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JACKSON COLE

THE RED MARAUDERS

Ranger Jim Hatfield
is caught in a savage
crossfire of white and Indian hate



REDSKINS' REVENGE . . .

The Indians moved in on the Square L Ranch. With a fresh-loaded Colt in one hand, Hatfield vaulted up behind the thick railing, and crouched there, shooting at the attackers.

They were dashing in, straight at the Square L, wildly splitting this way and that to circle the ranch. They had pitch brands, and began tossing them into the wooden buildings. Wild warwhoops rang above the din as the battle was joined.

Hatfield and the Square L cowboys tried to fight off the raging circle of Indians with guns spouting lead. Bullets slapped into wooden walls or hunted through the windows. A dozen little blazes were being fought by the defenders.

But the ranch was surrounded and the Indians were moving in for the kill . . .

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CHAPTER I

Red Death

A hot, dry wind scudded dark rolls of cloud across the Texas sky. The masses of black vapor turned over and over, like huge, fluid balls. Now and then a silver glow showed at a thin spot, where the moon sought to shine through.

"I'm goin' out and look at the hosses, Aggie," said Rancher Bob Griggs, uneasily.

"What, again?" said his wife, glancing up from her mending. "Why, Bob, they're all right. There's no thunder to stampede 'em, and you were at the corral half an hour ago." She sighed, realizing the futility of words. "Go on then, if it'll set your mind at rest, dear. It's about time to go to bed."

"I'll just run out and have another look and then we'll turn in," Griggs told her. "I reckon the kids 're asleep."

His wife smiled at him affectionately. She remembered what a straight, handsome youth he had been when he had courted her. Now he was a bit stooped and gray hairs showed at his temples. But he was still handsome to her, although there were lines in his face, lines from many worries through the years. Yes, mused Aggie Griggs, there was certainly a deep line for the time their son had been kicked by a mustang and had come near to death, and another for the sickness which had struck the girl. There were other lines for the bad years when it seemed they would lose their ranch and all they owned.

"Got a queer feelin' tonight, Aggie," declared Griggs, buckling his Stetson strap against the wind. "I can't set easy."

The door slammed as he went out and the oil lamp on the table jumped, flickered.

Griggs passed around the stable at the rear of the house, and reached a beaten path which led down a slope to a big outside corral where he had a hundred mustangs. The wind threw gritty particles of gravel against him, and it stung like hail. He knew the path step by step, and with his eyes almost shut to protect them from the flying dust, reached the corral.

He could now see the dark shapes of the horses, huddled together with their tails to the dust storm.

Suddenly he started. There were men all around him! It was confusing, for his ears were filled with the swish of the wind, and they appeared to move without any sound at all.

"Who's that?" he shouted, his hand dropping to his Colt butt.

The clouds thinned for a moment and he saw the gleam of bronzed, powerful bodies. Fierce, painted faces with glowing eyes turned on him.

"Indians!" he screamed.

He saw gun-barrels rising, but he pulled his pistol and fired, one—two—three. He had to warn Aggie.

They were upon him. He tried to retreat, but Indians were all about him. He knew they were after the horses and he had come upon them in the midst of their thievery.

Hands were laid on him, violent hands.

"You fool!" a terrible voice rasped in his ear. That was no Indian's voice! It was a white man's!

The confusion ended there. Everything ended, for Bob Griggs. A bullet tore into his back ribs and pierced his heart. He went down.

The raiders moved swiftly. A contingent roped the mustangs, starting westward with them. Others hurried toward the house. On the way, a brand dropped in some of the hay in the barn mow started the building to burning.

But Aggie Griggs had heard her husband's last warning, the shots carrying on the wind. The lamp was out, the

house dark. As the shadowy red raiders dashed in, a shotgun loaded with buck flared from a window. The scattering load cut the powerful naked bodies.

Guttural commands sent them around, seeking a way to enter the house. Fire was started, as Indians dashed in close to the wooden walls. The shotgun blared once more, from the side, as the lurid red light rose from the burning house.

The chief called his men off then. They ran back, picked up their horses, and rode off into the teeth of the storm. The stable was burning madly and the house was catching swiftly . . .

By morning, the news had spread to the neighboring ranches. Among the first to hit the trail after the marauders were the waddies of Ken Lord's big Square L outfit. They split up as they rode away, and it was shortly after daylight that two of them, riding together—Corey Addison and Johnny Teale—stopped and faced each other as they planned the pursuit.

"Trail's dusted over, Johnny," said Addison, pulling down his brown Stetson tighter on his handsome head. "Which wash'll we take?"

"You go up the left branch," said Teale. "I'll ride the right."

Addison nodded, touching with an unconscious gesture the crisp little mustache he had managed to raise, with youthful pride. Johnny Teale grinned as he saw the gesture.

"Yuh'll pull that off if yuh ain't careful, Corey," he drawled. "Think how bad the girls'll feel then."

Addison laughed, squinting at his pard, a broad young fellow a few years older than himself.

"They'll still have you, Johnny," he said.

He squared his wide shoulders. His powerful legs gripped the ribs of the big black gelding he rode, a half-wild mustang he had broken to saddle. Addison's hazel eyes, narrowed in the brilliant sunshine of the Trans-Pecos land, searched the smoky reaches of the rocky, broken

mountains which bounded the cattle range on the west.

"We better not get too far apart, Johnny," he advised. "These hombres who shot Griggs and burned his place must be tough killers. Fire three quick ones if yuh want me."

He had a good voice, deep, pleasant to hear. The thick leather chaps and the dark-blue shirt suited his rangy figure. His crisp hair was about the same color as the leather, and he was tanned a golden-brown, his skin smooth and satiny as became his youth.

"All right," Johnny Teale agreed.

Just at daylight they had heard of the killing and attack at the Griggs ranch. Mrs. Griggs and her two children had escaped in the darkness, and had hidden until morning. Then they had managed to get horses and had ridden to the Square L. Addison and Teale, as well as others who worked for Ken Lord had ridden out at once.

"Must be those cussed Lipans," young Addison mused, as he swung Blackie, the gelding, along the stony drywash which led roughly southwest. It was a deep cut, floored with smooth boulders. Once there had been water in it. The branch taken by Teale ran off like the other fork of a sling-shot, toward the northwest. The arroyos were deep enough to hide a horseman.

It had been difficult to pick up the trail of the raiders. The dust had hidden it, for one thing, and for another the raiders were on unshod mustangs. There were many bands of such half-wild mustangs in the vicinity.

