

# WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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Price 5 Cents.

## YOUNG WILD WEST'S STEADY HAND; OR, THE SHOT THAT MADE A MILLION.

*By AN OLD SCOUT*



"Save me!" cried the girl. "I will, miss!" replied Wild, bringing his rifle to his shoulder. "I'll save you, and I'll surprise that gang, too!" As he pressed the trigger a deafening explosion rang out right before the approaching horsemen.



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# WILD WEST WEEKLY

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## Young Wild West's Steady Hand

OR,

### The Shot That Made a Million.

By **AN OLD SCOUT.**

#### CHAPTER I.

##### YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE GIANT.

A few years ago when Helena, Montana, was one of the liveliest and most progressive cities in the Wild West, a rather exciting, not to say humorous, scene occurred in the principal hotel of the place.

It was a cool spring morning and the frequenters of the bar of the hostelry were hugging the stove and waiting for an "angel," as they dubbed anyone who came in and invited them to refresh themselves at his expense, to put in appearance, when the door suddenly flew open with such force that it seemed endangered of dropping from the hinges and a veritable giant of a man swaggered in.

The newcomer was certainly one to attract attention, for he was fully six feet six inches tall and must have weighed in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty pounds.

He was built in proportion, too, and, instead of having a good-natured look, as most big men have, his expression was one of extreme ugliness, overbearing and vicious.

Dressed in the usual rough fashion of a miner, he certainly was not one to impress the casual observer as a man who did not work for a living; yet there was something about him that told that he cared more for bullying his fellow-beings and fighting than he did for work.

He had just the look of one who felt that he was superior to the ordinary run of men, and that he could do about as he pleased with them.

Armed in the regular style of the men of the Wild West,

he certainly did look as though he might be able to "eat up" half a dozen if he once started in.

That he was a total stranger to the place was evident, for the dozen men in the room looked at him curiously, not to say apprehensively as he strode up to the bar and brought his big fist down with a bang that made the glasses rattle.

"Put out some firewater!" he roared. "I'm Big Bat, from Virginia City, an' I always drink a glass of whisky 'cordin' to my size! Step up, you loafin' catamounts, an' drink with me!"

As he gave the invitation he jerked a big six-shooter from the holster that was attached to his belt and fired a shot at the stovepipe directly over the heads of the men gathered about the stove.

This brought them to their feet pretty quickly, and with a rush they made for the bar.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the big man. "I reckon I fetched yer, didn't I? When I invites anyone to drink firewater with me I makes 'em come up putty quick. That's my way!"

The man behind the counter hustled about to get the glasses on the bar, and when he had done so he set a bottle out that was about two-thirds full of liquor.

"That won't do!" thundered the giant, and then he deliberately knocked the bottle on the floor, smashing it to pieces and letting the contents run away. "When I drinks I always wants a full bottle before me."

"All right," retorted the man behind the counter. "I reckon you kin have jest what you want in this house if you've got ther dust to pay fur it."

"Don't you worry about that part of it, you bald-headed monkey! I've got ther money!" and he produced half a dozen gold coins from his pocket and laid them on the bar with a bang.

A smile passed around among the crowd, and some of them laughed outright.

The man behind the counter, who was the proprietor himself, was bald-headed, and they probably thought it would be a good idea to laugh.

The proprietor did not like to be twitted of his baldness, and every loungee there knew it.

But he said nothing just now and got out a demijohn and produced a corkscrew to draw the cork.

"What are you doin'?" demanded Big Bat, as he called himself.

"I'm goin' ter pull ther cork, so's I kin fill a bottle fur yer," was the reply.

"Set ther jimmyjohn on ther bar."

"What fur?"

"Never mind what fur!" and the big man looked as though he was going to eat him.

The command was obeyed.

"Now, look out!" cried the big man, stepping back a couple of paces and drawing his revolver.

Crack!

The neck of the demijohn was shot off as clean as a whistle.

"Now you kin go ahead an' fill your bottle. Jest git a lively move on you, too!"

The proprietor hastened to do so, and when he had filled a bottle until it was running over, he placed it in front of the big fellow.

"That's ther way to do it!" and the glass was filled to the brim. "Now, you lazy galoots, help yourselves!"

They had all gulped down the fiery stuff when the door opened and two newcomers stepped in.

They wore fancy hunting-suits of buckskin and looked wonderfully neat for persons that followed a wild life on the border.

One was scarcely more than a boy with flowing chestnut hair and a handsome face and a form that was like that of an Apollo.

The other was a man probably ten years his senior, tall and straight as an arrow, with long, dark hair and a big mustache of the same hue.

The door had scarcely closed behind them when Big Bat turned and cast a critical look at them.

"Screechin' catamounts!" he cried. "What has we here? Step up, dandies, an' have some firewater! Lively, now, or I'll shoot ther buttons off your coats!"

An expression of amusement crept over the face of the younger of the two new arrivals as he took a look at the giant, starting at the top of his head and going down to his feet.

"I thank you for your invitation," he replied, "but I never drink firewater, as you call it. If you want me to have something with you I will take a cigar."

"What!" roared the big man. "You'll take a see-gar, will you? Not much you won't! You'll jest take plain, every-day whisky, that's what you'll take. I'm Big Bat, from Virginia City, an' when I treats anybody they takes what I wants 'em to take, an' not what they feel like takin'!"

"I am sorry," was the retort. "But I must refuse to drink with you."

"Then you can't stay in here! I'll throw you out so quick that your head will swim!"

He did not wait to do any dilly-dallying, but at once started to put his threat into execution.

We say started, for he did not finish.

As he sprang forward and made a grab for the handsome young fellow his paw-like hands simply grasped the empty atmosphere.

The boy had stepped nimbly aside and now stood on the defensive.

A murmur of astonishment went up from the dozen men at the bar and just the vestige of a smile of satisfaction appeared at the corners of the proprietor's mouth.

The tall man with the dark mustache, who was plainly the companion of the boy, stepped back against the wall and folded his arms so his fingers rested on the butts of the revolvers that protruded from the holsters that were on either side of his belt.

"I reckon there ain't goin' to be no throwin' out done!" he remarked, smiling grimly at the crowd. "Jest watch, now!"

The big, lumbering fellow who had made a miss of it when he tried to catch the handsome young fellow in the hunting-suit, now turned and made another rush.

"You've got to be chucked out!" he yelled in a voice of anger. "You've got to be chucked out, an' when you land your neck's goin' to be broke, or I ain't Big Bat from Virginia City!"

He made another dive for the boy, and then something happened that almost took away the breath of the lookers-on.

The agile young fellow stepped back out of the way and then planted a blow in the pit of the giant's stomach that doubled him up like a jack-knife and set him to gasping for his breath.

"Now, you behave yourself, you big bluffer, or you'll get something you don't want!"

As the boy said this he stepped back and waited to see what Big Bat would do when he recovered.

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted the distressed man. "I'll—I'll——"

"You will behave yourself or else take a thrashing from a boy!" interrupted the young athlete. "I generally mind my own business, no matter where I go, and I never like to be insulted or imposed upon. You are a very big man—strong enough to fell an ox. I should think—but I am no more afraid of you than I would be if you were smaller than myself. I have met too many of your kind in my

travels, and I can always tell a bluffer the instant he opens his mouth."

Between the effects of the blow he had received and the wonderful nerve displayed by the boy, Big Bat was completely bewildered for the space of a few seconds.

But he soon recovered.

Then, instead of making another rush for his youthful opponent, he made a grab for his shooter.

He got it half out of the holster and that was all, for—

"Drop that, or it will be your last minute on earth!"

Like a flash the boy had whipped out a revolver, and he now stood with it leveled at the big man's breast.

Then Big Bat showed that he was but a big bluffing coward, after all.

He let go his hold upon the shooter and his hands hung at his sides, while a frightened look came into his eyes.

"I reckon you can't take a joke," he managed to blurt out.

"Oh, yes!" was the reply. "I can take a joke when it is given in the proper way, but I never take whisky, or bluffing, either."

While this was being said the muzzle of the revolver never moved the thousandth part of an inch. It was a steady hand that held it.

"Give us another drink, landlord!" called out Big Bat, after a rather lengthy pause. "Young man, you're welcome to take jest what you want to. When Big Bat, from Virginia City, stands treat everybody generally takes what they likes. I don't like ther way you hold that shooter. I never scen sich a steady hand as you've got in my life."

"Oh!" was the laughing rejoinder. "Well, I'll lower it, then. If you were fooling when you tackled me I didn't think so. I wasn't fooling, I can tell you! And if you had not let go of your shooter just as you did I would surely have bored a hole through your heart. I'll take a cigar, thank you!"

"Ther best in ther house, landlord!" roared the big man. "I'm a feller what takes things as they come, I am."

He was trying to make it appear that he was not angered at what had happened to him, but the look on his ugly face belied it.

The round was put out and disposed of by the crowd, and then, as the dashing-looking boy lighted his cigar, Big Bat turned to him and said:

"Who are you, young man?"

"Young Wild West is the name I go by," was the calm rejoinder.

"It seems to me that I've heard of that name."

"I have!" spoke up the proprietor. "I might have known it from what happened just now. Boys, it's Young Wild West, ther rich young mine owner, of Weston, Dakoty! I reckon you've all heard of him."

A few of them had, it seemed, and they immediately broke into loud comments.

All hands joined in, with the exception of the big man,

who turned his back and looked out of the window until the commotion had subsided.

It was Young Wild West, sure enough. He had come to Helena to meet a wealthy capitalist on some important business; Cheyenne Charlie, the famous government scout, had come with him.

This was the hotel that they were to meet the capitalist at, and they had just arrived, dropping into the bar-room to make inquiries, when Young Wild West was tackled by Big Bat.

"Gentlemen," said Young Wild West, "you are invited to have a smoke with me. I never drink liquor, as I told our friend here, but I am of the opinion that a good cigar now and then won't hurt anyone. Step up, please."

Every man of them picked a cigar from the box the landlord put out, even to the giant.

## CHAPTER II.

### READY TO START FOR VIRGINIA CITY.

"Landlord," said Young Wild West, turning to the man behind the bar, "have you a guest stopping here by the name of Melton—Bernard Melton?"

"I reckon I have," was the reply. "He jest come this mornin'. He's got his daughter with him, too, an' she's ther finest dressed gal I've seen in this here town."

"Ah! Well, I would like to see Mr. Melton."

"Go right into ther parlor. I reckon you'll find him there. It might be that he's gone out to ther barber shop to git shaved, though."

"Well, I'll take a look in the parlor, then. Just take out for the cigars," and the boy tossed a goldpiece on the counter.

He got his change, and then, followed by his partner, went through a doorway into the hall of a building and then paused before a door on the other side.

"This must be the parlor, Charlie," he said. "I suppose I had better knock."

"I s'pose so, if there's a youug lady in there with ther man we're lookin' for," was the reply.

Young Wild West gave a knock and the next minute the door was opened by a tall, well-dressed man of forty-five.

He looked at the two rather curiously at first, but suddenly a smile broke over his face, and he exclaimed:

"Come in, gentlemen!"

Wild and Charlie walked in, taking off their sombreros as they did so.

Seated in an easy chair watching the street scenes from a window, was a very pretty girl of perhaps eighteen.

She was very elegantly attired and reminded our two friends of the fashionably-attired ladies they had seen in Denver and other large cities.

The gentleman and the young lady were the only ones

in the room, as it happened, and it seemed to our hero and his partner that it was more of a private apartment than a public parlor of a hotel.

"Are you Mr. Bernard Melton?" asked Young Wild West, coming right down to business.

"Yes," was the reply. "And you are——"

"Young Wild West, at your service."

"Ah! I thought as much. Well, Mr. West, I am glad to meet you. I had no idea that we would get together so quickly. I consider that we are in a streak of luck. This gentleman is one of your partners, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, this is Cheyenne Charlie."

"Is he the only one who came with you?"

"Yes, sir, my other two partners could not get here very well. Jim Dart, my boy chum, is in Arizona, and will not be back until next month, and Jack Robedee is handicapped so much from the loss of a leg that we thought he would not be of much service, so only the two of us came."

"Ah! Well, as I said before, I am glad you got here so soon. But, gentlemen, let me introduce you to my daughter. Miss Melton, Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie, the gentlemen who are going with us to Virginia City to help straighten out things on the mining property I own, but have never seen. Shake hands with the gentlemen, Marjorie. You can readily see that they are not the rough-looking fellows you were expecting to meet."

The girl blushed a rosy red, but did not hesitate to put out her dainty hand.

"I am very glad to make the acquaintance of the gentlemen, father," she said, bowing to our two friends. "Mr. West and Mr. ——"

"Cheyenne Charlie," the scout said to help her out. "That's all ther name I've got."

"Mr. Cheyenne Charlie, then, seeing that my father has spoken as he has, I must admit that I am deceived in my idea as to how you would look."

"Thank you!" laughed Wild. "I suppose we may take that as a compliment."

"Well, I—I—," and the girl became so confused that her father had to come to her aid.

"She expected to meet some very rough men, who chewed tobacco and had blood spots all over their clothing, with an Indian scalp or two in their belts," said Mr. Melton. "But never mind. Now that we know each other, we may as well get down to business."

He pointed to a couple of chairs, and Wild and Charlie drew them up and sat down.

"You understood by my letter that the men who are in possession of my property that is located near Virginia City are a very lawless set," he began.

"Yes, sir," answered Wild. "We understand that perfectly."

"And that it will require great skill and tact to get the best of them?"

"Yes, sir, we know that."

"And the two of you expect to accomplish the desired result, then?"

"Yes, sir. There are more ways than one to do it, you know. If we can get these men to leave peaceably we will do it, and if we can't we will make them leave!"

"That's what's ther matter, boss!" chimed in Cheyenne Charlie, slapping his hands together to emphasize his remark.

"Well, since you were recommended so highly to me, I am going to leave it all to you. My daughter insisted on coming with me to Virginia City, and I have an idea that she will see some exciting times before we get back to Denver."

"Well, it is probable that she will," Wild admitted. "Still, I hardly think there is much danger in taking her to Virginia City. I have never been there, but have heard that it is quite a respectable sort of place, for its size."

"Yes, so I have heard. My daughter is one of the romantic sort, you know. She rather likes to study nature in its wildness and make the acquaintance of the various people who strike her as being odd in their ways."

"She don't look like one of ther chicken-hearted kind, though she dresses in ther finest clothes I ever seen, an' is rather city-like," said Cheyenne Charlie, letting out just what was in his mind.

"That is meant for a compliment, I suppose," remarked the young lady. "Well, I am glad you think that way of me," and she blushed and looked pleased.

The next half hour was spent in talking over matters, and then it was decided that they should set out for Virginia City the next morning.

The capitalist and his pretty daughter would go by the overland stage route and Young Wild West and his partner would ride there on horseback.

If it had not been that the request to make a trip to the mining region of Montana was not backed by a particular friend of Young Wild West, he would not have accepted the offer.

