with spoils.

The detectives and Milo watched the Indians with interest.

After a while they came to a halt and scouts were sent forward.

These came right to the mouth of the entrance to the den.

They were cautious at first, but, finally made the same discovery that the detectives had, that the place was empty and deserted.

The effect upon them was at once apparent. They swarmed into the place in large numbers.

In less than no time they had overrun the cavern in the quest for plunder. The result of this was yet to be seen.

CHAPTER X.

HEMMED IN.

Milo and the detectives were in a secure hiding-place watching the savages.

Thus far they had no occasion to use their weapons.

There was the possibility that the savages would depart in peace after finding the place deserted.

There would, therefore, be no need of resistance unless they attacked Milo's abode.

The disappointment of the savages was made easily manifest.

They howled and grunted and ran wild over the place. Suddenly a startling thing happened.

One of the red prowlers dislodged a slab of stone from the mouth of an aperture in the mountain side.

It was a startling discovery and he called his companions.

Then into the newly discovered cavern chamber he went.

The result was thrilling.

The crack of a pistol was heard and then feminine screams issued from the place.

In a moment the detectives were apprised of what this meant. They exchanged glances.

“Mercy!” exclaimed Milo. “They have discovered the secret cavern where are the women whose voices we heard.”

“That is true!” cried Old King Brady. “Ought we not go to the rescue? Come on!”

No savage was in sight.

Four had entered the secret cave.

The others were in the large cavern and out of ear-shot. The detectives wasted no time.

Across the intervening space they dashed. In another moment they dashed into the secret cave.

The sight which met their gaze was a thrilling one.

One of the four savages lay dead across the entrance.

The other three were binding two women with thongs of deerhide. One of these women was Beatrice Vail. The other was a very beautiful young girl with pallid features.

That she was Helen May there was no doubt.

The appearance of the three rescuers on the scene changed the situation.

The savages turned with surprise and gripped their weapons for

a resistance. But they were too late.

Old King Brady fired at the nearest and dropped him in his tracks.

Milo the Hermit dropped his man. The third savage made a desperate dash to escape.

But Young King Brady grappled with him and threw him like a log.

He was quickly bound and gagged.

Then very quickly the two women were released from their bonds.

There was no time for explanations. Escape was the only thing to be considered.

And this was quickly planned.

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Milo ran back to the entrance.

None of the savages in the main cavern had yet appeared on the scene. Old King Brady took the young girl's arm.

But Beatrice Vail hung back.

"I will remain here." she said.

"What?" exclaimed Young King Brady. "You will not go with us?"

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I do not know you.”

“But we are white men. If you stay here the savages will kill you.”

“I will stay.” she said doggedly.

The detectives were astonished.

“Are you mad?” asked Old King Brady. “What can you mean?”

“Who are you?” asked Beatrice quietly. “Do you belong to the vigilantes?”

“No; we are prospectors.”

The woman hesitated.

She glanced at her companion. It could be seen now that she feared the latter would betray her real character, and she would be turned over to the law.

She would risk being captured by the savages to accepting this chance.

But Helen said:

“Come, you shall be safe!”

This settled it.

The Vail woman knew that Helen was willing to forego her betrayal that her life might be spared.

She flashed a grateful glance at the young girl.

In a few moments they were outside the little cavern.

They turned into the path leading to Milo's hut, and for the nonce were safe.

But they did not pause there, but set out on the long trail to Red Cliff.

The detectives' plan was to find their horses where they had left them hobbled and grazing and place the women on their backs. In this way they might easily make their way back to Red Cliff.

It seemed as if fate had played certain victory into their hands.

Certainly Helen May, the abducted girl, had been rescued. Beatrice Vail, one of the abductors, was in their power.

It only remained to capture Vail and his gang.

This it was believed could be done with the aid of Clifford Brown.

Beatrice Vail, assured that Helen would not betray her, went along amicably now.

They told a story to the detectives which implied that both were captives. Of course Helen understood that this was not believed.

With an exchange of but few words, therefore, a perfect understanding seemed to have been arrived at.

But once well down the mountain side, Milo the Hermit said:

“Now, gentlemen, I will take my leave of you.”

“You are not going back?” asked Old King Brady in surprise.

“I must!” replied the hermit. “My home is in the wilds and there it must ever be. If the savages destroy it I shall hope to build another.”

The detectives shook hands with Milo warmly and went on without him.

Darkness was now settling down very rapidly.

In a short time it would be difficult to find their way through the forest.

The Bradys, however, kept on.

Progress was slow, for they were hampered by the slow walking of the women.

For hours they kept on.

Then a halt was called.

“I see no way for it but to camp for the night,” said Old King Brady. “It is plain that exhaustion will overtake us soon.”

Helen protested that she could keep on, for her desire to again reach civilization gave her false strength.

But Beatrice had completely collapsed. She refused to go further.

There was the prospect of a long, dreary night in the wilds.

Beneath a spreading oak the party reclined. Sleep might have soon overtaken them, but suddenly a strange series of noises were heard in the depths of the forest.

“What is that?” asked Young King Brady.

“It sounded like trampling brush,” replied the old detective. “Somebody must be near us.”

“Indeed it must be so. Can it be wild beasts?”

But at that moment the whining of a horse was heard not fifty yards away.

It was a thrilling moment.

What did it mean?

Who could be traveling through the wilds at this hour. The tramp of many horses' feet was now heard.

A cavalcade was passing through the undergrowth. A sudden startling thought came to Old King Brady.

Was it the vigilantes returning from the Powder Horn and on

their way to the outlaws' stronghold?