On stones such as Corey Addison now moved, signs would not stick. The killers had fanned out singly, no doubt to reach a rendezvous miles beyond, and Teale and Addison had cut out ahead of Ken Lord, the Square L boss, and the rest of the outfits who were seeking the trail of Bob Griggs' slayers.

Addison rode carefully, his eyes on the turns of the deep arroyo, ready for any surprise. The wind had died off in the early morning, and the Texas sun beat down fiercely.

The black's hoofs made soft clicking sounds on the rocks.

The chin-strap of Corey Addison's Stetson pulled up his strong jaw as he glanced up, his hazel eyes narrowed in the sunlight. Seen like that, he looked what he was—son of the range, of the semi-arid Trans-Pecos. Born and bred to it, he was used to scant water, to dust, to the life of the cowboy, and he liked it.

The Square L was up in the northwest of the huge Lone Star State, in Culberson County. Save for the river towns on the upper Pecos, the settlements of New Mexico along the Rio Grande were nearer than any of those in Texas.

"This is Lipan Reservation land," he muttered. "I was afraid we'd have trouble with them Indians."

As he came near another turn in the wash, slowing for it, the sound of shots on his right galvanized him to quick action. They came from close to where Teale must be by this time.

"Rifle—pistol, too!" he exclaimed, and hunted for a way out of the cut.

He had to ride for several hundred yards before locating a little side gully which sloped up so that he could get out of the split. Between his position and the north branch of the arroyo the earth was rough, cut up by sharp granite spires and dips. It was necessary for Addison to dismount at times to lead Blackie. Before he had gone far, sweat soaked his blue shirt and formed in drops on his grim face.

An hour later he found Teale. His trailmate and partner lay sprawled in a wide spot in the north branch of the arroyo. He lay on his face, his arms stretched out, and looked to be dead, as Addison saw him from the rim. He drew his Colt, cursing in dismay and anger. Leaving the mustang on the rim, his reins on the ground, Corey slid down. Teale was dead. A high-powered rifle bullet had drilled his brain. His exploded pistol was still gripped in his fingers. He had tried to signal Addison.

Addison, having checked his friend, searched for sign. There were the marks of several unshod hoofs in some

sand nearby. In the shade lay two beef cattle, one half skinned, with chunks of beef cut from its tenderloin. Some bits of brush and sticks were heaped against a big boulder which bulged at the top, and which would have cut the smoke, had the fire for which preparations had been made been lighted.

"He come on 'em as they was gettin' ready to eat," concluded Addison, his teeth gritted.

He kept an ear open and an eye watching for return of the enemy, should they be merely hidden nearby. One cow, he found, had the Square L brand on its hide, the owner being Ken Lord, his boss. The other was a Circle 5 cow, belonging to a neighboring rancher. Johnny Teale had run on red rustlers, perhaps the same gang, or part of it, which had slain Bob Griggs.

Teale's violent death was a terrible shock to Addison. He had been infuriated when he had heard of Griggs' death, but now there was grief as well as fury. Johnny Teale had been so close to him. Corey had been shocked about Griggs, but this was a personal hurt.

But he had no time to think more about it now. His alert ear had caught the click of a dislodged stone rolling in the arroyo. He whirled, his Colt rising, as a bullet spattered against the big boulder not a foot from him. A second one slashed at his left forearm, cutting the flesh and shocking him to action.

He fired once, twice, swiftly, at the eyes of the rifle muzzles that had been stuck from the turn to cover him. Even as he let go, he started to retreat, getting the big boulder between himself and his enemies. He glimpsed a brawny red shoulder, the color of darkened bronze, and a naked, powerful leg with a moccasin strapped to it.

He scrabbled up the sliding bank. Bullets hunted him as he rolled over the lip of the arroyo, sprang up, and vaulted into Blackie's saddle. But they were shooting up, from an angle, and he was moving fast. His slugs slowed them, excited them, and he pulled Blackie around and rode at the

best speed he could make, low over the mustang, retreating, letting the horse pick the way.

His arm wound was only a scratch, although it bled heavily. He kept going, getting down on rolling range where mesquite and big clumps of curling grasses grew, and hunted for the men of his outfit. It was getting near to sundown and the western sky was ruby red. Finally he picked up the trail of white men, and it led toward home.

"Discouraged and went back," he mused, and cut straight for the Square L.

CHAPTER II

Complaints

It was after supper and dark when Corey Addison rode his weary black into the yard. First he took care of Blackie, then strode inside to report to Kenneth Lord, his boss, owner of the Square L. Lord had been out all day, and was sitting in his stockinged feet, resting.

The feet resting on the stool were huge and Ken Lord had a body to match them. He was one of those tremendous beings which the clean air, the outdoor life and plain food bred in Texas.

Corey Addison stood before him, looking at the strong face of his employer. Lord had a lobster-red hide, pleated by wind and dust. His great body tipped the scales at nearly three hundred pounds but he was only heavy, not fat. It took a special breed of horse to carry his weight. He wore no beard but his eyebrows were bushy and touched by gray, as was his hair, though the latter was so light in hue that it was difficult to see the difference in color. He had a curved nose, straight lips with lines radiating from them, and his eyes were Texas-blue, a frosty blue.

Addison admired this man and would have died for him.

"So you're back, Corey," Ken Lord grunted.

Even when he kept down his voice it was loud. When he roared, he sounded like a bull.

"We were worried about you, Cole," said a woman's voice.

There were two of them in the room. One of them was Lord's wife, still good-looking at fifty, and the other was his daughter Jenny. It was Jenny who had spoken and she looked at Addison inquiringly.

"Yes'm," he said to her. "I couldn't get back before."

In spite of his grief for his friend, as Corey Addison looked at the girl he felt the same thrill he always felt when he looked at Jenny Lord. She was a beauty all right, he thought, with those long-lashed brown eyes of hers that contrasted so startlingly with her golden hair, and her peach-bloom cheeks. She was healthily rounded, but lithe and graceful, a range girl in the first flush of young womanhood.

Ken Lord's booming voice brought Corey's eyes away from the girl.

"What's wrong?" Lord demanded.

"Johnny Teale's dead," Addison said soberly. "And I couldn't even bring him in, because I come up on some of the same kind of trouble he did—just managed to get away. He run into some Indians, Boss. They were eatin' a Square L cow and a Circle Five one lay beside ours, Boss."

Ken Lord's fists clenched. His red face grew redder, and he muttered curses.

"Them Lipans! They've gone loco. They killed Bob Griggs, and now they've done for Johnny Teale! In the mornin' we'll go see Paul Fuller, and if he don't talk sense we'll wipe out them red coyotes."