Anyhow, it so happened that he had nothing particular on hand at the time, so he thought they might as well get what there was in it—not only financially, but in the way of excitement, fun and adventure.

When all the arrangements had been made in the hotel parlor, Cheyenne Charlie promptly stepped to the door and opened it without any ceremony.

Then the scout saw a man spring to his feet right before the door and hurry away.

"Hey, there, you measly coyote!" he called out. "I reckon you've been peekin' through ther keyhole an' listenin'. Jest come back here an' give an account of yourself, do you hear?"

The man, who was rather small in stature and quite wiry-looking, turned around as though much surprised.

"What did you say?" he asked, walking back.

"I said you was listenin' at ther door," replied Charlie.

"Then you lie!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the scout had him by the throat.

"Take that back!" he cried. "Say that I ain't no liar, or I'll shake ther boots off your feet!"

Charlie's anger was up, and as he had the fellow at a great disadvantage, it is hard to tell what he might have done with him if Wild had not interfered.

"Let up on him, Charlie," our hero said. "You may have made a mistake, you know."

"No, I didn't make a mistake," the scout insisted. "He was on his knees right by ther door, peekin' through ther keyhole."

"No, I wasn't," gasped the man. "See! Here it is!"

As he held a match in his fingers, his explanation sounded plausible.

Charlie let go of him, though it was plain that he did not believe the man.

"You're putty handy about callin' people liars," he remarked.

"Mebbe I was a little too quick, but I knowed I wasn't guilty, so I couldn't help sayin' it," was the rejoinder.

"Well, I'll remember you, jest make up your mind on that. If I ever catch you doin' anything sneakin' ag'in, you're goin' to git it!"

"I'll remember you, too," and the fellow tapped the butt of his revolver as he spoke.

"Go on outside!" cried the scout. "If it's shootin' you want, I'll be glad to accommodate you!"

"Come on!" and the fellow opened the front door and ran out on the sidewalk.

Cheyenne Charlie, whose blood was now up again, was after him like a shot.

Wild thought it best to let them settle it, so he said nothing, and simply went out after them.

When Charlie came out of the door the man stood on the sidewalk, his revolver in his hand.

The excitement in the hall had attracted the attention of the men in the bar-room, and they came rushing out.

Among them was Big Bat, and the instant he saw there was going to be a scrimmage between the two he called out to the wiry man:

"Quit ther game, my friend!" he said. "If you don't an undertaker will come around after you in a few minutes. I don't know what ther trouble is, but I advise you to quit."

"All right, then, I'll do as you say," was the reply, much to the surprise of all hands, and he put his revolver in his belt and made for the bar.

A few minutes later Big Bat and the fellow were at the bar drinking and talking in low tones.

"What did you stop me from lettin' daylight through that feller fur, Bat?" the smaller one said.

"'Cause I knowed he'd only make short work of you, Bill," was the reply. "That young feller with him is a hurricane on wheels, an' if ther tall feller is half as good as he is he'd never let you got in a shot."

"I don't know about that."

"Well, I don't, either, but I've got an idea that way. Why, ther young feller took all ther starch out of me less

than an hour ago right in this bar-room. He knocked ther wind out of me with his fist, an' then he was goin' to bore a hole through my heart! He'd have done it, too, if I hadn't give in."

"Ther dickens you say, Bat!"

"It's a fact, Bill. I was never so s'prised in my life."

"Well, if that's ther case, we've got a couple of hard ones to buck up ag'in in our game, fur they're goin' with ther rich feller to ther minin' property near Virginia City."

"I s'posed as much when I heard Young Wild West ask ther landlord if Melton was here. I knowed he must want him fur somethin', an' what was more likely than fur them to go with him to the mine? Well, ther's one thing about it, we know that ther's plenty of gold on that piece of property an' we must fix it so them people don't find it out, that's all. We must see to it that Melton gits disgusted with ther property an' lets it be fur awhile. We knows what's there an' he don't."

"If we hadn't got into ther row with ther man there everything would have been all right, I think. You see, they've sorter got it in their heads that ther's gold there, after all, and now they've gone an' sent for ther owner to come out an' drive us fellers away."

"An' he's goin' there now, an' he's takin' Young Wild West an' that other feller with him to run ther business. Well, I'll jest guarantee one thing, an' that is that I'll git square on that young rooster fur what he done to me to-day!"

"An' I'll fix ther other one, an' don't you forgit it!" added the little man. "Why, I kin feel ther marks of his fingers on my throat yet!"

"We'll fix 'em. It's a good thing we come up here to meet Melton. Now we know jest about what's in ther wind."

"Yes, I heard putty much all they said in ther other room. Melton has got a very putty darter an' she's goin' with 'em. She's about ther puttiest gal I ever seed, an' her clothes look as though they're worth a cool thousand."

"Is that so? Well, I reckon that won't be much of a place fur a putty gal with sich fine clothes. I reckon Melton had better have left her home," and the big man looked wise.

"I reckon so," said his companion. "But you can't tell. I might take a notion to ther gal."

### CHAPTER III.

#### WILD MEETS THE GANG HE HAS GOT TO FIGHT.

The morning following the events just described the overland stagecoach left Helena with a full load of passengers, among whom were Bernard Melton and his daughter Marjorie and Big Bat and the small man called Bill.

It so happened that there were two other female passengers besides Marjorie in the vehicle, and this made it more pleasant for her than it otherwise would have been.

The girl readily recognized the man who had been in the quarrel with Cheyenne Charlie, and she made up her mind that he was a villain, and that he had really been listening to her father's conversation with Young Wild West.

But whatever thoughts they had about the capitalist and his daughter, neither Big Bat nor Bill seemed to be paying any attention to them.

Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie went on ahead of the outfit, and when the stage pulled up at a small place called Splicer Bend that evening at dusk they were there to greet Melton and Marjorie.

It was a long, ramshackle building that the stagecoach line had built to accommodate its patrons and was known as the half-way headquarters between Helena and Virginia City.

The accommodations were not any of the best, but the female passengers were always given the best there was to be had.

Wild and the scout were greeted warmly by Melton and the girl and scowled at by Big Bat and Bill, who could not disguise their feelings when they saw them.

But this only put our friends on their guard more than ever.

They felt certain that the two men meant to do them an injury if they got the chance.

Wild was positive that the giant man hated him, and it was plain to both that the little man was only waiting to get a chance at Charlie.

A steaming supper awaited the passengers, and when they finally filed into the dining-room Wild and Charlie took seats with the capitalist and his daughter.

Though the fare might be called coarse, it was health-giving, and there was plenty of it.

Marjorie declared she liked that way of living, for a change, and her father said he was glad to hear her talk that way, as he had been fearing all along that she would become tired and disgusted with the trip to Virginia City and thus make it uncomfortable for him, as well as herself.

"Don't worry about that," she laughed. "You will find me satisfied and cheerful all the time, papa. I thought it all over carefully before I asked you to let me come. I figured on a great deal worse than what we have been getting, so far, and if I do not experience it I will be surprised."

"Do you know how to ride a horse, miss?" asked Cheyenne Charlie.

"Oh, yes!" was the reply.

"That's good! I reckon if you stay around ther minin' place very long you would need to ride one, unless you stayed in one place putty much all ther time."

"Oh! Marjorie can ride, and shoot pretty well, too," declared Melton. "She can do both better than I can, I

guess. But I hope we won't have any shooting to do to get things settled up down at Virginia City."

Young Wild West noticed that Big Bat and the little man exchanged glances when this was said.

The two were seated at the opposite side of the table and down toward the left end.

He had wondered at the start what the two men were taking passage in the stagecoach for, and now he began to believe that they were interested in the rich capitalist.

"Well, you fellows want to be very careful, that's all I can tell you," he thought. "I found out yesterday that you were close friends, and now it strikes me that you came to Helena to meet the same man Charlie and I came to meet. It looks that way, anyhow."

It did look that way, and the more our hero thought over it the more he was satisfied that it was that way.

The night was spent at Splicer Bend without anything happening worth mentioning, and the next morning four fresh horses were hitched to the stage and the passengers booked for Virginia City started on the last half of their journey.

Wild and Charlie did not start out at the same time, but they overtook the outfit before noon and waved to the occupants of the vehicle.

Thirty miles from Splicer Bend and about twenty-five from the end of the route there was a halting-place for the horses to get an hour's rest.

Wild and the scout reached it shortly before twelve o'clock about a mile ahead of the stagecoach.

It was not much of a place, as there was nothing but a sort of depot where passengers could be provided with food and drink at enormous prices and three or four shanties.

It was called Top Notch, though just why no one knew.

When our two friends got there they found a band of horsemen hanging around as though they were waiting for someone.

There were about ten of them, and they were a rough and careless-looking lot.

They eyed Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie as they dismounted and acted very curious about them.

"See anything of ther stagecoach as you come along, strangers?" one of them asked.

"Yes," answered Wild, "we passed it about a mile below."

"Many passengers in it?"

"Yes, full, I should judge."

After a slight pause the fellow continued:

"Where did you come from, strangers?"

"Helena," retorted our hero.

He was not surprised at the questions, for it was common for people to be inquisitive to strangers in those parts.

"Helena, hey?" and the man looked at his companions in a rather peculiar way. "Did you notice ther passengers what got in ther stage when it left Helena, or wasn't you there then?"

"Oh! We were there at the time."



"You was, hey? Did you notice a putty big sort of a man among ther passengers?"

"Yes. You mean Big Bat, I suppose?"

"Exactly! Do you know him, young feller?"

"I got acquainted with him at the hotel we were stopping at in Helena. We had quite a lively time there, too."

"You did, hey?" and the man seemed pleased. "You met Little Bill, too, then, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yes!" spoke up Charlie; "we met him. Me an' him is ther greatest of friends."

"I'm glad to hear that, 'cause Little Bill is my brother."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so, ain't it, boys?"

"Yep!" came the reply from the listening horsemen.

"Are you anything like your brother?"

"Somethin', I reckon," was the retort, an' the man threw out his chest and tried to make himself look important.

"An' ther rest of these fellers are somethin' like you, I s'pose?"

"I should reckon they was; hey, boys? We're all of ther same kind, ain't we?"

"You bet!" was the unanimous retort.

"Then you'll all bear watchin'!" declared Cheyenne Charlie.

The horsemen looked at each other.

They did not know how to take the scout's remark.

Wild was sorry Charlie had spoken that way, but he said nothing to him.

He was not alarmed about getting into trouble with the men, but he thought they might have been able to learn something if they had kept on talking in a friendly way with them.

"What's your name?" queried the man who had been doing all the talking, after he had thought a moment.

"Cheyenne Charlie."

"Where do you hail from?"

"Weston, in ther Black Hills, not far from Deadwood."

"What are you doin' here?"

"That's my business."

"Oh! It is, hey?"

"I reckon it is."

"Didn't you say you was a friend of Little Bill?"

"I guess I did say so. If you don't believe it jest ask him when ther stage gits here. I hear it comin' now, so you won't have to wait long to find out."

Sure enough, the rumble of the lumbering vehicle could be heard in the distance, and while the rough-looking men were trying hard to study the characters of Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie the leaders came in sight around a bend in the road.

Out rushed the man in charge of the stopping-place, ready to reap in the harvest that he was pretty sure was coming.

When the outfit stopped Little Bill was the first to alight, and when he saw the waiting horsemen he greeted them with a smiling face.

When Big Bat got out of the stage the fellow who had done so much talking to Wild and Charlie ran to him and almost hugged him.

"We're so glad you've got back, Bat!" he exclaimed. "We reckoned as how you might git into trouble up at Helena an' git shot or somethin'. We all know what you are when you git a little too much bugjuice in yer."

"I reckon if I do git into trouble I always git out ag'in," was the reply from the big rascal, who towered over the rest.

Just then his eyes lighted on Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie, and a frown came over his brow.

"So them fellers is here, are they?" he muttered, half aloud.

"Friends of you'n, ain't they?" said the man who had greeted him.

"Friends, hey! I reckon not!" was the answer. "They're jest ther opposite to friends, Dan, jest ther opposite. They've come down here with ther feller what owns ther property we want to git ther gold out of, an' they say they're goin' to run us fellers off ther place."

"No wonder ther other feller talked ther way he did, then."

Wild and Charlie were talking to Melton and his daughter, but they were keeping an eye on the big man and his friend, just the same.

They could not hear what they were talking about, but they could easily imagine that it was about them.

As they walked into the building to get refreshments Wild called the attention of Melton to the gang of men.

"They are the ones we will have to contend with when we get to your mining property," he said.

"Do you think so?" asked the capitalist in surprise.

"I feel certain of it. I am satisfied that the big man and the fellow Charlie caught listening at the door came to Helena on purpose to meet you and learn what you were up to. They have learned all about it and are now reporting to their friends."

"Well, if that is the case we may have a hard time of it. I am not sure that the property is worth much, anyhow, and rather than have any serious trouble or bloodshed, perhaps it would be a good idea to let the claim-jumpers, as they are called, occupy a reasonable part of the land."

Young Wild West looked in surprise at the man.

"If you thought that way why did you send for us to come and help you out in the matter?" he asked.

"Well, I never thought it would be anything as serious as all this."

"You paid quite a sum of money for the property, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I understand that it is only partly developed. Only one shaft has been sunk and not enough quartz has been taken out to pay the expenses. That is how I came to take hold of the land. While I paid a good price for it, if those who sold it to me had found any rich deposits there before selling they would have wanted more than double the money for it."

"And you enlisted my services to find out if it was advisable to go ahead and sink any more shafts, and at the same time to get rid of the gang of men who were prospecting around there and digging into the soil for what they could get?"

"Exactly! And that is just what I want you to do, too. I shan't show the white feather again. It is my property, and no one else has a right to meddle with it. You go ahead and work the thing out in your own way, Young Wild West."

"All right, sir! That is just what I want to do, since I have come all the way from Weston to earn the liberal salary you have apportioned to me."

But though the capitalist was satisfied to go through with it, he was certainly a little squeamish about it.

Planning to get rid of a lot of claim-jumpers was quite easy, but when the real operation began it was different.

The sight of the men discouraged him right off.

But Young Wild West was not made to change his mind in the least, nor was Cheyenne Charlie.

The gang did not seem to be any worse than they had expected to see.

At the end of an hour the stagecoach was ready to resume the journey.

The ten horsemen had started off half an hour before, but Wild and Charlie waited until the outfit took its departure, and then they rode along with it.

They thought it might be possible that the band of men might be worse than claim-jumpers, and that they might try to rob the coach.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### AT VIRGINIA CITY.

Contrary to the expectations of Young Wild West, the ten horsemen were not seen on the way to Virginia City, and our hero and Charlie rode up to the hotel that marked the end of the route behind the outfit.

Wild had decided that to bring matters to a head quickly he would have to first find out what the rascals were up to.

To do this it would be necessary to keep a sharp watch on Big Bat and Little Bill.

Virginia City was not a very large town at the time of which we write.

It had a population of about three hundred.

But there was about everything there that constitutes a Western mining town.