It did not seem possible that it could be aught else.

The outlaws, it was believed, would enter the hills from the other side.

But while the detectives were listening, Beatrice Vail had also been doing the same.

Crouched like a tigress at the roots of the tree, she listened. Then a strange thing occurred.

Suddenly, and without warning, she opened her lips and uttered a strange, sibilant cry.

It echoed through the night woods like the call of a panther.

Instantly the detectives turned upon her.

But she had flitted away into the darkness like a wraith. It was useless to pursue her.

“Egad!” exclaimed Young King Brady. “She is gone and we are lost. I’ll wager the outlaws are all about us. Listen!”

The trampling of horses’ feet had momentarily ceased. Then the strange cry uttered by the Vail woman was answered from the depths.

Old King Brady knew there was no time to lose.

He clutched one of Helen’s hands and Young King Brady the

other.

“Come!” cried the old detective, “we are lost if we stay here another moment.”

Away into the gloom they glided.

It was fortunate that the night was dark.

The crashing in the undergrowth sounded all around them. They knew that the outlaws were closing in.

Shouts and curses were heard and lights flashed.

On the detectives rushed.

Suddenly they came to the bank of a little stream.

Young King Brady stumbled down to the water’s edge. As he did so he fell over an object.

In the dim light he was just able to see with a startled thrill what it was.

It was a boat.

A single Indian dugout, to be sure, but it would float and there were paddles in it.

This was enough.

Helen was lifted into it, and the detectives climbed in. They seized the paddles and bent to them.

Along the darkest shore of the stream they glided, digging the paddles silently.

Escape seemed sure.

They turned a bend of the river, and for the first time the sounds of pursuit began to grow faint behind them.

It is needless to say that it was a matter of deep relief.

“Whew!” exclaimed Young King Brady. “How is that for a close call?”

“It’s as close as any we’ve had yet,” replied the old detective.

“We’ve slipped them!”

“I hope so.”

“Oh, gentlemen,” said Helen, gratefully, “I feel very thankful to you for all this. To whom am I so indebted?”

“Bless your soul, miss,” said Old King Brady, “we’re out West for the very purpose of rescuing you. We are detectives from New York, and your father expects us to bring you safely back to him.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEARDED STRANGER.

A cry of joy escaped Helen May's lips with this announcement.

“Oh, dear papa!” she exclaimed with intense emotion. “You cannot know what I have suffered and how I have prayed to be restored to him.”

“Well, we shall take you safely to him if it is in our power,” said Old King Brady. “Be sure of that.”

“You shall be well repaid.”

The canoe glided on swiftly.

Where the stream led the detectives had no idea.

It was enough to know that the distance was lessening between them and the outlaws.

The darkness was intense.

Great masses of clouds were banked in the zenith. A distant rumble of thunder was heard.

It was evident that a storm was threatening.

Down the current they drove the light canoe.

An ominous sound suddenly came to the ears of all.

It was a dull roaring, like the falling of many waters.

“Rapids!” exclaimed Young King Brady. “That is bad!”

Old King Brady steered the canoe nearer the shore, and they now proceeded cautiously.

Nearer they drew to the rapids, and finding the current rapid, the canoe was driven ashore.

The detectives got out and assisted Helen to mount the river bank.

They had now entirely lost their bearings. It was impossible to say just where they were.

The darkness seemed more intense and the storm nearer. It was necessary to find some place of refuge at once.

It was plain that they had given the outlaws the slip.

So far as they were concerned there was no danger. The elements were most to be dreaded now.

Lightning played across the sky in forked streaks. The wind soughed through the tree-tops mournfully.

Pattering drops of rain began to fall. Alone and lost in the primeval forest, the outlook was not pleasant.

But the detectives were not long at a loss for a plan.

A hollow tree was found. Into this Helen crept, and the

detectives placed brush over the entrance to shed the rain should it chance to enter.

Here the young girl fell asleep. The detectives pulled the dugout out of the water.

By bending down some saplings they placed the boat across them to make a canopy.

With boughs they covered the sides, and lastly, by the light of the dark lantern, dug a trench around this impromptu camp to carry off the water.

Then they crept under the dugout, and reclining on their bed of boughs, soon fell asleep.

The rain fell in torrents.

The thunder roared, the lightning flashed, and the trees rocked and swayed with the storm.

But this did not disturb the sleepers. Their fatigue was so great that they minded nothing.

Toward morning the storm ceased.

When day broke the detectives arose much refreshed. They were quickly astir and went down to take a look at the rapids.

Great was their surprise to see the continuation of the valley far below, and down there plainly visible was Red Cliff.

It was an agreeable discovery.

The stream was the one which flowed through Red Cliff and from which the water was drawn for the mine flumes.

Had the dugout been able to ride the rapids they might have made the town before the storm.

As it was, the journey was made to a point below the rapids.

Here they came to the ford which was used by the stage. As luck had it, the stage came along just then.

So that all three rode down into the town on it. It was an agreeable termination of the past few hours' adventures.

When they rolled into Red Cliff Old King Brady went at once to the hotel and engaged rooms for Helen.

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Then he wrote a letter to Colonel May in New York and posted it, informing him of the success of the undertaking and that his daughter was safe.

When the coach went out that day Helen was a passenger.

Twenty-five armed men employed by Old King Brady rode alongside as an escort.

The result was that Helen reached the frontier safely, and thence made her way to New York.

There she was joyfully received by her father.

But the Bradys remained in Red Cliff.

Their work was not yet done.

That very day they started out once more on the trail.