"You're hurt, Corey!" suddenly exclaimed Jenny, as he turned and she noticed the crusted blood on his left arm. "Come into the kitchen and I'll wash and bind it for you."

"It's just a scratch, Jenny," he demurred, but went with her.

For it was a delight to have her hands touch him, and while she was binding his hurt to breathe in the perfume of her hair that brushed his cheek. . . .

Ken Lord routed out his men early the next morning and they rode to Culver town. There, the boss of the Square L wasted no time in hunting up Paul Fuller, the Lipan Indian agent, and laying his complaints before the man.

"So that's the story, Fuller," Lord said in an angry voice when he summed up. "Griggs and Teale killed! A ranch burned down and cattle rustled. What yuh goin' to do about it?"

The Indian agent stared into the blazing eyes of the rancher leader. Fuller stood in his office door in Culver, and the warm breeze across the dusty plaza of the little southwest settlement stirred his curly black hair, bare to the warmth.

"I will report it, Lord," he said in the precise way that characterized him, and his upper lip trembled as it usually did when he was inwardly perturbed. There was a white scar there which pulled the right side of the lip out of line a bit, showing his big teeth. "You know that the Government will make good any damage done by the Indians."

"Oh, shore!" sneered the giant Lord. "Ask the Government to bring Bob Griggs and Johnny Teale back to life, will yuh? And see to Mrs. Griggs and her two kids, ease their heartbreak. And how about fixin' it so's the rest of us can sleep easy nights without expectin' a passel of red varmints to swarm over us and kill us?"

Paul Fuller drew himself up to his full height. He was about as tall as Ken Lord although not so heavy, and in his dark suit and clean white shirt, his aspect was that of a strong man—which he was. Versed in the Indian lore of Texas, Fuller was a power.

The sun had reddened his skin, and he had a striking nose, which had the appearance of being a triangular

wedge which had been fastened on after the rest of his face had been finished. Because of his great physical strength and brawny arms which terminated in large, hair-flecked hands with extra long fingers, the Indians had named him "Bear Chief." And as he faced the angry cowmen, he gave the impression of a grizzly being baited.

He had a nervous habit of playing with a heavy gold signet ring on the middle finger of his left hand. The ring had three concentric black-jade circles in it, this insignia standing out in partial relief from the ring proper. He kept turning the ring as he spoke.

"You know what you ask is impossible, Lord! The dead cannot be brought back to life by mortal men. But damages will be paid, I'm sure." His blue eyes were intense, as he added, "If Lipans did it."

"Who else could've done it?" snarled Lord. "There ain't any other Indians in strikin' distance, and none reported movin' through Culberson. Besides, one of our men, Corey Addison here, says they went toward the Lipan village."

"If Lipans did it," declared Fuller, "it may have been some irresponsible young braves. Chief Much Feathers can be a trusted, I'm sure."

"Yuh're shore!" mocked Lord. "Well, we're shore, too. Them Lipans been stealin' cows from us and now they're killin'."

There was tension in the cowtown. The sun was high and warm, shining on the reddish soil, dry as dust because of the lack of rain. Lines of wooden and adobe buildings, mostly single-storied, leaned on one another as if for support, with wooden awnings extended out to shade passersby. Cowponies and teams with wagons stood at the hitch-racks.

There were several saloons, "The Last Chance" at the south end of the road leading to El Paso being the main one. Others were as aptly named. A couple of general

stores, a blacksmith shop and feed store, a saddlemaker, comprised most of Culver's industry. The cowmen came to meet in the town, to buy supplies and transact business.

Besides Lord, Corey Addison, and others of the Square L's fifteen riders, there were a dozen other ranchers and their followers who had come to back up their leader. Tim Roberts, a lean, elderly Texan with a sharp, saturnine face, and with one cheek bulged by a cud of tobacco, stood beside Ken Lord, his dark eyes fixed on Fuller. Roberts owned the Circle 5, neighboring ranch to Lord's.

There was Ole Larsen, of Swedish descent, a large, round-headed man with tow hair. He ran a little spread north of the Square L, and supported a big family of children by it. Frank Wells, of the 1-2, Drew Hagen of the Triangle H, and other sturdy Texans were present to make the formal protest to the Lipan agent.

Fuller's office was a square-built wooden structure near the center of the town, overlooking the plaza. It was painted white, and the shutters were green. Through the open window and door could be seen the agent's neat desk. It was his job to take care of the Lipan tribe whose reservation took in the sections west of the cattle range. Fuller saw to it that they received Government supplies and that they planted and herded as they should.

The big agent was alone, now, except for one man who hovered behind him, peeking now and then around Fuller's arm. Everybody knew Rodriguez, Fuller's assistant, and everybody was familiar with his garb. Rodriguez was clad in Mexican clothing, a short vest and silk shirt, and velvet pants, with a high-peaked steeple sombrero on his narrow black-haired head.

He was half Mexican and half Lipan Indian. His face had high cheekbones and the curved nose of the Indian, but he sported sideburns and a mustache. Most Indians had difficulty in growing such hirsute adornment and Rodriguez was proud that he could.

Paul Fuller spoke again, after hearing the complaints of the ranchers. The big signet ring whirled on his long finger.

"My friends," he said earnestly, "you must remember that the Indians were barbarians until a short time ago. It is well-known that the Lipan range is too dry. They can run a few goats and wild horses on it, but the herbage is sparse. The Lipans must eat. Such men won't lie down and die when they see food walkin' around on four hoofs close at hand."

"Shucks, we don't care about a cow or two now and then," snapped Lord. "But we won't stand the killin's. We intend to rest easy of nights, savvy? If the Lipans got cheated, then that's the Government's fault. Why don't yuh have 'em moved to other parts and better land?"

Fuller struck the palm of one hand with the clenched fist of the other.

"I'm trying to do just that, gentlemen. The Lipans till a little corn and squash, but the ground is too alkaline to grow anything else. They need better earth to live."

"But there's no guarantee the Lipans'll be moved," Lord said. "We want the gang of Lipans that killed Griggs and Teale. We'll give yuh a week to surrender 'em, then we're goin' after 'em ourselves."

"You can't do that!" protested Fuller. "It's against the law. The Texas Rangers will protect the wards of the State, Lord, and handle any such outlawry as you threaten."

Ken Lord exploded, as Fuller grew angry and threatened him.

"We ought to call the Rangers ourselves!" he shouted, so that his voice could be heard all over the town, and people hurried to look out on the gathering. "But we can handle the Lipans ourselves if it comes to that. We'll chase 'em out of Texas!"