The sheriff of the county lived there, the jail was there and there was a vigilance committee organized, but the lawless men were as thick as fleas on a dog, just the same.

But such places were nothing new to Young Wild West.

He had been all over the West and he could tell what a place was the instant he laid eyes on it.

As Big Bat and Little Bill left the stagecoach he saw them make a beeline across the street.

Our hero quietly took a look where they were going, though he did not appear to be doing so.

About a hundred yards down on the opposite side of the single street of the town was about the biggest building to be seen in it.

It was of two stories and had a flat roof.

On the upper side of it was a big shed, and under this a number of saddle-horses were tied.

The place was a saloon, as might be supposed, and the quick glance that Wild got at the house and the horses tied under the shed told him that it was the destination of the two men.

And so it proved, for in less than two minutes he saw them turn into the doorway and disappear from sight.

Then the boy went inside the hotel after Charlie and the capitalist and his daughter.

The shades of night had begun to gather now, and Marjorie Melton and her father, not being used to that kind of traveling, were pretty well tired out.

The place they had stopped at was what might be called the only hotel in the place, and that was not saying much.

Still, Melton had no difficulty in getting accommodations that would answer their purpose.

"Here is where we will make our headquarters, Marjorie, while we stay in this part of the country," he said. "I hope it will not be very long, though."

"I am satisfied, papa," she answered. "I rather like the novelty of it, I must say."

"I am surprised to hear you say that. Well, now the next thing is to meet Leo Sherwood, the young man who has been looking after the property—or try to look after it—since I bought it. As he knew of our coming, he ought to be here to-night."

"He is the young man who left his position at the Denver bank to come out here in your interest, is he not, papa?"

"Yes, and a very promising young man he is, too, Marjorie. I am satisfied that he has a bright future before him, if he does not fall in love with the wild life he has been leading up here during the past two months. The last he wrote to me he stated that he liked it here a great deal better than he did in the city."

"I shall be glad to meet the young man, papa. From what you say, he must be quite interesting—almost as interesting as Young Wild West is."

"Well, he ought to be here at the hotel to-night."

"Have you told Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie about him?"

"Only in a casual way. I simply told them that I had a young man here trying to look after things for me, and that he had advised me to take strenuous measures to make the claim-jumpers vacate the property."

"Well, I am confident that Young Wild West will show him how that can be done. Papa, since I have heard how the handsome young fellow thrashed that burly giant and

then cowed him at the point of a revolver, I regard him as something wonderful. You can tell by the way he acts that he does not know what fear means. I wonder if Leo Sherwood is anything like him in that particular?"

"There are few in the world like Young Wild West, I guess, otherwise it would not have been so much trouble for me to find one suitable to the task I wanted accomplished: The gentleman who recommended Young Wild West assured me that what he did not know about mining land no one did know, and that his equal could not be found as a fighter and disciplinarian. I have the utmost confidence in the young fellow and his partner, Marjorie."

"You should have, papa."

The two had been shown to their quarters by the wife of the landlord, who stood waiting for them to go down to supper while this conversation was taking place.

Suddenly the girl thought about the good woman, and she caught her father by the arm and exclaimed:

"Why, papa! Here we have been talking and making the lady wait for us. I must take off my wraps, and then we will go right down to dinner. I am hungry, aren't you?"

"Well, yes," was the reply. "A little more than usual, too, I think. That long ride has touched up my appetite wonderfully."

The wife of the landlord, who told them her name was Smith, smiled.

"Don't hurry yourself," she said. "We always have plenty to eat in the house. Mr. Sherwood told me to have the two best rooms ready for you, and I have done so. The young lady's room is right next to my own, so she can call me at any time during the night, should she want anything, by simply knocking on the partition."

"Thank you," retorted Melton. "I am glad my man Sherwood has attended to it so nicely."

A few minutes later they went down to the dining-room and found Wild and Charlie waiting for them.

Melton was going to pay big money for their accommodations at the hotel while they remained at Virginia City, and the landlord was taking pains to give them every comfort.

He had a separate table for them in the most cozy part of the dining-room, and a good-looking young Crow squaw stood ready to wait on them.

The table was a little too elaborate for Cheyenne Charlie, but he was too hungry to show the embarrassment he felt, and before the meal was finished he felt quite at home and conversed in his plain, old-fashioned way.

After supper, as it was called, Landlord Smith came in and announced that Leo Sherwood had just arrived and would see Mr. Melton, if he had no objections.

"Where is he?" asked the capitalist. "I want to see him as soon as possible."

"S'pose you take him upstairs in our private parlor," suggested the man. "You might have some private business, an' ther room we call our parlor fur ther public has got some people in it now."

"All right. Send the young man up."

Then he called Wild and Charlie and they went upstairs, followed by Marjorie and the squaw, who had also been appointed as maid for the young lady.

The two latter went to Marjorie's room and Melton and our two friends took seats in the neat little apartment the landlord's wife called her parlor.

A couple of minutes later Smith came up with a handsome young man of twenty-five, who was attired in a corduroy suit and wore a belt around his waist which was fitted out with the usual complement of weapons worn by the average resident of the town.

"How do you do, Leo!" exclaimed Melton, stepping forward and giving the newcomer's hand a hearty shake. "I am very glad to see you, I assure you. Let me introduce you to Young Wild West and his partner, Cheyenne Charlie. Mr. Leo Sherwood, gentlemen."

Wild and the scout shook hands with the young man, and both came to the quick conclusion that he was a bright, ambitious fellow, quite worthy to hold the confidence of his employer.

It did not take either of them very long to size up a man and tell what he was.

Wild hardly ever made a mistake in that line in his whole life.

A conversation of a couple of hours followed, during which our hero learned that young Sherwood was firmly convinced that the mining property was rich in deposits of gold, but that it would take an expert to locate the stuff.

"I am almost certain that the gang of men who hang out in the vicinity have located a lode that is right near the surface. That they are taking out ore that is almost pure daily, I feel sure. They make a pretext of hunting and camping on the place, but I have several times caught them working with picks and shovels. They know I am green in the business, so they have not paid much attention to me, other than to warn me that I had better not be prying into their business too much."

Ever since he had been in charge of the land Sherwood had gone to the shanty daily, but the shaft that had been sunk had not been operated since the former owners had vacated the premises.

The young man informed them that Big Bat, the giant, was the leader of the gang that was living off the proceeds of what they took from the property, and he declared that the gang was generally feared by the workmen of the surrounding claims.

"Well, the first thing to do is to make those fellows know that we mean business," said Wild. "I think I know where they hang out in the town, for I saw the place that Big Bat and Little Bill, as they call him, went in when they left the stagecoach."

"The saloon called the 'Hard-Pan,' you mean, I guess," replied Sherwood. "That is a sort of headquarters for them when they are in town."



"Suppose we take a walk over there and see if we can't find out something?"

"All right. I have been in there a few times, and no one has offered to bother with me. If you say go over there I'll go with you."

"You stay right here in the hotel, Mr. Melton," observed Wild. "There is no need of your mixing up in the affair just yet. When the proper time comes you can step in and have your say."

"I leave it all to you, Mr. West, as I said before," was the reply.

A few minutes later Wild, Charlie and Leo Sherwood left the hotel and made their way across the street.

As they neared the saloon Cheyenne Charlie turned to the young man and said:

"Are you putty good on shootin', Sherwood?"

"Oh, I am just passable, I guess," was the retort.

"An' have you got plenty of nerve?"

"I don't know so much about that. You see, I have never exactly been put to the test. Why do you talk that way? Do you think there will be any shooting done to-night?"

"You can't tell, an' it's good to know what you would do in case there is."

"Well, you can count on me sticking to you, no matter what happens. I flatter myself that I am not a coward, anyhow."

"I like to hear you talk that way," spoke up Wild. "Well, I hardly think there will be much shooting done to-night. But it is just as well to be on the watch for some underhand game when we get in that place. Those fellows know what Charlie and I have come here for, and Big Bat and Little Joe are down on us, anyhow. It might be that they would try to get a sly shot at us."

"I shall watch them like a cat watches a mouse," replied Sherwood.

"Good! Well, here we are! Now we'll go in just the same as people ordinarily go into such places."

As he finished speaking Wild opened the door and boldly walked into the place.

Sherwood followed right at his heels and Charlie brought up the rear.

The room used as a bar was a good-sized one, but it was well filled, for all that.

The tobacco smoke was so thick that at first our friends could scarcely distinguish one face from another, but as they stepped up to the bar their eyes became accustomed to it, and they saw that the room was occupied by a rather tough-looking lot of men.

Some were standing and others were seated at tables playing cards, but every man in the room had his eyes turned upon them.

Big Bat was in a game of cards off in the furthest corner, and he quickly got up.

"How are you, Young Wild West!" he exclaimed, starting for our hero with his hand out to shake.

"Pretty well," retorted Wild, catching his fingers just

right and shutting to on them with his iron grip. "How do you feel after your long ride in the stage?"

"F-fine!" gasped the big man, wincing under the fierce pressure his hand was being subjected to.

"I'm glad to hear that!" and then our hero gave him a squeeze that caused the tears to come to his eyes and made him yell out with pain.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Wild, looking at him innocently. "You don't appear to appreciate a hearty handshake from a friend."

"Thunder!" ejaculated Big Bat. "I took notice over in Helena that you had ther steadiest hand I ever seen, but now I kin say that you've got ther worst grip I ever felt. You're all right, Young Wild West, you are!"

"I am glad you think that way."

The men in the place were astounded at the easy way of our hero.

They wondered, too, how he had managed to make the giant cry out from the grip.

Big Bat was the strongest man in the town, and he held them all in fear of him when he got to drinking and cutting up.

Little Bill was the most surprised one of the lot, though, for his big friend had whispered to him that he was going to catch Young Wild West by the hand and give him such a shake that he would wish he had not come into the place.

And it had turned out just the other way.

Queer things happen, and this was a case of it, so Little Bill thought.

Wild could not have been better pleased than by what had happened.

One of his reasons for coming into the place was to show the bad gang that he meant business, and the fact of his taking their leader down a few pegs right at the go-off was regarded as a great thing by him.

But he was not through yet.

He wanted to impress it on the minds of all hands that he was a deadshot with a revolver.

"Gentlemen," said he, "will you have a smoke with me? I am a stranger here in town, but I expect to stay here for a few days, and I want to be on friendly terms with everybody. I don't drink myself, as Big Bat knows, but those of you who do not care to smoke may take what you like. Landlord, set 'em up!"

Every man in the place but one accepted the invitation.

The exception was Little Bill.

"I don't want nothin'," he said to the man who ran the place.

He was a good deal smaller than Big Bat, but he had more nerve, and he was not nearly as cowardly.

He had it in for Cheyenne Charlie, and as he was with Young Wild West, he thought it was a good chance to get into an argument and then settle with the scout.

The landlord and several of the men in the crowd looked at Little Bill in surprise.

"Ain't you goin' to take somethin'?" they asked.

"No!" was the retort. "I generally picks my company when it comes to drinking with anyone."

"Well, you don't have to drink with me," said Wild, turning to him. "I am sure that you would be better off if you never drank with anyone."

## CHAPTER V.

### WILD'S STEADY HAND.

Cheyenne Charlie could not help putting in a word now.

"That's jest what I think," he remarked.

"What have you to say about it, you long-legged galoot?" cried the little man, drawing a shooter and leaping to his feet with remarkable quickness.

"Hold!"

Young Wild West uttered the command in a ringing tone.

He had his revolver leveled at the man, too, though just how he had pulled it out so quickly no one in the room knew.

Little Bill stood still in his tracks and a silence that was almost deathly pervaded the room.

With the shooter pointed at the fellow, Wild stood as immovable as a statue.

The light from an oil lamp reflected upon the little man and a diamond pin that was stuck in the scarf he wore about his neck glittered so that Wild could see it plainly.

The villain was standing with his side to him, as he was facing Cheyenne Charlie, who was a few feet further down the bar.

"When I count three," said Wild, without moving his revolver the hundredth part of an inch, "I am going to shoot that diamond out of your scarf! Then if you, or anyone else in here, wants to take a hand in that kind of game you will be welcome to try it! One!"

Not a man stirred an inch and the clock on the wall ticked so loud that the landlord thought it was going to fly all apart.

"Two!"

Every eye was turned on Little Bill.

"Three!"

The word was scarcely out of our hero's mouth, when—

Crack!

The diamond no longer glittered!

The little man clapped his hand to his breast and uttered a cry of fright.

"Oh, you are not hurt a particle," said Wild, smiling as though he was on the most friendly terms with all hands. "I simply did what I told you I would do."

But the most wonderful thing about it all was that the revolver in his hand was still leveled, the same as it had been before he fired.

"What do you think of that?" cried Big Bat, with

something like real admiration in his voice. "That's a steady hand, ain't it, boys?"

A low murmur of applause went up.

"I give in!" said Little Bill, dropping in a chair. "But how about my diamond?"

"How much did you value the pin at?" queried Wild.

"Two hundred dollars."

"All right. Someone find the stone for me and I will buy it of you."

Half a dozen men started in to look for the diamond, and in less than a minute it was found in a corner of the room.

Then someone pulled the pin from the scarf and found that the bullet had mashed it up pretty well.

"I guess I won't sell it," said Little Bill. "I'll keep it to remember you by, Young Wild West."

"All right; just as you say. But I guess you will be able to remember me without having to look at the diamond."

"I reckon so," spoke up someone in the room.

Cheyenne Charlie was as much surprised at the wonderful shot as the men were.

He had never seen Wild take such long aim before, and he thought it no wonder that Big Bat said he had a steady hand.

"It was Young Wild West's steady hand what done that," he observed, looking at Little Bill. "Now, s'pose we go outdoors an' settle our grudge?"

"I reckon I'll wait till some other time," was the reply.

"That shot of Young Wild West's sorter took ther nerve out of me. I ain't afraid of you, understand? But we'll meet ag'in after to-night."

"I reckon so."

Wild was satisfied that he had made a deep impression with the gang, so he concluded to go out.

True, he had learned nothing of what they were up to, but he knew it would be useless to try and pump anything out of them after what had just taken place.

Leo Sherwood treated the crowd before they went out, and then as he was about to close the door Wild called out:

"Good-night all! I hope we shall remain friends!"

Just as he was disappearing through the doorway the sharp crack of a pistol rang out and a bullet whistled past his ear!

Some sneaking coward in the gang had fired at him from behind his back!

As quick as a flash he wheeled around and caught sight of the fellow, for smoke that was curling upward from the muzzle of a shooter told him the man.

He knew it was his duty to drop the fellow, so he fired at him.

As the report rang out the man threw up his hands and dropped.

"Again I bid you good-night, gentlemen!" Wild said, and then he closed the door.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Leo Sherwood, when they got

outside. "I never saw your equal, Young Wild West. But we had better look out, or the whole gang will be out firing at us."

"No, they won't," was the cool retort. "That last shot I fired has taught them to be careful. That fellow meant to kill me, so I had to drop him."