The vigilantes under Brown had not yet been heard from.

It was impossible to say whether they had overtaken the outlaws or not.

The detectives made the journey back into the hills and found their horses safe where they had left them.

Then they went back up to the deserted stronghold.

If Vail and his men had returned, they certainly had not stayed there.

No trace of them was found.

The savages had also disappeared.

They visited the spot where Milo's hut had been. There was nothing left but a heap of ashes.

Nothing was to be seen or found of the hermit.

But that he in a measure avenged the destruction of his home was made plain by the finding of two dead savages in the brush near.

No sign of Milo, however, was to be found.

His fate was unknown.

But where was Brown and the vigilantes?

This was the question.

What had become of them?

The detectives rode to the northward and back into the open country beyond, but nothing was seen of them or of the outlaws.

After a fruitless quest, the detectives again struck the Red Cliff trail and rode down into that little town.

What was their surprise to find that Brown and his men were there.

The vigilantes had returned, and empty-handed at that.

Old King Brady met Brown, who had a thrilling story to tell.

The vigilantes ran across Vail's men on the Red Cliff trail.

A lively skirmish followed, but the outlaws retreated. Brown deployed his men to cut them off, but failed.

They vanished in some mysterious way, and no trace could be found of them afterward.

After a fruitless quest, Brown brought his men back to Red Cliff.

“And you?” asked the vigilante leader. “What success did you have?”

“The girl is rescued and on her way home all safe,” replied Old King Brady.

Brown was astounded.

“Do you mean it?” he gasped.

“Every word of it.”

“Wonderful! You have done well. But what is your purpose now?”

“To rid the West of Vail, or Jack Mosely, the outlaw.”

“Good! I shall assist you all I can. What is our best move?”

“We will have to study on that,” replied Old King Brady. “I don’t believe Vail will quit this part of the country yet.”

“Nor I.”

“We will keep low and await developments. He will show his hand again in a new venture before long. Then we will get on his track.”

“So his wife escaped you?”

“She did. I tell you she is one of the keenest of women.”

“I believe you.”

Old King Brady’s plan was adopted.

The vigilantes quietly dispersed, as if their work was all over.

The detectives dropped out of sight.

Two genteel looking sports, who seemed to be enjoying life, sat evenings on the piazza of the hotel.

In the daytime not much was seen of them.

They seemed to keep out of the way and made little talk with any one.

One day Red Cliff had a celebration. It was the glorious Fourth and the miners proceeded to do things up in style.

The squeaky band played, horses were raced on the street, and a general good time was in order.

Among the horses raced was one jet black in color, and which was ridden by a tall, commanding man with a full beard.

The detectives studied this man.

Then they made an astounding discovery. The full beard was false.

This excited their curiosity.

Who was this disguised man?

Was he a detective?

After the race was finished he was seen to enter the hotel. The detectives were determined to shadow him.

So they followed him into the barroom. A number of rough men were here seated, playing cards.

The man with the beard watched them for a while. Then he accepted an invitation to drop into a vacant chair.

The game quickly became a warm contest.

The bearded stranger seemed to have plenty of money and made high stakes.

At first he lost and the skilled card sharps against him felt jubilant. They fancied that they had an easy victim to fleece.

But presently the stranger won a hand.

Then he doubled the stakes and won again. A third time he won, and was now ahead of the game.

He seemed to play with careless ease, and soon had his opponents at his mercy. After a while one of them dropped out of the game.

A short while later another did the same. Two vacant seats were left.

Old King Brady signalled to the younger detective.

Then both sat down at the table. The stranger gave them a keen, quick glance.

He appeared to be satisfied, however, and dealt each a hand.

The game progressed.

At first the stakes were small.

Then Old King Brady drew a remarkable hand. It was what is called a royal flush, and never before in his life had he held so high a hand.

For a moment the old detective stared at the cards.

CHAPTER XII.

A PROPOSED LYNCHING.

It was not the purpose of the detectives to play the game for the sake of winning money.

They were searching for a clew to the identity of the bearded stranger.

But Old King Brady was human the same as other men, and the impulse was upon him to back his hand.

The stranger seemed disposed to do the same.

Old King Brady made the first wager and it was a moderate one.

This was met by the stranger, who went ten dollars better. The other players dropped out.

Old King Brady pretended to hesitate, then advanced the stakes ten dollars more.

Thus they jumped up ten dollars at a time. The stranger saw that Old King Brady was not to be driven out.

He was puzzled.

He could not tell in any way whether the detective was bluffing or had really a good hand.

The stakes now aggregated quite a respectable sum, when

suddenly the stranger played his biggest bluff.

He threw a roll of bills on the table.

“One hundred better,” he cried.

Unhesitatingly Old King Brady covered the stake, and said quietly:

“One hundred better yet.”

“The deuce!” scowled the stranger. “Have you a royal flush?”

“If you wish to pay the price I will show you my hand,” said Old King Brady coolly.

“Well, I will double your advance.”

“I do the same.”

More than one thousand dollars now lay on the table. The stranger was plainly averse to losing this.

And yet it seemed as if there was no other way but to call or back out entirely. With a scowl and a muttered curse he decided to call.

So he covered the advance and said:

“I call your hand.”

The cards were laid down.

Old King Brady displayed his royal flush. The stranger had four

fives.

His face turned white and then ashen hued.

“A flush!” he gritted. “How did you get that hand? It is foul play.”

“Easy,” said Old King Brady coolly. “You dealt me the cards.”

But the stranger laid a revolver on the table.

“I demand that an investigation be made,” he said. “I believe that you have played a fraudulent game.”