"Keep your voice down," snapped Fuller, his eyes darkening. "You have no right to shout at me, Lord. I'll go

talk to Much Feathers, the Lipan Chief. If possible, we'll punish the guilty. In the meantime, disperse your mob and go to your homes."

His haughty tones further infuriated Lord and his rancher allies. The rancher chief clenched his fist and shook it under Fuller's nose.

"If there's so much as one more cow stole off'n our range, Fuller," he threatened, "we'll go after them Lipans and wipe 'em off the map! And if you're in our way, you'll get it too, savvy? We've stood all we're goin' to."

"Then blood will be shed," Fuller said icily.

He turned on his heel, and strode into his office, slamming his door after him.

CHAPTER III

Call for the Rangers

Captain Bill McDowell, Chief of the Texas Rangers, was fuming as he sat in his office at Ranger Headquarters, Austin, Texas.

"Injuns!" he muttered. "Yuh never can tell when they'll bust loose!"

He had fought plenty of them in his day—Apaches, Comanches, and bands of wandering red raiders. So skilful had he grown on the trail that he could out-Indian an Indian. His mind was still as clever as it had been when he was twenty, but his muscles and limbs would no longer obey his impulses for violent action. Fast as his mind worked, his old body could not keep up with it. But he was still fighting, mentally, from his Headquarters, and there were ways of bringing in outlaws and killers.

"Sometimes seems to me I'll bust if I don't get action pronto," he muttered.

He picked up his bell and slammed it against the wall, a

method of ringing it which cost the state the price of a new bell now and again but which gave a little satisfaction to the soul. An attendant poked his head around the door, blinking in anticipation of McDowell's orders.

"Get Hatfield!" roared McDowell, kicking the side of the desk with his booted toe.

He paced up and down like an angry tiger for a time. Then a soft step sounded and he swung to scowl at the tall man who entered. Something clicked inside McDowell. He felt soothed, and almost ready to smile as he gazed into the gray-green eyes of the big Ranger who answered his call.

For Jim Hatfield had that faculty of setting people at rest and giving them confidence, just by his presence—that is, good people. Outlaws and wrong-doers felt just the opposite when he appeared.

McDowell's frosty blue eyes had to look up to fix Hatfield's, for the Ranger was well over six feet. He had wide shoulders and tapered to the slender waist of the true fighting man; there rode his walnut-stocked, blue-black Colt .45s in their oiled, supple holsters.

Bronzed by the sun and wind of the plains and mountains, Jim Hatfield was too rugged to be called handsome. But he was a striking man. Jet-black hair gleamed with youthful health under his wide Stetson. In that long body was wiry power and he had the brain of a diplomat. His nerves were steady and always cool. He was hickory and steel and he could strike like chain-lightning when that was needed.

"A mighty mean job, Jim, across the Pecos, in nawth Culberson County," growled McDowell, though he already felt better, with Hatfield by him. He couldn't move from here himself, but he could dispatch the big Ranger, and it was like Jove flinging a thunderbolt. "Yuh savvy the Lipan Reservation up there? Paul Fuller's the agent. There've been at lease two killin's, and rustlin', and arson as well."

"Who sent the complaint?" Hatfield's voice was surprisingly gentle and soft.

"Both sides. Fuller for one. Ken Lord, of the Square L, for another, and some of his rancher pards. Fuller says that Lord and the cowmen threaten to attack the Lipans and wipe 'em out. I understand that Fuller's complained to the State that the Lipans don't like their range. Too dry. Mebbe they should be moved."

In repose, Hatfield's face was softened by a wide, good-humored mouth. He was smooth-shaven and looked easy-going. But that look was like his deceptively soft voice. In anger and action, the Ranger's features set grimly. The eyes darkened to the hue of an Arctic sea, and he could raise his voice above the storms of the range.

McDowell gave him all the facts he had, and the wires of complaint.

"Yuh better hustle, Jim," he said. "A lot of folks are goin' to be kilt if it ain't checked. I savvy what these Indian troubles mean."

"Yes sir."

Hatfield nodded calmly, pocketed the telegrams, and saluted his superior.

The Ranger wore no uniform. Instead he wore dark whipcord pants, tucked into black half-boots with big silver spurs, a blue shirt open at the throat, with a plain reversed bandanna circling his neck. As he fastened his chin-strap, the strong jaw bunched a little under the pressure.

McDowell watched him, from a window, as he touched the smooth neck of a beautiful golden sorrel awaiting him in the shade.

"That Goldy hoss and him are two of a kind," Cap'n Bill murmured, feeling still better now that he had started Hatfield on his way.

The big Ranger was speaking to the sorrel in a soothing voice, as he prepared to mount. A small pack rode at the cantle, and in a sling was his Winchester rifle, with a spare

belt of cartridges for it hung from the horn. Goldy was powerful, and could carry him where he wished.

Hatfield mounted. The sorrel, full of life and eager to be off, bucked a bit, then lined out, heading west. The Ranger rode as though part of the horse, with an easy gait, to let his mount warm up at the start of the ride.

"He's always ready," thought McDowell. "And that's lucky for Texas!"

It was a long ride from Austin to the Trans-Pecos, but Ranger Jim Hatfield made it in good time, stopping only at nights for the needed rest for himself and Goldy. It was close to noon when he reached the town of Culver, the nearest settlement to the scene of the disorders Captain McDowell had ordered him to quell.

He rode to the center of town, and reined in near a square-built structure facing the plaza, a building his quick eye had singled out as the one he sought.

"This is Paul Fuller's office, ain't it?" he asked a man who stood nearby, leaning against the adjoining building.

The man was one of the few in sight, this close to noon and with the sun high and driving down with murderous heat. There was no wind and the plaza's reddish dust lay undisturbed, save for a pig or chicken moving aimlessly across it.

The little settlement, with its rows of adobe and unpainted wooden shacks, with a few dominant saloons, stores and a jail sticking out like sore thumbs, was a familiar sight to Hatfield. Not that he had ever been in Culver before, but he had been in dozens of similar towns of the Southwest, all alike.

The man leaning stiffly against the wall near the painted and comparatively neat Agency studied Hatfield as the Ranger swung the golden sorrel, dusted by layers of the intervening strata from Austin to the Trans-Pecos, to face the townsman. Hatfield spoke again, with a little more emphasis.

"Say, mister, I asked you if this is the Lipan agent's office?"

Staring at the native son, who had not replied but was gazing off into the distant sky, he realized that the fellow's limbs were unnaturally stiff. The arms were straight down at his sides, with the fingers extended. The legs, too, were stiff as stilts. And he was leaning against the building like a wooden Indian as though someone had left him there for a moment.