"Well, I guess the sheriff will be glad when he hears that he has gone under, for he was one of the worst men in the town. He is said to have killed half a dozen men by shooting at them from behind their backs."

"He came pretty close to picking me off—a little too close for comfort. But a miss is as good as a mile, they say."

They were keeping a sharp watch on the place as they walked away, for there was no telling but some of the villains might go out by the back way and try a shot or two at them.

But nothing of the kind occurred, and a few minutes later he led the way into the hotel as though nothing had occurred.

"Been out takin' a look at the town?" said Proprietor Smith, as they walked into the bar-room and took seats around the big stove that had a wood fire in it, for the nights were quite chilly.

"Yes," replied our hero. "We saw a little of it."

"Mr. West, I want to introduce you to ther sheriff of our county. Sheriff Goode, this is Young Wild West."

"How are yer?" said a bluff-looking man of middle age, getting up from his seat in the corner and extending his hand.

"Pretty well, I thank you," was the reply.

"An' this are Cheyenne Charlie, Young Wild West's pard, sheriff," resumed the landlord.

"Glad to meet you, sir!" and then there was another shake.

"Sheriff," observed Wild, turning to him a minute later, "what do you do to a man who shoots at another behind his back and misses him?"

"Drop him deader than a doornail, if we kin," was the quick reply.

"What is done to the fellow who drops him, then?"

"Nothin', of course. He are considered as someone who's got to be looked out fur after sich a thing as that happens."

"So that's the way it is in Virginia City, is it?"

"Yes, sir, that's ther way we does business here."

"Well, when we were coming out of the Hard-Pan saloon a few minutes ago a fellow let a bullet drive at me and it just whizzed past my ear so close that I could feel the heat from it."

"An' what did you do?" queried the sheriff, looking interested.

"Oh, I turned around, and, seeing who it was that did it, let him have a shot."

"The fellow was Jem Hughes," spoke up Sherwood. "He'll never shoot another man behind his back, for Young Wild West put an end to him!"

"What!" cried the sheriff.

"That's right, sheriff."

"Good man, I call you, then!" and he seized Wild's hand and wrung it warmly. "I might as well tell you that I was a little bit afeard of that feller always. I was always expectin' he'd give it to me some time when I wasn't lookin', an' that's why I didn't meddle with him. He belonged to Big Bat's gang, an' a worse crowd never lived!"

"You wouldn't have thought they was so very bad a little while ago," went on Sherwood. "I never saw such a meek lot of fellows in my life. We went in there and Big Bat tried to pick a row right away by getting Mr. West by the hand and jerking him off his feet, as he has a way of doing with people. But Mr. West gave his fingers such a squeeze that he yelled out with pain and was glad to behave himself. Then I saw the best shot I ever saw made in my life."

"What was it?"

All hands were interested now.

The young man related just what had happened in the saloon and the inmates of the bar-room looked at Wild in wonder and admiration.

"So you've got such a steady hand, have yer?" said Sheriff Goode. "I never heard ther like of that afore."

"Well, I always thought my hand was pretty steady," replied our hero, "but I never heard any remarks made about it until within the last couple of days. A man must have a steady hand to shoot straight, you know."

Many were the comments that were made over what had happened at the Hard-Pan saloon, and finally the proprietor, who was a sort of humorous fellow, remarked:

"Speakin' of a steady hand, there's a couple of 'em on that clock up there. Ther blamed thing ain't went in a month, an' there's been no one that's come along that kin make it go!"

"I think I could remove the hands for you," said Wild. "That is, if you don't care much for the insides of the clock."

"Let's see you do it from where you stand."

Wild quickly whipped out his revolver and leveled it at the face of the clock.

It was one of the eight-day striking kind, and looked very innocent from its place on the wall.

Young Wild West's hand was steady as a rock as he took aim.

Crack!

Both hands flew off the clock and it began to strike as it had never done before.

It kept right on until someone counted a hundred, and then, just as the door opened and a stranger entered, it fell from the wall.

## CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WAS UNDER THE PILE OF RUBBISH.

The inmates of the Hard-Pan saloon looked at each other in silence for the space of a minute after Young



Wild West bade them good-night for the second time and closed the door behind him.

The man who had been shot was picked up and carried in a back room, no one saying a word.

But when this was done Little Bill walked up to the bar, and in a solemn voice exclaimed:

"Let's have a drink, Cropsey!"

"All right," was the reply. "We'll have one on me."

The drinks were put out and the tough men proceeded to "licker up," as they called it.

Then they all got to commenting on what had happened.

"It was Jem's own fault," said one.

"Sartin it was," retorted the proprietor. "He oughter waited till he caught ther boy out somewhere with no one around."

"But ther worst part of it is that Hughes had to go an' miss," declared Big Bat. "I don't know why he done it at sich close range, either."

"He was a little nervous, I reckon, after he seen how Young Wild West could shoot," said Little Bill, feeling of his broken scarfpin.

"That's what it was, I reckon!" exclaimed the saloon-keeper. "Young Wild West has got your nerve, boys. I'll admit that he got mine. I wouldn't stand up before him to fight out a grudge, not fur all ther gold there is on ther property of Melton!"

"Who says there is any gold ther?" queried Big Bat, looking sharply at those who were members of his picked gang.

"Oh, I heerd somethin' of ther kind," said Cropsey, with a laugh. "Even if I hadn't heerd so, I ought to know so. 'cause I reckon I've took in quite considerable dust from them that hangs around ther unworked claim a big lot. Then there's Melton! He's come down here to straighten things out, an' he's brought Young Wild West an' his partner along to help do it. That looks as though he knows there's somethin' there."

"Well, he don't know," retorted Big Bat. "He don't know anything about it. He brought Young Wild West down here jest to make an examination of the property and pass his opinion as to whether it would be advisable to begin operations."

"He brought Young Wild West here for somethin' more than that," and the saloon-keeper looked wise.

"Yes, I reckon he did."

"He brought him down here to clear out a certain crowd that has been running things their own way on his property."

"That's so, too."

"An' Young Wild West an' his partner, along with Leo Sherwood, will be apt to make things hum when they git started."

"Oh, Sherwood don't amount to much. He's been putty easy for us to git along with."

"That's because he hadn't anyone to back him up an' set him on. That feller has got plenty of grit, you kin

bet! He was only goin' it easy 'cause he had orders to be that way. 'Büt jest see how things will go now!"

While every man in there was more or less bad, in the true sense, they all did not belong to the gang that was operating on the property of Bernard Melton.

Still they knew something of what was going on.

Big Bat gave a peculiar whistle, and all hands knew what it meant.

Then he walked into the back room.

Those who belonged to the inner circle quickly followed, and then the saloon-keeper closed the door, which was promptly locked by Little Bill.

The villains numbered just a dozen, and when he had spoken every man's name and received an answer, Big Bat said:

"Well, boys, I'm glad we're all alive after what happened a little while ago. We wouldn't let Jem Hughes into our private company 'cause he would have made us thirteen. Now, I'm glad we didn't, 'cause he's gone dead!"

"Well, don't let's talk about him," spoke up Little Bill. "Let's talk about ther million dollars in gold that we know we kin git, if we kin only stay around on ther Melton property fur about another week."

"That's it!" exclaimed one of the others. "What do you say if we ride over to the place to-night an' go in camp there? Then we will be right on hand when them fellers come over in ther mornin', which they will be putty sure to do."

"That's about ther best thing we kin do, I reckon," observed Big Bat. "Ther watchman in ther shanty over there won't bother his head about us, 'cause we've done ther same thing afore. "While we're at it we better git some nuggets an' dust out of ther lode, as we don't know what might happen to-morrow."

This was thought to be a good plan by all hands, so after a little further talk on the subject the door was unlocked and they passed out into the bar-room.

Then one of them treated all hands and they took their departure.

There were horses for Big Bat and Little Bill in the stable in the rear of the saloon, and the rest had theirs under the shed that was alongside it.

In less than ten minutes they set out for their destination.

They rode to the outskirts of the town in a direction opposite to that from which the stagecoach had come in and then turned off to the left, following a winding trail that led to the east over a very uneven stretch of ground.

Patches of woodland, clumps of rocks, cliffs and gullies were very thick, and that was why the trail was such a winding one.

But the property purchased by Melton was only seven miles from the outskirts of the town, so the band of rascals soon got there.

It was rather a lonely-looking spot, since there was no mine that was being worked within a mile of it.

The men allowed their horses to come down to a walk

when they reached the mouth of a shallow gulch, and when they came in sight of a derrick and shanty near it, both of which showed quite plainly in the light made by the stars, they turned to the right and rode up to the foot of a cliff.

A roughly-built shed was erected right against the cliff, and this was the headquarters of the claim-jumpers, they making the claim that this was the property of no man, but was theirs by right of having seized it.

The rascals dismounted and hobbled their horses, so they could feed on the spring grass that grew in patches here and there, and then started a fire in front of the shed.

There were blankets, straw and dried leaves in plenty under the shed, and as the men were all more or less under the influence of liquor, they felt like turning in.

This they did, one by one, until finally a log was left burning in the fire to keep off the chill as much as possible, and nothing could be heard but the horses as they moved about in search of fresh spots of grass.

Big Bat did not deem it advisable to put anyone on the watch.

He was not afraid of being disturbed that night.

It was just getting daylight in the morning when Little Bill awoke.

He quickly aroused the big leader.

"Come, Bat," said he. "If we're goin' to git anything out of the lode we'd better be at it afore them fellers git over here."

"That's so!" was the reply, and up jumped the ponderous villain.

Two or three of their companions stirred when they talked and moved about, but they soon relapsed in slumber again, and then leaving them as they were, the two made their way in the direction of the shanty.

"I'll look out fur ther watchman," whispered the big leader. "You go over to ther rubbish pile an' see what you kin git."

Little Bill started for a pile that was composed of broken rocks, empty barrels, straw and leaves and empty tin cans that was about a hundred yards from the shanty.

This pile of stuff, though it looked innocent enough, had been put there for a purpose.

Big Bat and his gang were responsible for it being there on that particular spot.

And no wonder!

By accident the villains had discovered a lode of gold that was almost virgin in quality, which started from the surface and proceeded downward at an angle of forty-five degrees for how deep they did not know.

There was nothing strange in the fact that the gang persisted in hanging around there, then.

Ever since the find they had been shipping out pieces of the ore and converting it into money.

They dared not go to work at it openly, for that would have given the thing away, and then they would surely have been driven off the property, as the owner would have stopped at nothing to defeat them in that case.

So they decided that it was best to wait awhile, as they had heard it said that the new owner of the grounds did not take much stock in the property.

The shaft that had been sunk by the former owner had proved a rank failure, and the villains thought that this would be sufficient to cause Melton to let things lie in idleness after he once saw the dismal-looking place.

Probably this was a good thing to do for their benefit, but they forgot to realize that if they had kept away from the place there would be no reason for the owner to send men there to keep the property clear of trespassers.

There was no one in the party who had head enough on him to think of that.

They had such a lust for what they knew was hidden beneath the pile of rubbish that they could not keep away from the place very long at a time.

And that was what had caused Leo Sherwood to advise Melton to have an examination made of the property and force the trespassers to keep off it.

The young man suspected that the villains knew that it was valuable mining land, but he had no real base for his suspicions.

However, he had managed to get along fairly well with the gang of loafers, as he termed them, and had used his own judgment in sending Melton the word he had.

When Little Bill had pulled away some of the debris that formed the heap, he crawled under it into a shallow hole.

It was now light enough for him to see what he was about.

He reached forward and picked up a hatchet and then proceeded to hack and scrape right in the shallow spot.

The result was that in fifteen minutes he had filled his pockets with nuggets and dust until he was weighted down so that he was unable to hardly move.

But he managed to back out of the place and cover it over as he had found it.

Then he managed to rise to his feet and start for the shed where the sleeping gang lay.

As soon as Big Bat saw him moving in that direction he joined him.

"Thunder! You got a load this time, didn't you?"

"You bet!" was the reply. "It come out easier than it did ther last time, too. Do you know, I think we oughter worked all night at it?"

"Jest wait!" was the answer. "We don't want to be in too much of a hurry about this thing. I've been doin' some thinkin' while I was standin' there by ther shanty."

"What have you been thinkin' about?"

"I've come to ther opinion that we ought to move off this property an' locate jest at ther edge of it. Then we kin make out we're workin' there, an' every night we kin make a haul from here. That would be a good idea in case Melton or Young Wild West found out there was plenty of gold here. We'd have somethin', then."

"That's so. Say! S'pose they go to movin' ther pile of rubbish away?"

"That would be mighty bad fur us, fur they would be putty sure to see what was under it."

"We ought to have somethin' fixed so's they'd git downed if they did bother ther pile."

"What do you mean?" asked the big man.

"S'pose we was to put a can or two of nitro-glycerine under ther pile, where we'll be able to keep out of danger of it?"

"I see what you mean! That would be a good idea, fur if they got to monkeyin' with ther pile ther whole thing would be blowed up an' they'd go with it!"

"That's it exactly."

"Well, I reckon we kin put ther stuff there now. There's a few cans of it buried over ther other side of that tree. You remember that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! But don't think I'm goin' to bother with that! Sherwood is ther only man who knows how to git that stuff out without explodin' it. We mustn't 'tempt to git hold of any of that nitro-glycerine. Why, I don't think it is safe to go too near ther place where it is buried, an', if you've noticed it, I always give ther place a wide berth."

"So have I."

"We'll git a can or two of ther stuff in town. Then we'll fix it so a trap will be made out of that innercent-lookin' pile that covers a million dollars' worth of gold!"

## CHAPTER VII:

### THE MINING PROPERTY IS VISITED.

As the clock struck the floor with a jingle and bang, the man who had just entered the door uttered a yell of fright and leaped about two feet into the air.

"What are yez at?" he cried. "Is it a woildeat or a floyin' machine yez are after settin' at me? Lave me be, won't yez? Here I have only been in town a wake, an' I've been kilt siven toimes be blackguards, and now yez want to put ther finishin' touches to me system. Faith! It's a lunatic asylum I will be after goin' to if I stay here much longer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Landlord Smith. "It's ther Irishman that works in ther store, boys. He's as harmless as he can be, an' he can't git used to Western ways. Look out, Mike! There's a rattlesnake under your feet!"

"Ouch!" and up went the man again as though he had stepped upon a bed of live coals with his bare feet.

Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie laughed as loudly as any of the rest.

They could see that the Irishman was a very comical character, though it was quite plain to our hero that he was putting more than half of it on.

"What'll you have, Mike?" asked the proprietor, as soon as the fellow had calmed down a little.

"Faith, I'll have a little drop of the Craythur," was the

quick reply. "We have just been after closin' the store, an' I fale the nade of a drink before I go to bed, so I do."

"All right, Mike," and the liquor was placed before him.

Just then the Irishman gave another jump from the floor.

"Be the tail of the black cat that lived in Tipperary!" he shouted. "It's a clock!"

This raised another laugh, and the Irishman swallowed his drink while it was being indulged in.