Old King Brady raised the brim of his slouch hat.

The contingency was wholly to his liking. He believed now that he could evolve some important facts from it.

“Dare you accuse me of cheating?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, I do!” retorted the stranger.

“Can you prove it?”

“Whether I do or not, you obtained that hand by fraud.”

“Shame!” cried one of the bystanders. “Never squeal when you’re beat. Take defeat like a man.”

“Aye that’s right!” cried the others.

The stranger saw that popular opinion was against him. It, however, only made him the more furious. His face was purple

with rage.

He shook his fist at Old King Brady.

“You are a cheat and a fraud!” he hissed. “I demand my money back!”

The old detective leaned over the table.

“One moment!” he said blandly. “If I am a cheat, what are you?”

“I am an honest man!”

“Dare you say that?”

“I can prove it!”

“How?”

“I have friends in the town who will vouch for me. If you do not give me back that money I will make this place too hot for you.”

“One moment,” said Old King Brady again. “You claim to be an honest man. I am going to prove that you are not.”

“Ah, how, I ask you?”

“Honest men do not wear false beards.”

The stranger started as if stung.

A sickly hue came over his face and he receded slowly, with the manner of a fox which seeks escape from its corner.

“Your pretence is of no avail,” he said. “But I see that I am in a place where I shall get no fair show. So I am obliged to lose.”

But Old King Brady vaulted over the table.

“Halt!” he said sternly. “You must prove your identity before I leave this place.”

“What? Who are you?”

“An officer of the law.”

For a moment a stillness was upon the place. Even the gamblers and habitués were startled by this statement.

The bearded stranger stood with feigned coolness and defiance.

“I don’t care who you are!” he shouted. “You’ve no business with me!”

“You are wrong. My business is all with you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Take off that beard and I will tell you,” said Old King Brady.

The stranger started for the door precipitately, but Young King Brady stood in his path.

As the unknown halted the young detective made a grasp at the beard. Off it came instantly.

And then a genuine sensation was created.

Not a man in the room failed to recognize him.

He was Vail the road-agent.

A hoarse roar went through the room.

Pistols leaped from belts and covered the outlaw chief. He was cornered. Escape was impossible.

“Hands up!”

Vail obeyed. In an instant he was disarmed and made a prisoner. In less time than it takes to tell it the report spread like wildfire.

The whole town flocked to the spot.

There was but one impulse extant at that moment. Only one expression was on the lips of all:

“Lynch him!”

Now this was against Old King Brady’s desires.

Brown and the vigilantes came. The old detective protested.

“It’s of no use, Brady,” said the vigilante captain. “I don’t think we can handle the mob. They want his life, and they will have it.”

“But he’s my man,” protested the detective. “I want him in the East. He belongs to me.”

The vigilante captain shook his head.

“I am sorry,” he said, “but I am powerless.”

The crowd swelled every moment. It was as well to try and stem the tides of the ocean.

In vain the Bradys pleaded and begged for their man.

The mob was obdurate.

“Hang him!”

“String him up!”

“No mercy to the outlaw!”

These were the cries which were heard. It was out of the question to do anything to prevent the tragedy.

The detectives were swept along with the crowd, and abandoned all efforts to save Vail.

Down the village street they carried the object of their vengeance.

Vail was deadly pale, but defiant.

To his credit it might be said that he was going to his fate like a man.

There were no trees or any object suitable for a gibbet in the centre of the town.

It was necessary to carry the prisoner to the mountain slope just

outside the little settlement.

Here preparations were quickly made. Then Bill Hawkes, the giant sheriff, mounted a boulder and addressed the crowd:

“Feller citizens!” he shouted, “in accordance with the law of this county we air about to execute the sentence of Judge Lynch upon this man.

“Naow, in some towns they don’t give ther prisoner time ter think. But it’s lucky fer him that he’s among good, square men. An’ it’s our rule to give a chance for a few remarks and a prayer.

“Then, as high sheriff of this county, I shall proceed to place this noose about ther cuss’s neck an’ hang him higher than Haman. That’s all!”

Wild cheers followed this pertinent bit of oratory.

Then Vail, white as chalk, faced the crowd.

Among those whom he looked upon were many who had suffered severely at his hands.

There were fathers who had lost sons and vice versa. Men who had seen dear friends slaughtered by the outlaw band.

It was not strange therefore that he looked only into merciless countenances.

“I can only say,” he said with rigid nerve, “that there are women in my camp who will suffer death if you take my life. I only ask

a fair chance. Let me off, and I will restore all my prisoners to you, and quit Wyoming forever.”

But a tumult of scorn and jeering hatred arose.

“Hang him!”

“Pull him up!”

“He is a cheat!”

Brown, the captain of the vigilantes, now interposed.

He pleaded for the villain’s life on the plea of justice.

Detectives from New York wanted to take him East to expiate the awful crime of murder there.

Brown pleaded well.

But he might as well have talked to a stone post. Again the yell went up:

“Hang him!”

There was no further use to try and save the wretch. Brown fell back and joined the detectives.

“I’m sorry!” he said. “It was unfortunate that you captured him in the crowd. If you could have got him when he was alone it would have been all right.”

“He deserves hanging all right enough,” said Old King Brady.

“But if we could take him East it would clear up that Jacobs mystery.”

“Too bad!” said Brown.

“Say yer prayers!” cried Hawkes, the sheriff.

Vail shook his head defiantly. At that moment a strange thing happened.

A whistle pealed from his lips.