He wore a buckskin suit, and the front was stained and dirty. He had dark hair, his eyes were a pale green, and wide. The sun had bronzed his skin to the hue of an Indian's. He wore a Colt at one hip and a hunting-knife in a sheath at the other. On his head was a plain leather cap, and beneath it his face, with a blunt nose and full cheeks, seemed frozen.

Suddenly his cheeks sank in, as he expelled the air which had bulged them. His eyes blinked and it moved his head slowly as though it hurt his neck for him to do so.

"Uh!" he said, and licked thin, brown lips with a long tongue.

Hatfield could now scent the whisky on the air. He grinned a little as he realized the man's condition.

"Are you laughin' at me, mister?" demanded the strange being. He scowled fiercely, and his eyes flashed.

"Oh no, nothin' like that." Hatfield avoided any argument with such a man. "I only wanted to know if this place is Paul Fuller's. I reckon it is. I see the sign in the winder now."

"Yuh asked me a question. I beg yore pawdon, suh." The intoxicated one drew himself up to his full height. He had a different look with his lean, sunken cheeks and burning eyes. "In reply, I would state, suh, that this is the office of Paul Fuller, the Lipan agent. Does that answer yore query?"

Hatfield adopted the same mock politeness as he replied:

"Yes suh, and I do thank yuh kindly, suh."

There was something that inclined the Ranger to believe the man was a black Irishman, as the fellow came to-

ward him. He walked a trifle stiffly but did not stagger, and his eyes were fully alive.

"Senor Fuller isn't in there, amigo mio," he said. "At the moment he is out at the Lipan Reservation, tryin' to keep some nail-bitin' cowmen from slaughterin' his charges."

"Yeah?" said Hatfield. "Yuh mean that the ranchers are attackin' the Injuns?"

"That was my meanin'. I'm sorry I failed to make myself clear at the first shot, suh."

Dripping venom was in the Irishman's harsh voice. It escaped past the veneer of his smooth mockery. The pale eyes had depth to them, a burning depth of furious hatred.

Hatfield decided he was not amused. He didn't like this fellow. He had run into such egotistical characters on the Frontier before. Some were braggarts, some were silent and dangerous killers. The Ranger had an uncomfortable feeling, as the Irishman leered up at him, following him step by step.

"My name is Abner J. Murphy, suh," the fellow offered. "Paul Fuller I know. Once he bought me a drink and I never forget that. You ain't a Texas Ranger, are yuh?"

The question was so serious and sudden that Hatfield inwardly jumped. But he maintained his outward calm as he shook his head. It was his habit to remain incognito, to move under an innocent front, during his investigations. He could learn more that way and strike harder when the moment arrived.

"I'm glad," said Abner J. Murphy. "Yuh have a certain look about yuh that some Rangers have. Sort of a sneaky, ready-to-shoot-if-yuh-snort gleam in the eye. No offense, of course—if yuh ain't a Ranger. I hate 'em. Personal matter. One up and killed a cousin of mine for nothin' at all over on the Brazos last year."

"Yeah?" Hatfield said conversationally. "What was yore cousin up to, Murphy?"

"Oh, all he did was kill a couple of hombres who tried to interfere in his business."

"His business?"

"Yeah," Murphy nodded. "He was a bandit. After all, he needed the money he was helpin' hisself to from the till. He had lost every cent he had in a stud game and he was set on recoupin'. But that cussed Ranger never give him a chance. Soon as my cousin drawed, the Ranger let him have it right between the ears."

Hatfield realized that Murphy was running a sandy on him. The man had a way of starting a speech in a serious vein, gaining the listener's attention, and then making a jest of it.

"That Ranger was a cuss, no doubt of it," drawled Hatfield ironically.

There was a horse trough in the shade of a scrubby live-oak growing at the corner of the plaza. Hatfield dismounted and led Goldy to it, allowing the sorrel to drink a little. Goldy was overheated and the Ranger was careful not to let him drink too much. He wet his bandanna and rubbed his equine friend with the damp cloth.

Murphy came over and watched him. He moved as silently as a snake, in buckskin moccasins, Hatfield noted, which were beautifully made and trimmed with rows of small red and black beads. Many Frontiersmen preferred such footgear to boots. On occasion, the Ranger himself wore them, for a man could move without a sound in such moccasins.

"Yuh love that critter, don't yuh?" observed Murphy. "I don't blame yuh. He's a fine hoss. Yuh make a nice mother, suh."

Hatfield was inwardly amused. Had Murphy's talk been entirely humorous he would have enjoyed the fellow's company, but behind his jokes was that ever-appearing, dripping venom, hatred and an unbridled fury. He wondered what the man was like when sober.

He was upset at the news which Murphy had given him,

that Fuller had hurried out to the Lipan Reservation to attempt to check the attacking ranchers. Perhaps he had arrived too late and the battle had begun. Innocent men, white and red, would die and much suffering be caused.

"Let's have a drink," suggested Murphy. "The Carousel serves the best liquid refreshment in town, suh. My treat."

Hatfield nodded. "All right, son."

The sorrel needed a breathing-spell and he wished to make sure of the best route to reach the Lipan Reservation. Ten minutes would be more than made up by the advantage gained if Goldy were rested. He walked beside Murphy, who moved with a straight if somewhat stiff gait.

CHAPTER IV

Before the Storm

The Carousel had a little ring of hand-carved and painted wooden horses over its front door, a miniature merry-go-round. The long veranda was low.

The batwings swung before the tall Ranger and his companion, and the interior was shaded and cool, with a damp, refreshing smell. Sawdust on the floor had been watered, and some inhabitants of Culver drooped on the long bar which ran from the front to the rear. There were some round tables on the left, and gaming devices in an annex. Open doors led to the other rooms in the back of the rambling place.

A white-shirted barkeeper sidled up and blinked at them with red-rimmed eyes. He glanced quickly at the tall Ranger and then at Ab Murphy.

"Set 'em up, Pinky," ordered Murphy.

"Aw now, Murph," the barkeep protested, "yuh had enough for the mornin'. Yuh went outa here an hour ago like yuh was ossified."

Murphy scowled and slammed a heavy palm on the top of the bar.

"Pinky, yuh're an old woman. Set 'em up."

Pinky shrugged and shoved a bottle of red whisky across the bar. The Ranger helped himself, and Murphy poured a tumblerful and downed it as though it were water. Hatfield paid the score.

"Say Pinky," asked the Ranger, "which way's the Lipan Reservation?"

"There's a road leads west out of town," Pinky explained. "It swings north and then forks. Take the right-hand fork. Yuh figgerin' on goin' out there today, mister?"