"He is not so green as he makes out," said Sherwood to Wild. "He's the smartest worker the storekeeper ever had, so he says, and it is only when the Irishman is out of the store that he cuts up his monkey-shines. He is dead in love with Shining Eyes, the young squaw who waited on the table for you, and she rather returns it, I guess. You will hear him ask Smith's permission to pay his respects to her pretty soon."

At this juncture the sheriff reached over and took Mike by the arm rather roughly.

"Are you ther feller who shot Jem Hughes over in ther Hard-Pan a little while ago?" he asked.

Then the Irishman was taken with a fit of terror.

"No, sor, I was not there, sor! I niver shot a man in my loife! Don't arrist me, sheriff! I'll be after bein' as good as I kin be if you'll only let me be. Don't hang me, sheriff! I am an innocent man! Oh, I wish I was back in Ireland! Why did I iver come out to the West? Won't somewan save me?" and he cast a look that was imploring at the inmates of the room.

"Hold that empty glass you've got in your hand over your head and I will save you," answered Wild.

"All right, sor, I'll be after doin' that pretty quick!" and up went the glass.

Before Mike knew what was coming Wild jerked out his revolver and fired.

The bullet smashed the glass into a hundred pieces!

The Irishman ceased his acting instantly.

"That wur a foine shot, sor," he observed, placing the bottom of the glass on the counter. "I thank yez fur savin' me."

But he was just the least bit nervous now, and he watched our hero keenly.

"Suppose you pick up the clock and hang it where you knocked it from?" said Wild.

"Did I knock it down, sor?" and the Hibernian looked very much surprised.

"Well, it fell down just as you opened the door."

"All roight, thin; I'll put it back," and he quickly did so, using a chair to stand on to do it.

But all the fun was taken out of him now, and he was as meek as a lamb.

But in a minute or two he became satisfied that it was all a joke. There were too many smiling faces about him to make him keep on believing that Wild was a dangerous fellow.



Mike took some money from his pocket and began to count it over.

"I'll trate yez, gentlemen," he said.

"Never mind about that," spoke up Wild. "Go ahead and ask Mr. Smith if he has any objections to your going into the kitchen. That's where you are itching to get, and you know it."

He had heard that Mike was after the squaw.

"Faith, an' how do yez know that?"

"Oh! I had an idea that I saw you in a dream with a pretty squaw on your knee. There is one here in the hotel, and it struck me that she might be the one."

"Bedad! I belave the fairies have been after given yez sicond soight, sor."

"You kin go inside if you want to, Mike," spoke up Smith. "I guess Shining Eyes is waitin' fur you."

"All roight, sor! Good-noight, gentlemen! I hope yez will all be after behavin' yourselves till we mate again."

He went out in a hurry, keeping a sharp watch on Wild as he did so.

Possibly he was afraid another shot would come close to him.

When he was out of the room our two friends and the rest of the inmates of the bar-room had a good laugh.

After awhile Wild and Charlie were shown to their rooms, and, being rather tired, they turned in.

Leo Sherwood remained all night at the hotel, too, and the next morning he found that Wild and the scout were up ahead of him.

"I should have risen earlier," he said. "But, somehow, I overslept myself. I am anxious to get over to the claim and show you around."

"Oh, there is time enough, I suppose. We haven't anything to call us there so early."

"Well, I suppose Mr. Melton will want to go over, and it is quite likely that his daughter will go along, so I must see about getting horses for them."

But it so happened that the capitalist and his daughter did not make their appearance for breakfast until an hour later, and by that time Sherwood had finished his breakfast and made all arrangements.

He had procured a gentle horse equipped with a side-saddle for Marjorie and a fat, lazy-looking bay for her father.

"They don't need anything very speedy, I guess," the young man said.

"If they do I reckon they won't git it out of them critters," retorted Cheyenne Charlie, with a grin.

"I suppose you folks are used to riding swift animals?"

"Well, sorter swift, you know. A feller has got to have somethin' that kin outfoot ther majority of Injun ponies when one is in our line of business. Wild has got ther fastest runnin' horse that I have ever seen. I've seen a good many, too."

"The sorrel I saw in the stable, I'll bet!" exclaimed Sherwood.

"That's right. There's a horse that has saved Wild's

life more'n once, I kin tell you! There ain't another horse in ther world, I think, that knows as much as Spitfire. I've got a good one, which I wouldn't take a lot of money for, but he can't come up to ther stallion. I've had my horse nigh onto two years, an' he's a putty knowin' one, too."

"Well, I have a fine black that is pretty speedy and intelligent, too."

"That's what you need in this part of ther country."

When Melton and Marjorie were ready they came out, and then their mounts were led around by the stableman.

Our friends saw that the young lady was not the least bit afraid to get into the saddle, but it was different with her father.

Though he had spent a large portion of his years in the West, he was no horseman.

"How far is it, did you say, Sherwood?" he asked, nervously, as the young man assisted him into the saddle.

"Only seven miles," was the reply.

"Seven miles! Well, I fancy I shall be a good one if I manage to ride there and back, then."

"Nonsense!" laughed Marjorie. "You will like the saddle, papa, after you have ridden a mile or two."

"Perhaps I will," was the rejoinder, but the tone of voice belied the words.

The gentleman watched Wild and Charlie mount with much interest.

"If I could do it like that I shouldn't worry," he remarked.

"Mr. Sherwood mounts nearly as well," spoke up the daughter, who seemed to be more than pleasant to the young man. "I am sure he has learned considerable about riding."

"Oh, I learned how to ride in Denver," was the reply. "I am very much at home in the saddle."

Then they started off and Bernard Melton's troubles began.

An awkward person who rides horseback for the first time can only conjecture as to how he felt.

His daughter laughed outright at him several times during the trip, but she refrained from doing so, and did their best to tell him how to take it easy.

When they finally reached the mining property, Melton declared that he wished he had never heard of the place.

"The horseback ride has put the finishing touches to it!" declared the girl. "Oh, papa! Suppose it should turn out that the property is worth a whole lot of money! Then you will be sorry you talked this way."

"I don't care how much it is worth," was the reply.

"This is the last time I am ever going to ride horseback." They all laughed at this.

But when Melton dismounted and began walking around he got in a better humor.

Sherwood took them all over the property, and when they came back to the shanty where they had left their horses the capitalist asked Young Wild West what he thought of it.

"Well, it looks to me as though it has never been tried very much," was the reply. "There needs to be some digging and boring done, I should judge. You are sure there is nothing down the shaft that amounts to anything?" and Wild looked at Sherwood.

"If there was it is hardly likely the men who owned it would have quit it and sold out," said the young man. "As near as I can find out the vein they struck when they put the shaft down only ran a little way, and then they became disgusted. There is the derrick and other tools to work with, if you think it would be advisable to put on a gang of men."

"I don't think that way yet. I will probably make up my mind as to that before the week is out."

"It is Thursday now," spoke up Melton.

"Yes, sir, I have just three days to find out whether it will pay to go ahead and work the property."

"Well, if you can find out in that time you are a good one."

"Oh! He is a good one, all right!" declared Charlie.

"Never mind, now," said our hero. "I don't know any more about prospecting than you do."

Sherwood now asked the watchman if the bad gang had been around, and received the reply that they had been there early that morning, but had not been seen since.

"Was Big Bat among them?" queried Wild.

"Yes, he was here. You kin always tell him, no matter how far they are away from you."

"Did they have anything to say to you?"

"Not a word. They've got a shed over there," and he pointed around an angle of rock. "They may be there now."

Wild started in the direction indicated, and all followed him but Melton, who remained to talk to the watchman.

When our friends got around the turn they saw the shed, and also that there was no one to be seen there.

But they thought they would take a walk to it and see how things looked there.

"I have never been in the shed," remarked Sherwood, "because I did not want to get into trouble with the men. I knew they would be apt to pick a row with me if they caught me nosing around what they call their quarters."

"It seems rather queer that they should persist in hanging around here unless they knew that there was something valuable here," observed our hero. "It certainly is not a very good place to put up at."

"It ain't for nothin' that they hang around, you kin bet on that!" said Cheyenne Charlie.

Marjorie was as curious as any of the rest to see the interior of the shed, so she stepped up close to it and peered in.

It was anything but clean there, so she soon stepped back.

"They are not very neat housekeepers, I should say," she remarked.

After satisfying themselves that Big Bat's gang was not there, they turned and walked back to the shanty.

When they got there they were surprised to see the watchman lying on the ground.

Young Wild West bounded to the prostrate man like a shot.

A single glance showed him that the man had been hit on the head by a blunt instrument, and that he was unconscious, if not dead.

Melton had disappeared!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE WONDERFUL SCHEME OF THE BAD GANG.

Big Bat and Little Bill aroused their sleeping companions, and then all hands had a talk over matters.

"Why can't we git a can of nitro-glycerine from out of ther shaft?" said one of them, when the subject of setting a trap in the pile of rubbish was brought up. "I was down there only a few days ago, an' I seen one that must have been left there when ther other people abandoned it. It was placed in a niche, an' there was the wire there that was to set it off, too, only it had been cut."

"I reckon if that's ther case we kin git ther can," observed the big leader.

"I'll go an' git it," the fellow who had made the proposition exclaimed. "You fellers kin go out in ther view of ther man in ther shanty an' keep his attention your way, while I go down. It is easy enough to do, 'cause I kin let myself down with ther block an' fall an' not make a bit of noise."

"You're a good one, Burt!" nodded Little Bill. "Go ahead an' git ther nitro-glycerine."

Burt, as he was called, looked as proud as a peacock when he received such a complimentary remark from the smartest man in the gang, as the little villain was said to be.

"Oh, I know a thing or two, I reckon," he remarked.

The plant was at once put into operation.

But it was hardly necessary to keep a watch on the man in the shanty, for he was sound asleep yet, and Burt went down the shaft and got the can of dangerous explosive without the least bit of trouble.

As the man had often handled the stuff, having been a miner for a number of years, he was not a bit afraid of it.

While the rest stood around the watchman's shanty he went with Big Bat and Little Bill and placed the can under the heap of rubbish just so it could be seen among the tin cans at the edge, and so it would not have to be interfered with when they went to take more nuggets and dust from the pocket.

"There!" exclaimed Big Bat. "I reckon if they start in to shovel up ther pile an' cart it away somethin' will happen," and he laughed harshly and bent back his giant frame.

Just as they had finished laying the trap, as they chose

to call it, and were idling about the place, as they had been wont to do, the watchman woke up and came out of the shanty.

He said nothing to them, nor they to him.

He was afraid of them, and they thought it best not to interfere with him, so long as he did not get officious and order them off the property.

When the villains got back to the shed they divided the nuggets and dust among them as equally as they could.

Cropsey, the proprietor of the Hard-Pan saloon, was an excellent judge of ore, and he bought all they brought to him at his own figure.

The man was fast getting rich in this way, but he did not let his customers know it, and ran the saloon as a blind.

As might be supposed, the men he bought the nuggets and dust of were mostly thieves.

But that made no difference to Cropsey.

He disposed of the stuff at the smelting plant in the town; sometimes he cleared as much as a thousand dollars in a week by his dealings.

In the past month Big Bat and his gang had sold him nearly twenty thousand dollars' worth of nuggets and dust, and he had made fully forty per cent by the transactions.

That gave the villains plenty of money to spend for drink and to gamble with, and that was about all they cared for.

But they did not want to lose the good thing they had been having since they discovered the vein on the Melton property.

They figured that there was easily a million dollars lying there, and they also were quite positive that they could get it about all out, even if the situation remained as it had been for the past couple of months.

If Melton concluded to abandon work there it would be so much the better for them.

"Well, what do you think, boys, shall we ride back to town an' git our breakfast, or shall we hang around here an' see what them fellers are goin' to do when they come down? They'll be along in a couple of hours, I reckon," said Big Bat, scratching his head.

"I think it would be a good idea to hide around here somewhere an' not let 'em see us," suggested Little Bill.

"That's what I think," spoke up Burt, who now felt as though he was entitled to say something, since he had solved the nitro-glycerine question.

After a little discussion it was decided to stay there.

They knew just where to place their horses so they would not be apt to be seen by anyone, and they soon had them there.

Then they waited patiently for Young Wild West to put in appearance.

Every man of them feared the young deadshot, and they did not want to get in any trouble with him.

It was a rather long wait, and the villains were getting pretty hungry, but at length our friends came in sight.

The gang watched them from their hiding-place, and

when Big Bat saw that no attention was paid to the heap of rubbish at all, he felt pretty easy.

Presently he was struck with an idea.

He thought it was a brilliant one, too.

"S'pose we could get hold of Melton, or his daughter, boys?" he said. "We could hold 'em fur a ransom, an' make Young Wild West agree to most any terms we was to make. What do you think of it?"

Of course this struck them as being an excellent idea.

They told him so.

"We'll have to think up a way to do it, then," the big man observed.

By and by, when the rest all went away, and Melton remained by the shanty to talk to the watchman, Burt popped up again.

"There's a chance to git ther mine owner now," he said. "We could easy sneak over there while ther rest of 'em are away, an' we could knock that watchman down an' git away with Melton in no time!"

"I reckon we could. Come on, four or five of you!" and Big Bat started to put the suggestion into execution without any further debate.

"We may as well make all we kin out of them fellers," he said. "For there's no tellin' what will happen a little later on."

They had an excellent opportunity to creep up behind the shanty, since the rocks and boulders were plentifully scattered about.

Swiftly and carefully they made their way along and soon they were right upon the two men.

The backs of the mine owner and the watchman were toward them, and with great precision three of the villains sprang forward.

The watchman was felled by a blow from the butt of a rifle and Melton was seized and choked into silence.

Then the scoundrels looked around, and, seeing no signs of Young Wild West and the others, they ran hurriedly back to their hiding-place among the rocks.

Melton was a badly scared man when he saw the muzzles of half a dozen revolvers thrust in his face, and he did not struggle a bit or attempt to utter an outcry.

"We ain't goin' to kill you—not if you give us what we want," remarked Big Bat, as the process of binding and gagging the prisoner was on. "Jest take it cool, old man. I reckon you'd better have stayed in Denver an' let us people alone out here. We're goin' to take you to a place where no one kin ever find you, an' if you agree to pay us, say a hundred thousand dollars, we will let you go. You've got ther money an' we've got you."

The more the big scoundrel talked in this strain the more he thought he had done a great thing in capturing the mine owner.

Here was a chance to get hold of a big pile of money without doing a stroke of work to get it.

And not the least thing would be done to them for it, either, as they would make it a point to have that in the agreement to set the prisoner free.

It looked very rosy to Big Bat just then.

But it also occurred to him that it would not do for them to hang around there.

So at a word from him the prisoner was carried to the horses, and then, mounting, they rode slowly over a well-beaten trail until they were satisfied that they were out of hearing, and then they let their horses go at a gallop.

In less than half an hour they had reached a deserted mine, and down the shaft their prisoner was lowered.

One of the men went down and placed him where he would be out of sight, in case anyone looked in, and then they rode by a round-about way back to town.