Then the crowd was rent as with a powerful hand. Every man seemed suddenly struggling with his neighbor.

A cry arose:

“Vail! Vail! Vail!”

A pistol shot rang out, and Hawkes the sheriff dropped. The Bradys were jammed in the mob immovably, and Brown the same.

A mob of yelling, struggling men surged about the prisoner.

For a moment none understood the true meaning of this.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BIT OF TREACHERY.

It had the outward semblance of an attempt upon the part of a certain faction to get at Vail and wreak their personal spite upon him.

And they were in a fair way to succeed.

Excited hands were seen to be laid upon him, and he was hustled through the crowd. Then a startling turn in affairs was witnessed.

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Suddenly it was seen that Vail's bonds had been cut.

He was free.

A horse was near him, and the next moment he was on its back. A lane was made, and he dashed madly through it.

A few scattering shots followed him, but in a flash the angle of the mountain wall hid him from view.

He had escaped.

Then and then only was the whole matter explained.

In the mob which had hustled him to the mountain side were members of his own gang of road-riders.

They had awaited the signal from him to make a concerted

action for his rescue.

And they had succeeded.

So cleverly disguised were they in the garb of miners that no man could look in his neighbor's face and declare that he was one of them.

The scene which ensued baffles description.

Recriminations and hot words followed, together with blows and shots, men tumbled right and left as the result of ill-judged bullets.

It began to look as if the mob would literally exterminate itself.

But there were those in the mob who were not idle.

Of course none of the outlaws ventured to separate from the mob.

This would at once have made of them a sure mark.

But Brown called together as many of his vigilantes as he could, and started in pursuit.

The Bradys were with him.

But it was useless.

They might as well have tried to catch a wild hawk as the wily outlaw, once he was at large.

The chase was futile.

Later in the day they returned to Red Cliff.

They found the town in a state of literal anarchy and riot.

Every man suspected his neighbor of being an outlaw, and encounters were of momentary occurrence.

The town seemed likely to become a literal cemetery before long if such a state of affairs continued.

But this could not be.

The return of the vigilantes had the effect of quieting things down.

The Bradys were disconcerted.

Of all the cases they had tried to solve this seemed the hardest.

It seemed now a gigantic feat to think of effecting the capture of their bird.

Of course he would be more wily than ever. There was even a chance that he might change his base.

This would seem like beginning the case all over again with the chances all against them.

An ordinary man might have abandoned the case.

But not Old King Brady.

He was imperturbable.

“Rather tough, isn’t it?” said Young King Brady dubiously. “It looks bad!”

“To the contrary, my lad, nothing could be better, except having the bird right in our hands.”

Old King Brady seemed to have completely changed front. Harry was much surprised.

“I don’t see how it could be worse,” he said.

“I do. If they had hung him,” replied the old detective.

“He deserved it!”

“No doubt, but the mystery of the Jacobs murder would have been forever sealed with his death.”

“Ah! I see the point!”

“With him alive there is a chance to probe it. And that, my boy, we must do.”

“We will leave nothing undone.”

“That is the talk! We have now the chance offered us again to capture him, and take him back to New York.”

“If we can.”

“Ah, but we will!”

“I hope so!”

“It may take time.”

“I’ll wager it will!”

“But we will succeed.”

Young King Brady was not so confident. But he kept his own counsel.

The detectives kept dark.

They were seldom seen in the streets of Red Cliff, where they knew half the denizens were in league secretly with the outlaws.

By day they haunted the mountain trails and recesses.

By night they returned to Red Cliff and waited and watched.

It would undoubtedly be a good while before their bird would return to the town again.

But that he would appear there again was as great a certainty as the rising of the sun.

Patience is a mighty attribute.

None were better gifted with this than the two Brady detectives.

They were content to wait and wait, and ever keep watch.

And this method of procedure bore fruit.

One evening the Eastern stage came bowling into Red Cliff four hours late.

The driver's box was covered with blood, the coach was shattered with bullets, and a new man held the reins.

He was a swarthy, rather ill-favored chap, with stubby beard. Two of the horses, one leader and a pole horse, were gone.

The other leader had been put on the pole, thus making a four-in-hand.

Thus equipped, Dick Dugan, as the fellow gave his name, drove the coach into Red Cliff.

The passengers, four in number, three men and a woman, were in a sad state of fright.

The driver's story was brief.

Coming through Deep Water Pass outlaws had appeared on the scene. They held up the coach.

The driver, who had tried to keep on, had been shot on his seat, and his body was now reposing in a mountain grave.

After robbing the party, Vail, for it was he, had made off.

This was the substance of the driver's story.

It was not a new one.

It had been told in the same manner many times before.

But the denizens of Red Cliff were aroused.

Something must be done.

The road-riders were an intolerable nuisance, and a fearful damage to the town.

“It’s no use talking,” said Burton Sharp, the land agent and real estate man, “the price of Red Cliff lots is dropping every day, and it’s all the fault of the road agents.”

“New settlers are afraid to come here, and I predict that Red Cliff will soon be once more a howling wilderness unless those chaps are taken care of.”

An indignation meeting was held.

Everybody expressed their views on the matter. All sorts of plans were discussed pro and con.

But none were adopted.

It was impossible to tell how many of Vail’s adherents were in the crowd.

Truly matters were getting desperate. The people were stirred up.

But the affair was of great assistance to the Bradys.

They were now satisfied that their bird was still in the hills. This was a matter for congratulation.

Knowing this for a certainty they entered upon the search with more of zest than ever before.

Dick Dugan, the fellow who had driven the coach in, was catechized very closely.