The bartender leaned on the counter, looking up at the rugged face of the Texas Ranger. Such men as Pinky were purveyors of information in the range towns.

"I might," said Hatfield.

"Take care, then. Paul Fuller, he's the Lipan agent, done hustled out at the crack of dawn. Tryin' to stop a passel of cowmen from slaughterin' the Indians, savvy? There's been a good deal of trouble roundabouts and some cowboys was killed. Lipan braves got out of hand, I reckon. Some of the boys from town rode out to watch the fun."

Hatfield nodded, turning his glass in his slim, long hand.

"I heard tell of it," he drawled. "I used to be a range detective for the International Beef Company, and I figgered I might work in here. Thought Fuller or the ranchers could use me, and if not, why, I'm a good hand with steers."

"I see," said Pinky. He had gained the information he was after. It paid for such fellows to know all the local gossip and a stranger was always a source of speculation. "What's yore handle, in case I hear of somethin'? And where'll I find yuh?"

"I'm Jim Hayes, of Amarillo," the Ranger said promptly. "Yuh'll find me hereabouts so long as I stay, but if I don't hook up pronto, I'll ride on."

He set down his glass, having finished his drink. He had paid the score, although Murphy had invited him in.

"So long, Murph," he said. "Hasta luego, Pinky. See yuh."

As he swung to go, Murphy seized his arm and rudely jerked him back.

"One moment, Hayes. Yore treat this round. Set 'em up agin, Pinky."

It was an old gag, considered humorous, to pretend that the other fellow hadn't paid for a round.

"I had enough, Murph," drawled the Ranger mildly.

"Oh no, yuh ain't. Drink, cuss yuh."

All the humor had drained from the man's surface. The ugly nature under the veneer asserted itself. Perhaps it was the addition of the latest glass of whisky, the final straw.

"I had enough, Murph," repeated Hatfield, again turning to go.

This time he was ready, when Murphy snatched at his wrist. His left arm swept down, catching Murphy's inner forearm and throwing him off balance. Murphy fell to his knees in the sawdust, stayed there a moment, staring up at him.

Then Murphy went for his gun.

"Look out, Hayes!" shouted Pinky. "He's plumb mean when he's—"

But the scrap was on before the bartender could finish his warning. It was a matter of instant-fractions and only a trained infighter such as the Ranger could have acted with speed enough to save himself without beating Murphy to the draw. With unerring, cool precision, Hatfield's strong, slim hand vised on Murphy's gun wrist, throwing up the fellow's arm even as Murphy let go with his shot.

The bullet drilled into the wooden roof, on through the tarpaper and into the air.

"Take it easy, Murph," began Hatfield. "Calm yourself."

Murphy brought up a knee and rammed it into the Ranger, driving the wind from his lungs. It hurt, for it was

unexpected. Most drunks would have been quelled by Hatfield's first move, but he suddenly realized he had a Tartar on his hands.

Murphy was as sinewy as a serpent. He had long, wiry muscles and was in fine physical shape. Holding on to him was like trying to hold a greased snake, and Murphy kicked, bit and slashed the Ranger's face with the nails of his left hand.

Hatfield got hold of Murphy's left wrist just in time to prevent him from pulling his long hunting-knife. Angered by the fool's resistance, the Ranger slung the cursing fellow around, twisting his arms in their sockets so that Murphy was bent over and the Colt fell from his numbing fingers. He screamed his fury, kicking at Hatfield.

Suddenly the Ranger released the man's right arm and seized Murphy's foot. He turned, whirling Murphy with him, then let go with both hands, so that his opponent sailed through the air. Thudding heavily on the floor, Murphy slid several feet in the damp sawdust before coming to a stop.

Hatfield had not yet drawn. He backed to the door, watching in case Murphy insisted on continuing the scrap, but several bystanders jumped in and pinned the man down.

"I'll kill yuh for that, Hayes!" bawled Murphy.

Hatfield did not reply, but pushed through the batwings, hurrying to pick up his horse. He had shown great forbearance in the fight, endangering his own life so as not to kill Murphy. But he was irritated; the trouble had been over such a picayune matter, and it had only delayed him, done no good.

"Never can tell what a drunk'll do next!" he muttered.

His left hand stung, and he glanced at it. There were some scratches on it, one or two of them bleeding slightly. Embedded in the calloused pads were three or four little beads, red or black in hue. They had adorned the beautiful moccasins worn by Murphy.

"Busted a string when I slung him, I reckon," he decided.

On the golden gelding, the Ranger quickly left Culver behind, taking the trail described by the barkeep. The sun was in his eyes but the wide Stetson brim protected them from the rays, and he was hardened to such discomforts.

The land was arid, as he left the valley of the little creek which fed the town and the range to the north and east. Cactus growths filled the draws and the mesquite had taken charge of the ridges. Hills rose in wild confusion westward, over the Lipan Reservation, covered with tough, low scrub trees and thorned brush. There were innumerable dry washes and the trail looped and turned back again and again on itself to avoid the deep splits in the reddish-gray earth.

Huge rock clusters loomed on all sides, as though thrown down by a giant hand scattering seeds. And the dust clouded under the beating hoofs of the gelding, choking the man and the horse, so that the Ranger drew up his dampened bandanna to sift some of the dirt from the air he breathed.

"Mighty dry spot, Goldy," he murmured.

His gray-green eyes swept the reservation. He noted some herds of goats grazing in the distance, and once he saw some Indian mustangs in a sink where there evidently was a small water-hole.

As he rode he thought over what excuse he might use to interfere in the war which had opened between whites and reds. Texans, upright people, were involved. Lives and property had already been lost. The Lipans, too, must receive consideration from the State. The Rangers were always fair, and their reputation must be upheld.

Hatfield had intended to talk to Paul Fuller before going to the reservation, presenting himself as a former range detective seeking employment. Now he might have to think of something else.

It was late afternoon when he reached the Lipan village, in the heart of the reservation. Goat herds on the sur-

rounding hills were tended by small boys. Patches of squash and corn, irrigated from three small water-holes which gave the Lipans their main water supply, grew in the hollows. On the side of a rocky hill stood a number of crude shelters, made of mud bricks, brush and hides. Outdoor stone ovens, pots, ollas, and other utensils and gear were strewn about the village. In the background were mustangs, the riding horses of the Indians.

But it was the human element and not the physical surroundings which attracted the Ranger's chief attention. He had seen Indian villages before. But he had not before looked on a scene such as this where, in the shadow cast by a great red cliff, two opposing factions—red man and white—faced one another.