The terrified capitalist was thirty feet below the surface of the ground, bound and gagged!

But the villains did not care for that.

"I reckon it won't hurt him to stay there a few hours," said Big Bat. "We ought to be able to make terms with Young Wild West an' ther rest afore night. Then one of us kin go an' let Melton sign ther agreement an' ther order fur ther money on ther express company's bank, an' as soon as we git it we'll let him go. Bill, you're ther one to draw up ther agreement. Do it, an' be sure you make it good an' strong. It's got to be signed by Young Wild West, as well as Melton. This is about ther best day's work we've done in a long time, an' it all come so sudden, too!"

"That's right," said Little Bill. "We are about to ther top of ther heap, I calculate."

The twelve members had assembled in the back room of the Hard-Pan saloon, and they were now very jubilant.

Paper and pen and ink were procured, and then Little Bill sat down to draw up the agreement that was to make a lot of money for them.

"I think we had better make two of 'em," he said. "One for Young Wild West an' ther rest to sign, an' ther other one fur Melton."

"All right. Go ahead. You know more about that kind of business than we do," remarked Big Bat.

It took the little man a full hour to get what he wanted to write down in the proper shape—or what he thought was the proper shape.

He had covered the ground well, and he thought there could not possibly be a loophole for the people they expected to deal with to escape from.

The ransom they decided upon was fifty thousand dollars.

And after it was paid they were to be let alone and not to be prosecuted in any shape or form.

Also they were to have the privilege of building a shanty on the Melton property in any place they saw fit, and were to occupy it jointly or singly, so long as it did not interfere with the workings of the shaft already sunk.

This was a great clause in the document, so Big Bat thought.

"They'll think we're all right, boys, when we build our shanty right where ther heap of rubbish is," he remarked. "We'll tell 'em that we ain't hogs, an' that we don't want

to bother with any ground they might want to use. Oh! This agreement is great!"

It certainly was great, but the leader of the gang, nor any of the rest, for that matter, never once thought that there was a possibility of it not being signed.

They had Melton hard and fast at the bottom of the shaft of a deserted mine.

They knew that much.

And they could not possibly see why the daughter and Young Wild West would not be willing to agree to almost anything to get him out of his predicament.

But they did not know Young Wild West thoroughly yet.

They were destined to, though, before they got through with him.

The villains had a rather late breakfast that morning, and after they had eaten it and converted the nuggets and dust into cash they started in to make merry.

There was something yet to be done that Big Bat was afraid to undertake himself, and that was to go to Young Wild West with the terms of the ransom they demanded.

He thought it would be a good idea to get false courage into the gang before he picked a man to do this.

Shortly before noon he concluded that it would not do to wait any longer.

He broached the subject, and the moment he did there was a deathly silence.

No one wanted to be the one to go to Young Wild West.

Finally Little Bill suggested that they draw lots to see who it was to be.

This was unanimously agreed upon.

Twelve matches were produced and the brimstone of one was broken off.

Then Cropsey was called in to hold them, after mixing them up.

He did not know what the drawing was for, but he did as they wanted him, as a matter of course.

They all drew rather gingerly, and it fell to the lot of the man who had suggested it to go and tell Young Wild West that the gang had Melton hidden away, and that they would kill him if their terms were not agreed upon.

Little Bill was the man!

He was pretty nervy and promptly went out to fulfill his duty.

He went to the shed for his horse, when he happened to look out in the street.

The villain gave a violent start, for there was Melton riding past!

## CHAPTER IX.

THINGS GO A LITTLE WRONG WITH THE BAD GANG.

Young Wild West was much surprised when he saw that Melton was not there.

The watchman had been knocked down from behind, and the fact that the mine owner was nowhere to be seen was evidence that he had been spirited away in some mysterious manner.

And this being the case, who could have done it but Big Bat's gang?

That was the thought that flashed through the mind of our hero in an instant.

"Look after the watchman, Sherwood!" he exclaimed. "Come, Charlie! We must find Mr. Melton!"

"Right you are!" was the scout's reply.

One quick glance sufficed to show Young Wild West that the villains who had knocked the watchman senseless and then kidnapped the capitalist could have approached from but one direction.

That was from the clump of rocks back of the shanty.

Like a hound on the scent, he hastened in that direction, picking his way along and looking sharply for some signs of a trail.

As he reached a short, steep hill, where the ground was a trifle soft, he saw footprints.

They were fresh ones, too, and then, pointing to the evidences of someone having gone that way, he said in a whisper to Charlie:

"I guess it won't take us long to find him. It is what I call a pretty bungling piece of work."

"Big Bat was here, I reckon," retorted the scout, pointing to a footprint that must have been made by a No. 12 boot. "Them's ther ones, you kin bet your life!"

"Oh! I was positive of that the instant I realized what had happened. Well, now let us go cautiously about this, for it may pay us better in the end than if we started in to drop the scoundrels the moment we see them."

"Jest as you say, Wild."

They reached the top of the little hill just in time to hear the sounds made by walking horses.

"Run and get Spitfire and your horse, Charlie, and come around the other way," said Wild. "I will follow them on foot until you come."

The scout hastened back without a word.

He saw how he could get around the other side of the rocky rise by making a short cut past the shed.

Wild kept right on, and soon succeeded in reaching a point where he caught a glimpse of the gang.

He gave a nod of satisfaction when he saw that the bound form of a man was on one of the horses with one of the gang.

"You poor, miserable fools!" he exclaimed under his breath. "I wonder what you hope to accomplish by this, anyway?"

It was now quite an easy matter to follow the gang, and just as he heard them start their horses at a gallop Charlie came along riding his own horse and leading the sorrel.

Wild hastened to meet him, and the next minute he was in the saddle and leading the way over the trail of the rascally gang.

"Be careful!" he warned the scout. "We don't want to

get too close to them. They don't intend to harm Melton, you may depend upon that. We will follow them to where they take him, and then it will be time enough to get him free."

"That's right," nodded Charlie.

Cautiously the two made their way, keeping far enough behind the band of men so as to not be seen or heard by them.

When they finally saw them halt near the abandoned mine Wild instantly realized what they meant to do.

Cheyenne Charlie was eager to get in a fight with the gang, but he was restrained by our hero, who was cool as he ever was in his life.

From the cover of a clump of trees they saw all that the villains did.

When they finally rode off and were out of hearing Wild got up from the bushes and mounted his horse.

"Come on!" he said. "We will get Melton out of his predicament and take him back to his daughter. Now I guess we have a sufficient cause to make a war on these villains. We will see what sort of stuff Sheriff Goode is when we get back to town."

"An' if he don't want to take a hand in ther game we'll do it ourselves."

"That's right, but we've got to have a place to lock them up, in case they don't all die with their boots on."

"Of course. But don't think that many of 'em is goin' to die with their boots on, if they kin prevent it. They're about as cowardly a lot as I've ever come across."

"Oh, they could put up a dangerous game if they were a mind to stick."

"I s'pose they could. But they won't stick, not after a couple of 'em goes under."

"You can't tell. A rat will make a fight when it is cornered, you know."

"But they ain't rats; they're a lot of measly coyotes!"

The scout was bound to have his way about it just then.

The two now rode over to the mouth of the shaft.

Wild dismounted and uncoiled his lariat.

"I'll go down," he said. "Keep a sharp watch, for the gang may change their minds and come back for something."

"Oh, I'll be on ther watch," was the reply. "Go ahead."

The scout held one end of the lariat and Young Wild West went down the shaft in a hurry.

He found the bound and gagged capitalist instantly.

"It is all right, Mr. Melton," he said. "Don't be alarmed."

Then he removed the gag and found the man to be in a very nervous state.

He could hardly speak at first, but in a couple of minutes he had recovered sufficiently to utter his thanks.

"Don't mention it," Wild said. "It was such a plain case that they could not keep you away from us very long. Just take it easy now. I am going to let Charlie haul you up."



The next minute Melton was ascending with the rope tied under his arms.

He was too weak from fear and excitement to do much to help himself.

But Cheyenne Charlie was a powerful man, and it was but child's play for him to haul the man up.

When he was landed safely the scout let the lariat down and then hauled our hero out of the shaft.

Melton was as pale as a ghost, but he was gradually becoming calmer.

"I have had quite enough of my mining property in this vicinity," he said. "I will sell it at the first offer I get."

"Don't be too hasty in doing that," Wild advised. "Just wait a few days."

"I never want to see it again."

"Probably you feel that way now."

"I do feel that way, and I always shall."

"But when Big Bat and his gang are punished and out of the way you may feel different."

"I will feel different, but not as far as the property is concerned. I wouldn't change my mind on that point if I were to see a million dollars in gold suddenly disclosed at my very feet."

Wild smiled, thinking that he would surely change his mind in a case of that kind.

He took him on his horse with him and then they hastened back to where they had left Sherwood and Marjorie with the unconscious watchman.

The watchman had come to his senses and was leaning against the shanty.

In the door of the shanty the girl sat weeping on a bench, and Sherwood stood near her, revolver in hand, trying to comfort her.

When the young man heard our friends returning he must have thought the villains were coming, for he raised his weapon as though to fire at them.

"It is all right, Sherwood!" Wild called out. "We found him, and he isn't hurt a particle."

Marjorie sprang to her feet and uttered a cry of joy when she heard this.

As soon as the father dropped from the horse she sprang into his arms.

"I am so glad you are safe, papa!" she cried.

"I had an awful experience, Marjorie!" he answered.

"I guess we have both had enough of this, so we will start for Denver to-morrow morning. If I can't sell the property by that time I will give it away."

"Nonsense! Don't talk that way, papa."

But he persisted in talking that way, however, and it was not until they got him inside the shanty and fixed a place for him to lie down that he ceased to talk.

The watchman was not hurt as badly as Wild had thought at first, and he was made as comfortable as possible.

It was some time before Melton got up and expressed a desire to get back to the hotel.

Young Wild West felt that it would not be policy to leave the property alone now, so he suggested that Charlie escort him back to the town, and then bring the sheriff and some deputies to arrest the villains when they put in appearance, for he had no idea that they had gone back to the town after kidnapping the man.

Melton wanted Marjorie to go, too, but she refused.

"I will go back with Mr. West and the sheriff," she said. "It may not be safe for me to go now."

The father gave in to her, and a few minutes later he started off with the scout.

Young Wild West knew why the girl did not want to go just then.

He had noticed that a very warm friendship had sprung up between her and Sherwood.

"If I had sent him with her father she would have been only too glad to go," he thought. "Well, I could hardly trust him to go, for it may be that they get into trouble before they arrive there, and in that case Charlie will be the right man in the right place."

There were some provisions in the shanty, and when noon came Marjorie, notwithstanding the fact that she was attired in very costly and stylish garments, insisted on getting the dinner ready.

Leo Sherwood offered to help her and his services were promptly accepted.

The meal was cooked and they all ate it with a relish.

It was in the neighborhood of one o'clock when Wild detected the sounds of horses' hoofs.

A number of horsemen were approaching the mouth of the gulch. He could tell that readily.

But were they friends or foes? That was the question.

It struck him that they might be foes, so he held his rifle in readiness.

Suddenly it occurred to him to close the door and let the shanty have the appearance of being unoccupied.

No sooner thought of than done.

Whoever the horsemen were, they halted before they came into view.

That made our hero feel certain that they were foes.

But he was not the least bit worried.

If it was Big Bat and his gang he was satisfied to meet them and fight it out.

In about five minutes a man suddenly appeared on foot.

He was heading straight for the shanty, though he appeared to be somewhat cautious.

It was no other than Little Bill.

When he had seen Melton riding past the saloon as he was in the act of mounting his horse to go and find Young Wild West he was thunderstruck.

But he recovered himself very quickly and went back into the saloon.

He told his companions that Melton had escaped, and that he had just gone past with the partner of Young Wild West, and then there was a rush for the windows.

The gang soon saw that Little Bill had made no mistake.

They could not understand how it had happened. Big Bat began to grow very nervous. "I reckon we'd better git out of here," he said. "Where are yer goin'?" asked one of the men. "To our headquarters on the Melton property," he answered. "We may as well stick it out now. If it comes to a fight, an' we find that we're goin' to git ther worst of it we kin give in to 'em an' git off ther property, can't we?"

"Yes!" they cried.

"Well, come on, then."

They mounted and did not let the grass grow under their horses' hoofs in getting back.

They rode around to the shed without coming in sight of the shanty, and then Little Bill was appointed to go to the shanty, and if there was anyone there to make terms with them the best he could.

If there was no one there he was to call them and they would make a trip to the rubbish pile and get away with some more of the ore that was in the rich vein.

Little Bill approached the door of the shanty rather timidly and gave a knock.

Wild opened the door, thrusting his revolver under the man's nose as he did so.

"Come right in and sit down!" he said. "I guess I'll hold you till the sheriff comes!"

## CHAPTER X.

### LITTLE BILL TELLS ALL HE KNOWS.

Little Bill acted as though he would like to have the earth open and swallow him just then.

The steady hand of Young Wild West held the revolver within an inch of his nose and the flash in the handsome, dark eyes of the boy told the villain only too well what he must expect if he attempted to run away.

"I give in!" he exclaimed. "Don't shoot!"

"I guess you do give in, you treacherous rascal!" replied Wild. "What are you doing here, anyhow?"

A sudden idea popped into the head of the little man.

He realized that he had got himself in a very bad fix by coming to the shanty, and he wanted to get out of it.

He was an accomplished prevaricator, so he would have no difficulty in finding a story to tell that would suit his purpose.

He had the papers he had drawn in his pocket, and he decided to work something on the strength of them.

"I come over to see you on a little business," replied Little Bill, nerving himself and doing a lot of thinking at the same time.

"You came here to see me?"

"Yes, you fur one."

"What do you want?"

"I want your signature to a little document I have in my pocket."

Wild looked keenly at the villain, but he was playing his part well, and appeared to be in earnest.

"What does the document apply to?" our hero asked, after a rather lengthy pause.

"Well, I suppose you know that Melton can't be found anywhere?"

"You mean that your gang took him and put him down an old shaft, don't you?"

"Yes, we done that," was the cool reply. "Then you fellers got him out, didn't you?"

"Something like that."

"Well, now we've got him ag'in!"

"This was the lie the villain had been working around to tell, and he told it so earnestly and with just the least tinge of triumph in his voice that Wild could not help believing him.

"We've got him ag'in," he went on to say, "an' he's in sich a good place this time that none of you fellers would be able to find him if you was to look fur him from now till doomsday!"

"Oh! Oh!" cried Marjorie, excitedly. "You villain, you! How dare you come here and tell us that?"

"I come here to see what you are goin' to do about it. Ther only way to save his life an' git him back is to pay over some money and agree not to bother us hereafter."

Young Wild West was undecided what to do.

He thought there was a strong likelihood of the story being true.

But he did not want to let him know that he thought that way.

He concluded to question him and try to catch him in a lie.

"Where did you get hold of Mr. Melton the second time?" he queried.