He told the story in a straightforward manner, and without flourish or embellishment.

It was very plain that he had acted with great courage and spirit. He was greatly commended.

Old King Brady asked him very particularly where the spot was that the robbery was committed, and Dugan said:

“Hang me, but I’ll take ye up there any time, gents. We might hev to be a bit shady an’ keerful!”

“That is certainly very kind, Dugan,” said Old King Brady. “We will pay you well for the trouble.”

“Don’t want no pay,” replied Dugan. “’Tain’t worth it.”

So it was arranged that the next day Dugan would go with the detectives to the mountain pass.

Horses were procured, and the three men set out.

Dugan rode in advance.

He seemed to be a lively fellow, and his wit was something remarkable. Again and again he told the story of the hold-up.

After a long ride the trio finally reached the pass.

Dugan rode leisurely along, and suddenly pulled up his horse.

He looked up at the canyon walls above and then up and down the trail.

Then he whistled shrilly.

In an instant Old King Brady turned in his saddle.

“What are you doing?” he asked sharply.

But the driver’s face was open and frank.

“Eh?” he exclaimed. “I was tryin’ to show ye the kind of a whistle those fellers had fer a signal!”

“Well, don’t repeat it,” said Old King Brady. “Some of them might be in hearing.”

“All right,” replied the fellow with a sullen shrug of the shoulders. “Is thet all you want of me?”

“Where are you going?”

“Back to Red Cliff.”

“Are you not going to remain with us?” asked Young King Brady.

“I don’t see any use. You know all about the hold-up now.”

“We would be glad to have you stay.”

“Naw, I reckon I’ll go. So long! I hope ye’ll find what ye want.”

Dugan wheeled his horse. But at that moment the jaws of the trap closed.

The Bradys were startled to see armed men in the canyon below them. It did not require a moment to assure them that the men were outlaws.

Instinctively both looked in the other direction.

The pass was jammed with the villains. Only one thing could be seen.

They had been led into a trap.

Dugan was an impostor.

His trip down with the coach was all a clever trick to inveigle the Bradys into a hot place.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONDEMNED TO AN AWFUL DEATH.

The detectives could hardly fail to see this.

They were for a moment stunned with the force of the shock.

That they should be outwitted in such a manner was humiliating. They glared at Dugan.

But the fellow only grinned in a demoniac sort of way. Then he cried tantalizingly:

“Ha, ha! A sharp pair of detectives you are. You did not fathom my disguise this time, did you?”

With which he pulled off the close-fitting red wig and stubby beard and stood revealed.

It was Vail!

The detectives were stunned.

They wondered now why they had not seen through the game before.

It was easy now to see that the outlaw chief had easily carried his ends by becoming a passenger on the coach, and then, after the killing of the driver, taking the coach down into Red Cliff himself.

This had effectually disarmed suspicion. There was no doubt of this.

The armed outlaws were rapidly closing from above and below.

There was no avenue of escape.

The Bradys saw this.

The jig was up.

Resistance would be folly, and necessitate only the useless shedding of blood.

So Old King Brady, in his methodical way, dismounted from his horse and laid down his rifle.

The detectives allowed the outlaws to close in about them and make them prisoners.

It was a dismal outlook.

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But they did not despair.

They knew that at any moment fate might play the game right back into their hands.

In any event, they could not be more than massacred. And neither was as yet afraid of death.

Vail was brutally ugly.

“Bind ’em!” he hissed. “Drag ’em up to the stronghold. We’ll

have some fun with 'em sometime.”

Several of the outlaws led Old King Brady away down the pass. Young King Brady soon followed.

Between their captors the detectives were thus marched away into the fastnesses of the hills.

This time they were not blindfolded. One of the outlaws was about to do this, when Vail said harshly:

“There’s no need of that. They’ll never return to tell the tale.”

Just the same the Bradys did not lose their self-possession, or fail to take advantage of every detail.

For a long ways they were led through the hills.

Through deep defiles, across shady glens, and over rough, boulder-strewn ledges they went.

At last they came to a section of the mountain wall which to outward appearance was blank.

A thousand feet above the jagged peaks and turrets arose to the clouds.

But the outlaws came to a halt here. Vail blew a whistle.

Against the mountain side there rested a flat slab of rock.

This was fully twelve feet high and four feet broad. It suddenly moved as if on hinges, and a passage through the rock was

revealed.

Into this the outlaws rode, with their prisoners in advance.

As they passed through this narrow portal Vail leaned forward and hissed:

“You may see what your chances are. This is the only outlet to our camp.”

It was not strange that the Bradys felt a sense of despair.

The narrow passage which they knew led to death suggested the lines of the poet:

“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.”

After passing through the rock for some distance they emerged into a green-clad circle. On all sides arose steep walls of ledge.

It was a natural shaft or pocket in the hills.

A more wonderful hiding place could hardly be found or imagined.

So far as defense was concerned one man could hold the passage against a hundred.

The place was filled with outlaws.

They were lounging about on the greensward and under the cover of a large tent.

The odor of cooking meat was in the air.

As the prisoners were led into the place loud cheers went up, and the gang thronged about them.

Jeers, hisses and taunts were hurled at the Bradys.

They tried to disregard them, but this was difficult. At length, however, they were bound and left to themselves in the big tent.

“Hard luck, Harry,” said Old King Brady dismally. “Queer we did not probe that fellow Dugan.”

“He fooled us completely.”

“It was all prearranged.”

“Surely!”

“Well, it looks as if our work was forever done!”

“We will not give up yet.”

“By no means! If only Brown knew we were here.”