The Indians were gathered in a bunch behind the village, where their squaws and children peeked from the lodges and from behind the rocks and brush. Their array of fighting men were up the wide gap between the hills.

The ranchers and their followers had dismounted, and their horses were held back in the shade. There were fifty or sixty, Hatfield decided, at a quick look—cowboys and their bosses, sturdy Texans armed with Winchesters, shotguns and six-shooters, with belts of ammunition for the weapons.

The main bunch squatted together back from a smaller group of whites and reds who were talking in the neutral strip between the two factions.

The Lipans were fairly well-armed, with big-game rifles, knives and spears, and bows with steel-tipped arrows, instruments with which skilled archers could do real damage at close range.

Hatfield could tell from the tense attitudes of them all that a showdown was rapidly approaching. A spark might suddenly cause a terrible explosion in which many men would die. He could hear the rising voices of the leaders as they parleyed at the center.

CHAPTER V

Pow-wow

As the Ranger dismounted, dropping the sorrel's reins to the stony ground, he heard a great voice shouting.

"Fuller," a rancher was bellowing angrily, "I say Much Feathers is an old liar! His braves done it. How could they behave like that without him savvyin'? That's plumb foolish! We want the men who killed Teale and Griggs and who shot at Roberts yesterday!"

The speaker was huge, a Texas man, born and bred. Hatfield took in the lobster hue of the broad face, the physical might. The rancher wore range clothing, leather pants and a big hat covering his tow hair. Behind him were three more cowmen, smaller in stature, no doubt others who were backing him up.

The white man facing the big rancher was about as tall but not so heavy. From what the cowman had said, Hatfield took this man to be Paul Fuller, the Lipan agent. Fuller also was powerful physically. The agent was wearing black pants and boots and a white shirt. The rolled-up sleeves showed brawny arms. His hat was off, and his curly black hair was damp with sweat as he argued with the ranchers earnestly. The long fingers of his right hand played with a large signet ring on the middle finger of his left hand.

Hardly noticed by either side, in the tense moments, Hatfield hurried in. As he came closer, he saw that the most striking feature of Fuller's face was his nose. It was triangular in shape, like a large wedge stuck on as an afterthought. He had a white scar on his upper lip which showed his big white teeth. The lip was twitching in nervous excitement.

On Fuller's left stood a Lipan chief, with a fat paunch, an old fellow with a face as wrinkled as a relief map. He had black eyes and a curved nose, and he stood there in his big moccasins with a majestic air. His clothing was part Indian, part white man's garb, for he wore a red shirt. On the agent's other side hovered a dark-faced man in Mexican clothing.

"You mustn't speak that way of Chief Much Feathers, Lord!" cried Fuller.

The giant cowman then must be Ken Lord, leader of the ranchers, thought the Ranger. Much Feathers was the Lipan chief.

"Let him talk straight, then!" snarled Lord. He patted his Colt, depending at his heavy thigh. "Like this can. We've waited for them killers to be turned in, Fuller, and it ain't been done. Instead Indians fired on Tim Roberts while he was on my range on lawful business yesterday. Cut a chunk from his arm."

Ken Lord indicated an elderly, lean Texan who stood near him.

"Corey Addison was pinked, too," the Square L owner went on accusingly, "when they killed Johnny Teale. Only luck they didn't finish him off that day."

Corey Addison, the Ranger saw, following Lord's gesture, was the handsome young cowboy with the crisp little mustache and brown hair.

The waddy's hazel eyes carefully watched the Lipans and Fuller.

"Rodriguez," said Fuller, turning to the man in Mexican garb who stood beside him, "you know the cowmen are wrong in this matter, don't you? Haven't we both checked up on the Lipans? Much Feathers speaks the truth. The tribe isn't to blame." The man in the steeple-sombrero and Mexican clothing backed up his declarations.

"Si, Senior Fuller. You spik truth."

Rodriguez had some Indian blood in him, it was plain

to Jim Hatfield, in spite of the sideburns and mustache which adorned his sharp face.

"The Lipans are ready to defend themselves," went on Paul Fuller firmly. "You can't run over them on their own reservation. You cowmen don't own the world, you know, though you act like it sometimes. The Indians have rights. They are human. They get hungry just as all men do, and they want freedom. They have families they love, wives and children. The range they've been given here is dry and rocky. Perhaps they take a few cattle that stray over from your ranches, but that's not enough of a crime to kill them for."

"We ain't here to settle the Indian problem in Texas," growled Ken Lord. "We didn't put the Lipans on this here reservation. Why don't you have 'em moved if the place ain't no good, Fuller?"

"You know I have asked the Government to shift the Lipans to a better rangel" cried Paul Fuller. "But one man can't do anything. If you ranchers requested it, though, perhaps the authorities would listen and move the Indians."

"Huh!" Lord snorted. "We'd be glad to be rid of 'em! In the meantime, Fuller, we want the braves who been shootin' us up."

Fuller turned and spoke to Much Feathers. The chief frowned and clicked his brilliant false teeth, which someone had presented to him. They did not fit well but Much Feathers was inordinately proud of them. He answered in Lipan, and Fuller translated.

"Much Feathers insists he doesn't know who committed the crimes."

Lord started forward angrily, shaking his fist under the Indian chief's nose. The cowmen and Lipans tensed, gripping their weapons. Fuller leaped between the two, and shoved Lord away.

"If you lay a hand on the chief, Lord, they'll open fire—"

Hatfield stepped in.

"I'd like to say a word, gents," he drawled.

Their attention turned to the tall man who had interfered. The Ranger had a magnetism which drew men.

He was big, powerful, and there was a look about him which made his fellows listen and obey him.

"Who are you?" demanded Ken Lord, and Paul Fuller swung, frowning at him.

"My name is Jim Hayes and I come from the Panhandle. I was a range detective up there, for the big IB, International Beef. When I was passin' through, I heard yuh might need help over here on account of some range killin's, so I went to Culver to hunt up Paul Fuller . . . That's you, ain't it, mister?"

"That's me," replied Fuller, blinking.

Hatfield nodded and went on talking. His voice had a soothing, hypnotic quality. The big Ranger was playing for time, to hold their interest until their blood cooled, for his expert eye had told him that they were close to snapping.

As yet, he did not know the rights and wrongs of the situation. While he could tell that Ken Lord had a hot temper, the ranchers had evidently had a great deal of provocation without actually attacking the Lipans in force. That meant that Lord, while he was a real fighting man and quick to resent an injury, was yet shrewd enough to hold back his followers from battle until he had exhausted other possibilities. The fact that there had been no pitched engagement between the cowmen and the Indians proved the point.