"Right at ther outskirts of Virginia City," was the quick reply.

Little Bill, thought he was making excellent progress now, and he was encouraged to tell a good, plausible tale.

"Was there anyone with him at the time?"

"Sure there was. Ther tall feller with ther black mustache was with him."

"What did he do when you captured Mr. Melton?"

"He shot one of us dead an' wounded another. But a bullet in his shoulder brought him down. He'll live, though, an' if you want to save his life an' git a doctor to him you'd better sign the paper I've got."

Wild was just the least bit anxious now.

But he could hardly make himself believe that the villain was telling the truth.

"Let me see the paper," he said.

Little Bill brought out both of the documents he had written in the Hard-Pan saloon.

Our hero read them over carefully.

The wording in them was much better than he would have expected to see from such a source.

"You want me to sign this document, then?"

As Wild asked the question he looked the man squarely in the eyes.

"Yes."

"Well, I won't do it!"

As the words left his lips Wild pushed the man's head back against the partition and pressed the muzzle of his revolver against his temple.

"Now, then, you've got to tell the truth, or I will shoot you!" he exclaimed. "Where is Mr. Melton and Cheyenne Charlie?"

"I—I—don't—don't know!" was the gasping reply. "Don't shoot me! I'll admit I was lyin'. We ain't got Melton at all! I only said that to try an' save myself, that's all. We had these papers made out afore we knew you'd got him out of ther shaft. Let me go, will yer? If you do I'll never show up around Virginia City ag'in!"

The face of Marjorie brightened wonderfully when she heard this from the man's lips.

Her father was safe, after all!

Leo Sherwood looked at Young Wild West in admiration.

He thought it was really wonderful how the boy had forced the scoundrel to tell the truth.

"I'll let you go!" said Wild, in answer to the plea of Little Bill, "but it won't be just now. Sherwood, just take his weapons from him and tie him up, will you?"

The young man hastened to obey.

Marjorie took the weapons and laid them on a bench at the further end of the room.

When Little Bill was in a helpless condition and seated on a three-legged stool that happened to be there, Wild faced him once more.

"See here," he said, in his cool and easy way, "you value your life pretty highly, I suppose?"

"You won't kill me, will yer?" was the reply.

"You can readily imagine how it would feel to have a rope tightened around your neck while your feet were kicking in the air six feet above the ground, can't you?" went on Wild, paying no attention to what he said.

"Don't talk that way! I ain't done nothin' to deserve it!" cried the villain, becoming terrified.

"And when you felt yourself going to the great beyond, as the noose got tighter and tighter, and your neck stretched longer and longer, you might think of the bad deeds you had committed while on earth. You would, wouldn't you?"

"Yes! Yes! But don't! Give me a chance, won't you?"

"The only possible chance you have got is to tell everything you know about this property, and let us know why your gang persists in hanging around here."

"I'll do that!"

"Well, go ahead, then."

"An' you'll let me go if I tell all I know?"

"I didn't say so. I simply said that the only chance you would have would be to tell all you knew."

"Well, ther reason us fellers hang around here is because we git our livin' off ther property."

"You do, eh?"

"Yes."

"How is that?"

"Oh! It's easy enough. There's plenty of good payin' quartz an' dirt to be picked up, if you only know where to look fur 'em."

"That is true enough. So that is why you persisted in hanging out here?"

"Yes, that's ther only reason."

"What did you knock that man down for and then seize Mr. Melton and take him off?" queried our hero, pointing to the watchman, who sat on a bench with his head bound up, taking in all that was going on.

"We done that because we thought it would be a good idea, that's all."

"You thought it would be a good idea?"

"Yes, you kin tell by ther papers you took from me what our idea was."

"Well, I believe you are telling the truth in that. Now, where are Mr. Melton and Cheyenne Charlie?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in town, I s'pose. We seen 'em go pas' ther Hard-Pan saloon."

"Oh! Were you there then?"

"Yes. We went right back to town as soon as we put ther feller down ther abandoned mine. How did you find him an' git him out so quick, anyhow?"

Little Bill's fear had left him to a certain extent, and he was now becoming inquisitive.

"We saw you put him there. That was easy enough. You poor fools thought you were doing something smart, but you left such a plain trail that we could not help finding it. Your tracks when you went up the hill back of the shanty showed plainly where you had come from and where you had gone. Big Bat has such big feet that he should be careful where he walks when he is up to any mischief."

The prisoner looked at Wild in surprise.

"I reckon you can't be fooled much," he observed.

"Not by such people as you."

"Well, what are you goin' to do with me now? My gang is back there by ther shed waitin' fur me to come back an' report."

"Let them wait."

"They might take it in their heads to come an' look fur me if I don't show up putty soon."

"Well, let them come!"

"You'd shoot, I s'pose?"

"I rather think so."

"An' they'd shoot back, an' then ther young lady would be apt to get hit."

"Big Bat and his crowd won't do much shooting after I drop three or four of them."

Little Bill shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

He was doing his level best to thiuk of a way to gain his freedom.

Suddenly he thought of the can of nitro-glycerine.

"Say!" he said suddenly, "if I tell you somethin' that

might be ther means of keepin' you an' your whole party from bein' blown to pieces, will you let me go?"

Wild looked hard at him.

But there was naught but a mixture of eagerness and earnestness depicted in the expression that was on his face.

"I mean what I say," said the prisoner. "There's a trap set on this property, an' not more'n a hundred yards from this here shanty, that you people are liable to walk right into at any minute. An' if you do it will sartinly be ther last of you, because it's nitro-glycerine that'll do ther business."

Young Wild West was the only one who did not turn pale when this was said.

There was hardly any doubt that the man was telling the truth, though, and our hero thought it might be a good idea to let him go.

He was pretty certain that Cheyenne Charlie would be along in a few minutes with the sheriff, anyhow.

"If you can prove to me that there is any nitro-glycerine around here that is likely to explode and blow us up, I will give you your liberty, under the condition that you promise to leave this part of the country and never come back again," he said to him.

"I'll agree to that!" was the quick reply. "I'll take your word, for I believe you ain't one to say a thing an' then go back on your word."

"Well, where is the trap you spoke of?"

"Under ther pile of rubbish out there."

"There is a can of nitro-glycerine in that pile of stuff, then?"

"Yes."

"Who put it there?"

"Me an' Big Bat, an' a feller called Burt, who was ther one who got it out of ther shaft, where it must have been left by t'other people what was here."

"There was a can of ther stuff down ther shaft," spoke up the watchman, looking apprehensively in the direction the pile of rubbish was located.

"Well, it ain't there now," said Little Bill. "It's right where I said it was, an' it is right in plain sight from ther door of this shanty, too!"

Wild pulled his knife from his belt and quickly cut the prisoner's bonds.

"Show it to me!" he said, leading him forward and opening the door.

"There it is!" he exclaimed, pointing to the dangerous explosive. "It's ther shiny can that's among ther lot of rusty ones. You kin see that's it bigger than them old empty ones, too!"

"All right. You can go. But remember what I told you!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### DRAWING TO A FOCUS.

Bernard Melton was heartily glad when he reached the hotel with Cheyenne Charlie.

His experience since he had started from Denver to visit the mining land he had bought had not been a very pleasant one.

His capture by the bad gang had been the crowning event to disgust him with the whole business.

Though not much of a drinking man, the rich capitalist called for the best the house afforded when he followed the scout into the bar-room, limping from the effects of his horseback ride.

"I feel the need of something stimulating, Mr. Smith," Melton said. "Ah! You have cognac, eh? Just the thing!"

"I think I need a little, too," remarked Charlie, as the bottle was pushed toward him. "I like a drink once in awhile."

"Well, there's mighty few places this side of ther Missouri that keeps sich stuff as that," observed the landlord. "I try to run a first-class hotel, an' my liquors can't very well be beat."

"It is very good, Mr. Smith," retorted Melton, smacking his lips. "I think I will have another, as I have had an awful experience, and my nerves need settlin'."

He took another stiff horn, and Charlie followed his example.

Then the mine owner excused himself and went to his room.

Cheyenne Charlie was now just in the right humor to fight a bad gang, or anything from a Digger Indian to a band of outlaws.

"Where's ther sheriff?" he asked of the hotel man.

"Over in ther supply store, most likely," was the reply.

"When he ain't to be found in here, he's generally there."

"All right. I'll go an' look fur him. I reckon things is goin' to hum down on ther Melton property putty soon!"

"What's ther trouble down there?"

But the scout didn't wait to answer him.

He slammed the door and made a beeline for the supply store, which was not far away.

When he opened the door the first one he met was Mike, the Irishman, who had made so much fun at the hotel the night before.

Charlie was in a hurry, and he was heading for the back part of the store, where he saw a number of men gathered.

The Irishman tried to get out of his way, but succeeded in stepping right in front of him.

The result was that they collided, and as Mike had a ham and box full of eggs in his hands at the time, there was quite a mess on the floor in no time.

"What's ther matter with you, you clumsy fool?" cried Charlie. "Why didn't you keep out of my way?"

"Faith, I'm no clumsy fool!" retorted the Irishman, angered because the eggs had been smashed. "It is you who are after bein' ther clumsy fool, bedad!"

"I am, hey?"

Then the scout caught him by the neck and thigh and tossed him over the counter.

He did not stop to note the damage done, but hastened

to the rear of the store, for he saw Sheriff Goode sitting there.

"Sheriff, you're wanted down at ther Melton mine at once!" he called out.

"Is that a fact?" retorted the official, springing to his feet. "Do you s'pose there'll be anything in it fur me if I go over there?"

"I reckon there will. Big Bat's gang got hold of Melton an' run him off an' put him down an old shaft an' went away an' left him there. If we hadn't found out which way they went, by good luck, ther man would have been in a mighty bad way by this time. Young Wild West is down there, with Melton's daughter an' Sherwood an' ther watchman, who got a bad knock on ther head by ther gang when they captured Melton. There's goin' to be trouble down there, an' Young Wild West says as how you better come down there with some men an' take a hand in it."

"Young Wild West says so, does he? Well, I reckon I'd better go, then. Come on, boys!"

Half a dozen men sprang to their feet and followed him to the door, just as Mike appeared from behind the counter with a paddle full of lard.

It was the Irishman's intention to throw the greasy stuff on the scout to pay him back for being thrown over the counter, but his boss started to interfere and managed to get into the way just as the lard was thrown.

The boss got it right in the face, and with a merry shout, Cheyenne Charlie started for the door, while the boss scolded Mike.

But when he reached it he paused and thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a five-dollar goldpiece.

"There!" said he, tossing it on the counter. "I reckon that will pay for the damage done."

When he got outside he explained the situation to the sheriff, who promised to go over and take a hand in the game.

The fact of the matter was that the sheriff was a little afraid of Big Bat and his men, but he had seen enough of Young Wild West to make him believe that the boy was a winner, and he now felt that it was his chance to put an end to the doings of the lawless gang.

It was half an hour before he got ready to start, though, and during that time Cheyenne Charlie was on pins and needles.

He was worried for fear that the villains might attack the shanty and do some damage.

The sheriff had seven men besides himself, so Charlie made the ninth, and the scout was satisfied that they would prove to be more than a match for the gang, if they happened to meet them on the way.

Charlie stood in front of the supply store when the posse rode up, and just as he was about to mount his horse Mike came running out of the building.

"Don't have no hard falings ag'in me, mister!" he called out. "I didn't mane to do what I was after doin' whin you come in ther store."

"All right," laughed the scout, and then he swung himself into the saddle and rode off with the sheriff and his deputies.

They rode along at a swift pace, for Charlie was anxious to get there, feeling certain that Big Bat was in the near vicinity of the shanty where he had left Wild and the rest.

When they were within a mile of the place a horseman was seen coming toward them.

"Who's that, I wonder?" remarked Sheriff Goode.

"It looks like one of Big Bat's gang," replied a deputy.

"An' it is, too!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "It's ther measly coyote they call Little Bill."

"Hanged if it ain't!" admitted the sheriff. "I wonder what he's up to?"

"We'll soon find out," was Charlie's reply. "If he goes to try to git away from us I'll bring him down with my rifle."

But Little Bill was not trying to get away from them.

The fellow had made straight for his companions after Wild let him go, and after he had told them the situation he had declared that the best thing to do was to quit the game and leave the county.

Big Bat did not agree with him on this point.

And as Burt did not, either, the rest of the men thought that way.

After no little argument, Little Bill told them he was going to cut loose from them, and they had told him to go ahead.

He had just left them now, and when he saw the party riding toward him he determined to face them and make the best of it.

"Halt, you measly coyote!" called out Cheyenne Charlie, as he rode up.

"That's jest what I was goin' to do," was the reply. "You needn't bother about keepin' me covered; I'm all right. I've cut Big Bat an' his crowd, fur good an' all."

"That sounds good, but how much truth is there in it?" retorted Charlie.

"It's all ther truth. Wait till you see Young Wild West, an' he'll tell you all about it. I promised him I would leave here an' never show up ag'in, an' I'm goin' to keep my word."

"If you do it will be ther first time you ever did tell ther truth," spoke up the sheriff.

"Maybe it will, sheriff. But it's a fact, what I'm tellin' you."

"What made you promise Young Wild West anything like that?" asked Charlie.

"'Cause he had me hard an' fast, an' it was a ease of bein' hung or git clear. I told him all I knowed about ther Melton property, an' how there was a trap set with nitro-glycerine to blow you all up, an' showed him where it was, an' then he agreed to let me go, after I'd given him my promise to quit ther county an' stay out of it hereafter."

"A trap to blow us up, hey?" said the scout.



"Yes, but it can't be did now, for Young Wild West knows all about it."

The sheriff looked a trifle uneasy.

"I don't like nitro-glycerine," he remarked.

"I reckon not," observed Little Bill, with a faint grin. "No one does much, I reckon."

"See here!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie; "you may be tellin' ther truth, an' you may not. I reckon ther best thing you kin do is to come right on with us."

"Oh, I'm willin' to that. I was afraid that Big Bat, or some of ther rest might take a notion to do me up; that's why I wanted to git away so quick."

"Ther rest of 'em are down there, then?"

"Yes, an' they're goin' to put up a fight ag'in Young Wild West. He ain't only got one man to help him, ether, for ther watchman ain't able to fight from ther hip he got on ther head this mornin'. But he'll git ther best of 'em, though. I'm satisfied of that."

"He might. How many is there of them?"

"'Leven."

"Well, I reckon they'll have a tough time of it afore they git ther best of Young Wild West. But come on, boys! We'd better git over there an' see what's goin' on."

Little Bill wheeled his horse around, as a matter of course, and started back with them.

But let us see what Big Bat and the rest of ther gang were doing all this time.

The big villain was not much pleased over Little Bill cutting loose from them.

"I didn't think ther little fool would do anything like that," he said. "Anyone as would go back on his crowd like that ought to be shot."

"If you'd only spoke of that afore he got out of sight we might have dropped him," remarked Burt.

"That's so!" said another, who was very bitter against the deserter.