“They may wonder at our absence and institute a search.”

“Yes, but I fear it will be too late then.”

Time passed.

The day was waning.

Darkness was at hand.

It was at this juncture that Vail came sauntering up to the spot. He smoked a Spanish cheroot.

“Well, my good friends,” he said gratingly, “I hope you are willing to acknowledge by this time that Vail is a hard man to beat.”

“Particularly when he has luck on his side,” said Old King Brady.

“Why not give me credit for a clever bit of strategy.”

“Well, I will say that you fooled us completely.”

“Ha, ha! You do well to admit that.”

“What are you going to do with us?”

A cruel smile followed. The villain puffed at his cheroot.

“Well,” he said finally, “I have not exactly decided. Some of our boys like to play with their lariats. Perhaps I will give you over to them for a ride across the prairie at the heels of a mustang.”

The horror of this declaration made the detectives shiver.

But they did not outwardly betray fear.

The villain regarded them in his sinister way, and said:

“However, you will be safe for to-night, and this will give you time to think it all over. I wish you pleasant dreams. Au revoir!”

With this he was gone.

The detectives were silent for a while. Then Old King Brady whispered:

“Is there no way we can escape, Harry?”

“I see no chance.”

“I think I can feel my bonds loosen a bit.”

“Ah, they are rawhide, and I could never gnaw them apart in one night. They knew better than to bind us with ropes.”

“Very true!”

Hours passed.

The outlaws had spent much of the evening in drinking and card playing. It was a sickening carousal.

But now the notes of a whistle went through the camp, and all grew still.

Silently they turned into their blankets and began to fall asleep. It was the order of the chief.

Soon the camp was silent and dark. Sentries paced at the outlet; but otherwise none of the outlaws were stirring.

The detectives lay helpless and inactive. All manner of plans for escape passed through their minds.

But none seemed feasible.

Daylight came at last.

Just as the darkness disappeared there was a stir in the camp. Several of the outlaws came into the tent.

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They loosened the thongs about the prisoners' ankles and bade them get upon their feet.

The detectives complied, and they were led out of the tent.

Outside several others awaited them, and Vail himself, with a demoniac smile, greeted them.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said, “this is the day you pay the penalty of interfering with Captain Vail. I have decided what your fate shall be, and I think it will be a warning to others which they will not soon forget.”

“Very well,” said Old King Brady nonchalantly. “We are ready.”

“You take it calmly.”

“Why not?”

“Are you not afraid to die?”

“Death comes to all!”

“Not such death as awaits you.”

But the detectives betrayed no alarm.

“We are wasting time,” said Old King Brady. “What terrible fate have you prepared for us?”

The villain pointed to the mountain peaks above.

“Do you see those birds of prey hovering there?” he said.

A score of hideous great vultures soared high over the peaks.

“Well,” continued the outlaw, “you are to become food for them. We shall bind you to the highest of those spurs of rock. There you will be helpless, so that the vultures may descend and peck out your eyes and eat you alive.”

A horrid laugh went up from the outlaws who stood near. The detectives were faint with horror.

“You are a devil!” gritted Old King Brady. “But your time is coming.”

“Not yet. I shall at least have wreaked my vengeance upon you.”

With this Vail gave orders to his men to fall in.

The detectives were led away through the entrance to the mountain pocket and out upon the trail.

From ledge to ledge the party clambered. It was a long ways to the peaks in question.

But in due course they were reached. Very quickly the rest was done there.

The detectives were thrown upon their backs and bound to the jagged spurs of rock.

With faces upturned to the blistering rays of the sun, they were bound immovably.

Then the outlaws departed.

Back down the mountain they went.

And now the awful sequel began to unfold itself.

The hideous black vultures, those devilish birds of prey hovering above, came down nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER XV.

VILLAINY ITS OWN REWARD.

The grisly birds of evil omen now seemed to realize that the two human beings, whom under ordinary circumstances they would have feared, were helpless.

They lowered themselves upon their broad pinions nearer yet.

Their hideous beaks and reeking claws were just overhead.

In spite of their manhood the two detectives groaned aloud.

It was not at the prospect of death, but the filthy manner in which it was to be visited upon them.

Downward still, in narrowing circles, swept the vultures.

Now one of them, with a savage hiss, made a dart downward and his pinion swept Old King Brady's face.

Several lighted on peaks about.

Their caution was fast disappearing.

The time was rapidly nearing when the dreadful orgy must begin.

Again and again the dread birds flapped their pinions in the faces of the helpless men.

But suddenly there came a change.

It was not intended that the detectives should die in so dreadful a manner.

A strange, eerie cry was heard.

The vultures flapped their wings and rose a trifle.

Those on the peaks ascended into the air. A distant shot sounded, and one of them tumbled dead onto the ledge.

“Heaven be praised! Rescue has come, Harry!” cried Old King Brady in joyful tones.

“The vigilantes!” cried Young King Brady.

“No!”

Old King Brady had been enabled to turn his head so as to see down over the ledges.

What he beheld startled him.

A man was running rapidly over them and toward the prisoners. One glance was sufficient.

Old King Brady recognized him.

It was Milo the Hermit.

Nearer the hermit drew every moment. Presently he crept pantingly up to the spot.

“Praise heaven!” he cried. “I came just in the nick of time.”

“That you did!” cried Old King Brady. “We certainly owe our lives to you now.”

In an instant Milo cut their bonds. They were free.

But so cramped were the detectives that it was some moments before they could make use of their limbs.

Then Milo explained matters.