"Well, if we ever run ag'in him, Little Bill will wish he had stuck to us, that's all!" exclaimed Big Bat. "Now, boys, what's ther best thing fur us to do?"

"Clean them fellers what's in ther shanty out an' git ther gal!" suggested Burt, who was hit with the idea all of a sudden. "If we kin git ther gal it will be jest as good as havin' her dad, won't it?"

"That's so," admitted the leader.

"We could ride down on ther shanty at full speed with our rifles leveled, an' if that didn't make 'em surrender, fur fear we'd kill ther gal, we could simply pour it into 'em, that's all."

"Yes, an' Young Wild West would be apt to pour it into us while we was doin' it," retorted Big Bat.

"We would have to take ther chances."

"We're putty deep in ther game now, so we might as well go in all ther way," spoke up another of the gang.

Big Bat thought a moment.

"I'll tell you what we'll do!" he said. "Burt, you take a sneak around an' see if you kin see anything of 'em."

"All right!" and the ambitious villain promptly set out.

He was very careful, and managed to keep his form out of sight of those in the shanty until he got around where he had a good view of it.

Then as he took a look he suddenly saw Young Wild West step out, followed by the handsomely-dressed young lady.

He waited long enough to see them heading for the pile of rubbish, and then he hurried back to his companions as fast as he could.

"Now is ther time to make ther attack!" he exclaimed. "Young Wild West an' ther gal are out of ther shanty, an' they're takin' a look at the pile of stuff where ther nitro-glycerine is. Little Bill must have told 'em all about it!"

"Is that so?" said Big Bat, as he ran for his horse.

"Where's ther other feller an' ther watchman?" asked one of the men.

"I don't know. They must be in ther shanty," replied Burt. "I didn't see 'em. As soon as I seen Young Wild West an' ther gal I headed back here."

"I reckon we'll have a try at 'em," remarked Big Bat, as he mounted his horse. "Boys, you want to be careful when you shoot. Make every shot tell!"

"An' Young Wild West will be my target!" added Burt.

The next minute the eleven men were mounted and riding around the curve to make the attack.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

After Little Bill disappeared from their view our friends in the shanty waited to see what would turn up.

Wild thought the man was sincere in what he said, but he did not know what effect it would have on the rest of the gang.

"There is one thing quite certain," spoke up Leo Sherwood. "If they are going to attack us they will do it as soon as he gets there and tells them what happened to him."

"That is quite a reasonable conclusion," Wild admitted. "But you can't tell anything about such fellows as they are. They are cowards, for the most part, but those are the kind of people who sometimes do unexpected things. If we see or hear nothing of them in the next ten or fifteen minutes I will feel inclined to believe that they have taken their leave of the place, however."

Sherwood looked pleased and Marjorie smiled encouragingly.

Ten minutes passed and there was not a sound to indicate that there was anyone about the vicinity.

"It is time Charlie got back," remarked Wild. "I can't understand what keeps him so long."

"It may be that he did not get safely to the hotel with papa, after all," said Marjorie, apprehensively.

"Oh, I think they got there all right."

"He's havin' trouble to git ther sheriff to come, that's what's ther matter," spoke up the wounded watchman.

"Sheriff Goode ain't much of a hand at fightin' bad gangs, anyhow."

At the expiration of five minutes more Wild opened the door again and went out.

"I am going to have a look at the can of nitro-glycerine," he said.

"I am going out, too!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"I guess there will be no harm in that," Wild told her. "The villains would not be apt to shoot you, even if they were around."

Sherwood was about to follow them out, when the watchman called him and asked him to fix the bandage that was around his wounded head first.

The young man could not refuse such a request, and when he found that the wound was in need of being dressed he started in to do it.

Meanwhile, Young Wild West walked over to the pile of rubbish, followed by the girl.

Our hero was keeping both eyes and ears open, though.

He never took any chances when there was a possibility of danger lurking around.

He got a good glimpse at the can of explosive, and then he pointed it out to Marjorie.

While they were standing there talking the sound of galloping hoofs came to the ears of Young Wild West.

The next instant Big Bat and his gang came riding toward the shanty, yelling and firing as they came.

Young Wild West saw that it would be foolhardy for him to make for the shanty, so he called Marjorie to follow him behind a nearby stone heap.

The daring young deadshot did not lose a particle of his natural coolness.

It struck him instantly that the villains would be apt to make for him and the girl, and as he ran to get behind the stone, so he would have a cover to fire from, he thought of the can of nitro-glycerine.

He would explode it if the horsemen did not halt before they got to it.

He reached the heap and laid down, and then for the first time he saw that the capitalist's daughter had not made a move to follow him.

She stood stock still in her tracks a hundred feet away.

"Come over here!" called out Wild. "Don't be frightened. Run, now, and get as far away from that rubbish pile as possible!"

The villains were now riding straight for Marjorie.

They had ceased their firing, but were yelling like so many demons.

"Save me!" cried the girl.

"I will, miss," replied Wild, bringing his rifle to his shoulder. "I'll save you, and I'll surprise that gang, too!"

As he pressed the trigger a deafening explosion rang out right before the approaching horsemen.

The trap set by the villains had been sprung!

But not by them.

Wild saw a very few of them turn and flee, but the majority of them caught the full force of the explosion.

"I had a steady hand that time," he thought. "It was Big Bat who first spoke of my steady hand, and now he has learned what it could do when it came to the pinch."

Just then the familiar "Whoopee!" of Cheyenne Charlie rang out.

Wild gave an answering shout, arose and took Marjorie by the arm.

"We will go to the shanty," he said. "There will be no more fighting, for here come our friends. See! They are taking the survivors of that awful explosion prisoners."

"I see," answered the girl, tremblingly. "It was awful! Some of the pieces of the dirt and stones dropped in a shower around us."

At this juncture Leo Sherwood came running to meet them.

The young man's face was very pale.

"I saw you when you fired the shot that caused the explosion," he said. "You looked just as cool as an iceberg and your hand was as steady as the rock you are now standing on."

Two minutes later Cheyenne Charlie and the rest came up, leading four prisoners.

The rest had perished in the terrible explosion.

Cheyenne Charlie took off his hat and led the crowd in a cheer.

When it had subsided Sherwood stepped out.

"It was Young Wild West's steady hand that did the business," he said. "I doubt if there is another man living who could have stood there right before that yelling crowd of villains and fired so deliberately at the can of nitro-glycerine!"

Little Bill, of course, was interested in the place where the explosion had occurred, so the instant he dismounted he ran over to the spot.

The earth had been terribly rent by the explosion and the gold was exposed to view as plain as could be.

"Come over here!" he shouted.

They did so, and when they saw what the explosion had brought to light all hands opened wide their eyes.

"That was ther shot that made a million!" exclaimed Little Bill. "Hooray fur Young Wild West's steady hand!"

The cheering was deafening, and the survivors of the band of villains ground their teeth when they heard it.

Big Bat had been in the lead of the horseman, so he was one whose earthly career came to an abrupt ending.

After an inspection had been made of the vein, Wild said:

"Miss Melton, I think if your father was here now he would not be so anxious to sell this land as he was when he left here. Little Bill just remarked that the shot I fired made a million, and I'll venture to say that if there's a dollar's worth of gold there, there is a million!"

There was another cheer at this, and Marjorie was so happy that she fairly cried.

Wild arranged it so that the sheriff and two of his deputies took the prisoners to the town, and when they went Marjorie and Leo Sherwood accompanied them.

Sherwood was going after men, who would go under pay from the time he hired them.

He was very jubilant, and when he left the place, with Wild and the others to guard the vein till he came back, he was one of the happiest young men alive.

It was late in the evening when Young Wild West and Charlie set out for the town.

Everything was arranged satisfactorily at the mine, and they really had nothing further to keep them there.

The sheriff's men and Little Bill rode back with them.

"See here, my man!" said Wild, turning to the little man who had been such a rascal. "I thought I told you to make yourself scarce."

"I did try to, but he wouldn't let me," and Little Bill pointed to Cheyenne Charlie.

"Well, I reckon you can light out now, then!" retorted the scout.

"That's jest what I'm goin' to do, gents," replied the man. "There's no use talkin'! I couldn't lead an honest life if I tried. So I'll git away from here, whether Young Wild West tells me to or not. I'll be a good man some day, maybe, though."

When our friends reached the hotel it was pretty late, but they found Melton up and in a very happy frame of mind.

The next morning at breakfast our friends were treated to a little surprise in the way of an invitation to be present at a wedding.

The landlord's wife gave the invitation, and when she stated that the contracting parties were Mike, the Irishman, and Shining Eyes, the squaw, they promptly decided to accept.

The ceremony was to be performed at the hotel on Saturday night, and as that was close at hand, there was little chance of making much preparation.

Cheyenne Charlie grinned broadly when he began to think over it.

When Saturday night came around there was a big crowd assembled at the hotel to witness the ceremony, which was to be performed by a medicine man of the girl's tribe.

Charlie had not forgotten his little adventure with Mike the day before, so he determined to have a little fun with him.

There were some Chinamen in the town, and right after supper the scout went out and found one who would do as he wanted him to for the small sum of ten dollars.

He made the Celestial rig up in a big horse blanket and then he stuck his pig-tail full of feathers.

"Now, then, you heathen! You're ther medicine man!" he said. "Don't forgit that! Here's your ten dollars, an' if ther Irishman breaks your head, don't blame it to me."

It so happened that Mike and the squaw were ready and waiting when Charlie came in, followed by the Chinaman.

The medicine man was supposed to arrive punctually at eight, and as it lacked half an hour of that time, all hands were puzzled, as an Indian always comes when he says he will in such cases, and not before.

Wild knew nothing of what the scout was up to, and when he heard that the medicine man had arrived he went into the parlor with the crowd.

"Ladies an' gents," said Cheyenne Charlie, taking off his sombrero, "ther first thing ther medicine man will do will be to kiss both ther bride an' groom."

There was a laugh at this, but the Chinaman stepped forward, and, catching Mike around the neck with his arms, gave him a rousing kiss on the cheek.

Then he made a grab at Shining Eyes, but she would not be fooled so easily.

She knew he was not the man who was to marry them, and, catching the Celestial by the pigtail, she pulled him across the room.

Then Mike realized that he had been fooled.

"You haythen Chinay!" he yelled, and then he went at the Chinaman hammer and tongs.

But the fellow managed to get away after awhile, and he was as well satisfied as Charlie was.

As nearly all stories end with a wedding, we will end this one with the marriage of Mike and Shining Eyes.

And we might say right here that there was another wedding a few months later.

It occurred in Denver, and Leo Sherwood and Marjorie Melton were the contracting parties.

After paying Young Wild West for his services the mine owner went away from Virginia City, declaring that he would never return to it.

He subsequently deeded the property to his daughter, and her young husband started in to make a fortune.

The four men who survived the explosion were punished in accordance with the laws of the county.

Young Wild West's steady hand had fired the shot that made a million, and as there was nothing more in Virginia City for him and his partner, they returned to Weston.

But there was plenty of excitement and adventure in store for him somewhere else, as our next number will tell.

## THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE PIUTE PRINCESS; or, THE TRAIL THAT LED TO THE LOST LAND," which will be the next number (75) of "Wild West Weekly."

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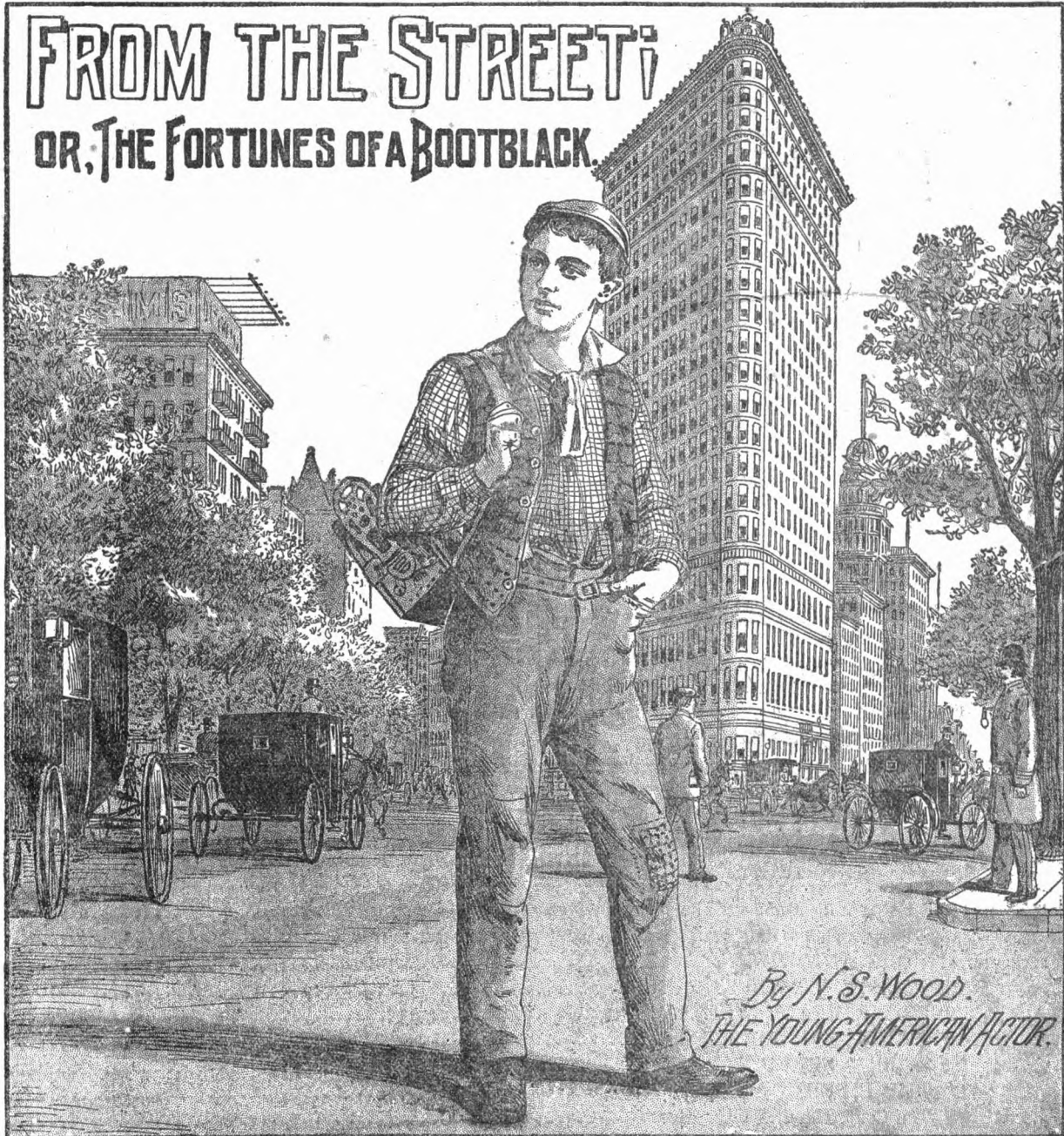
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