“I was in the gorge in hiding when you were betrayed and captured by Vail and his men,” he declared.

“I at once followed them to the spot where they entered their den. Then I hastened with all speed to Red Cliff and notified Brown, captain of the vigilantes.

“While he was gathering his men I returned, and arrived just at break of day. I saw you brought up here, and determined to save you.”

“But your action must have been seen,” declared Old King Brady. “We had better get out of the way.”

“Hark! What is that?”

A distant, startling sound came up the mountain.

It was the fusillade of rifle shots.

This could mean but one thing.

The vigilantes had arrived.

The effect of this upon the detectives can hardly be described.

Instantly they started down the mountain.

“We must join them,” cried Old King Brady. “Every man is needed, now!”

The detectives had no weapons.

But as they reached the defile below they acquired them. Numbers of dead outlaws lay scattered about.

Their rifles and cartridge belts were with them. The Bradys thus armed themselves.

With Milo the Hermit they now made for the scene of strife.

This was at the entrance to the den of the outlaws.

Luckily the vigilantes had arrived in time to cut Vail and his men off. They were literally surrounded, and while making a desperate stand, it was plain that they must be captured.

The Bradys plunged into the fray, and were seen by Brown.

He shouted to them joyfully. Just then a cry went up.

“All over! A surrender!”

The outlaws saw the futility of further resistance.

So, after half their number had been shot, they laid down their arms.

They were quickly made prisoners, and bound securely.

Captain Vail, Jeff Black and Martin Mills, the ringleaders of the gang, were in limbo.

Those in the mountain pocket, finding that their leaders had been captured, gave up the strife.

They came out and delivered themselves up.

Then the vigilantes proceeded to take their prisoners down to Red Cliff.

A long procession they formed.

Each outlaw was bound to his horse, and on either side an armed vigilante rode.

Thus they made their way down through the mountain defiles.

On the way they passed many Indians and miners who came out on the trail, attracted by the unusual spectacle.

Vail acknowledged himself as identical with Mosely the murderer, as Old King Brady questioned him.

“It’s all up!” he said desperately. “I made a mistake in sticking out here. I’d ought to hev gone somewhars else.”

Somewhat singularly no trace of Beatrice Vail was found.

But Mosely explained this.

He declared that his wife had departed for the East again, where he had hoped to join her.

Soon they entered a little defile from which Red Cliff could be seen.

Some Indians stood spell-bound beside the trail.

It was a great sensation to them that the dreaded band of outlaws had at last been captured.

Mosely, the leader of the desperados, rode beside Old King Brady.

He and his companions were securely bound, and escape seemed impossible.

Down into Red Cliff they rode.

They were received with tremendous excitement.

The rough miners thronged about the party like a mass of angry hornets. It was not their way to delay summary vengeance.

But Brown was ready for them this time.

He formed a hollow square with his men, and shouted:

“You’ve got to come to reason. I and my men are going to have a fair show. We’re goin’ to see justice done, and you’ll see it too; but the prisoners belong to us!”

This curbed the crowd.

When they understood that it was intended to lynch all of the ringleaders but one they were appeased.

Preparations were made for the execution of border justice.

A temporary gallows was erected in the street of the town.

Jeff Black, Martin Mills and a dozen others were marshaled beside this, each to await his turn.

The other outlaws were given a hint to be seen no more in the place, and departed hastily.

The chief of all, Mosely, was delivered to the detectives, the two Bradys, as their part of the capture.

The ringleaders of the outlaw gang were lynched, and the crowd was satisfied.

The stage the next morning took the Bradys and their prisoner, securely handcuffed, out of Red Cliff.

A day later they reached a railroad, and thence at once embarked for the East.

In due time New York was reached, and thus Captain Vail, the chief of the outlaws, was in a brief space transferred from his mountain retreat to the security of the Tombs, where he was entered as Jack Mosely.

A few days later a hearing was given him.

He broke down completely, and confessed to the Jacobs murder.

The day for his trial was named. No defence was made, and he received a death sentence.

Thus the Bradys won their case out West, but it was one of the hardest they had ever attempted.

They never forgot that experience on the mountain peak, when Milo the Hermit saved them from the clutches of the vultures.

And one day, while Old King Brady was working in the slums of New York on a case of crime, he met with a surprising experience.

Out of a dark alley glided the gaunt, spectre-like figure of a woman.

Want and misery and degradation were stamped in every line of her face.

She went up to the old detective and touched his arm.

“Do you see me?” she hissed. “Am I not an object of pity and contempt? Curse you! It was you brought me to this.”

Old King Brady was astonished.

“My good woman,” he said, “I never saw you before.”

“Ah, you do not know me?”

“I do not.”

“It is no wonder.”

“Who are you?”

“I am the woman whom you wronged. You tore my dear husband from me, and sent him to the gallows. My curse is upon you for that. Now do you know me? I am Beatrice Vail!”

“What!” exclaimed the old detective. “The outlaw’s wife?”

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“Yes, once the outlaw’s wife.”

“Woman, what has brought you down to such a fate? You were always too keen and shrewd.”

“Grief and hate and a thirst for revenge!” cried the woman, rushing toward the detective with a dagger in her hand.

It was certain that she might have ended Old King Brady’s career then and there had he not clutched her wrist and overpowered her. She was taken to headquarters, and found to be violently insane.

She was committed to a public institution and cared for.

There she was visited by Helen May, who ministered to her sufferings with charitable spirit.

Thus ended the case out West. But the Bradys had little time to dwell upon its thrilling memories when new and startling work was cut out for them, which we may tell about in a future story.

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