From their general appearance the ranchers were hard-working Texans who could take care of themselves, or believed they could. The death of one would mean a bereaved wife and fatherless children, or the loss of a good man on the range if he were unmarried. On the other side, the Lipans were human beings too, just as Agent Fuller said. They had to eat, exist, and they had loved ones who would mourn their deaths.

"When I done heard that Agent Fuller was out here

tryin' to check the tall trouble between the cowmen and Lipans," Hatfield went on, "I figgered I'd hustle along and see could I help."

He hoped to postpone the fight and then pick up some clue, evidence which would turn aside Lord and his men. Perhaps he could track down the perpetrators of the killings and thievery. He wished to save the Texans, and the Indians, as well. A shot would precipitate a bloody war in which men would die, and there was no saying how far such would spread.

As yet it was local, between Lord's group and the Lipan tribe, but there were other Indian tribes who might ally themselves with the Lipans in a showdown. The Lipans were cousins of the Comanches, the dreaded riders of the Plains, and of the terrible guerrilla Apaches of Mexico and Arizona.

"What do yuh say, Mr. Fuller?" Jim Hatfield finished, looking into the agent's black eyes.

"Well—I have no authority to hire a range detective, Hayes," answered Fuller. "But if you can give us the answer to the trouble here and clear the Lipans, I'll pay you out of my own pocket."

"That's fair enough," said the Ranger. "And to show yuh I mean what I say, unless I get results I won't ask for any pay a-tall."

Ken Lord gave a short laugh.

"Shucks, Fuller, if yuh're payin' this hombre, he'll be on yore side and the Lipans'. How about us?"

"I dunno the rights and wrongs of it yet," said the Ranger levelly, bringing the rancher chief under the spell of his cool gray-green eyes. "I ain't met any of yuh till this minute, and I'm a fair man. Why don't the two factions chip in and let it go at that? I'm more interested in solvin' yore worries than in the pay I get. Lemme hear both sides of the story . . . Mr. Fuller, s'pose you speak fust?"

The agent nodded. "All right, Hayes. These cowmen live on the eastern rim of the Lipan Reservation. Lately Indians have been raidin' their stock and have killed two

men, and wounded several more. Lord and his men say they're Lipans, the only tribe near, and they—"

"We trailed 'em over here, and close to the Lipan village," broke in Lord.

"Let Fuller finish, Lord," ordered Hatfield. "Then you can talk."

Lord shrugged, and Fuller went on: "Much Feathers claims that if Lipans have attacked the whites, then they're outlaws and crazy young braves he can't always keep track of. Many of the Lipans stay out with their herds and the chief can't watch every one all night and day. Perhaps the men who caused the trouble are in with the tribe now—" he waved toward the silent, watchful Indians nearby, with forty to fifty tough-looking braves, well-armed, in the bunch—"but none will admit it. My point is that Lord and his men have no right to attack the Indians wholesale and punish the entire tribe for the things a few individuals do."

"That's right," Hatfield nodded. "What you got to say, Lord?"

Ken Lord frowned, and drew himself up. He was a tremendous fellow.

"What Fuller says is purty straight, only he didn't go into details about how Bob Griggs' widder and kids feel, and how we all felt when Johnny Teale was drygulched. It's been one thing after another till we're sick of the Lipans. The trails all point over here, and Corey Addison, one of my punchers, run into some of the killers and they tried for him. He says they were Lipans or looked like it, from what he saw. And there ain't any other Indians in the neighborhood."

Lord paused, then added, "We've hit the end of our tether. Either the Government moves the Lipans and opens the range to the cattlemen, or we'll clean these red rascals out ourselves. Nobody sleeps easy nights any more and we don't dare let a woman or kid go out of our sight."

"This range is too dry to run cattle on," declared Fuller. "Why should you want it, Lord?"

"It's dry, but we got spare water we could run in here

and irrigate some," replied Lord frankly. "It's good winter ground, and mustangs can run on it."

Fuller shook his dark head. "Most of it's too alkaline for anything. It's waste land, and it was an injustice to settle the Lipans here and expect them to make a livin' from the soil. In my opinion that may be the cause of this trouble. The Indians had to steal beef because they were hungry, and they fought when they were caught up with."

"Huh!" growled Ken Lord. "First yuh say the Lipans didn't do anything wrong, now yuh say they did!"

"Not at all. I only said it was possible."

"They hit Griggs' place at night and burned it. Does that sound like takin' beeves just for a snack?" Lord spoke sarcastically.

The argument was starting again, and Hatfield hastily interposed.

"Tell yuh what, gents. Give me three days and I'll report to both sides on my findin's. Lord, you take yore men home. Fuller, tell the Lipans to stick close as they can to home, and not to cause any trouble. Is it a deal?"

Paul Fuller stared into the tall man's rugged face.

"Very well, Hayes. I'll see that the Lipans keep their side of the bargain."

"Me, too," declared Ken Lord.

Inwardly the Ranger sighed with relief. He had averted the pitched battle which had threatened, and he had seventy-two hours in which to operate without worrying about what the two factions would do next.

"I'd like to borrow yore waddy, Corey Addison, the one who was wounded, Lord," suggested Hatfield. "He can show me where he was hit, the day this Teale cowboy died."

"All right." He nodded to the handsome Addison. "Corey," he ordered, "stick with Jim Hayes and show him the works."

"Howdy, Jim, glad to know yuh," said Addison, shaking hands.

"Howdy, Addison." Hatfield grinned at the cowboy. "Soon as we've cooled off we'll git goin'."

Hatfield had already sized up the Square L rider. Addison's hazel eyes had a straight, honest look. He touched his crisp little mustache which gave distinction to his bronzed, handsome face, and squared his wide shoulders. The young fellow's whole aspect was pleasing and he did not seem capable of the lying deception which would have been required had he invented the story of his range partner's killing, and his own wound.

Neither side, of course, would take any blame for the war that had begun. Perhaps, he thought, some of Much Feathers' young braves had slipped out at night without their chief's knowledge. That had happened before.

CHAPTER VI

Investigation

Paul Fuller and Rodriguez retired with Much Feathers to the group of Lipans. Ken Lord gave his orders and his followers moved back to the mustangs and mounted, starting for home. When they had ridden off, Hatfield swung to Corey Addison.

"Let's go, Corey. How far is the spot where yore pard Johnny Teale died?"

"Not so far, Jim," Addison told him. "Trail pointed to here and the Lipans, though they hid it on shale before they reached the village."

Addison was riding a big, rangy black, a half-wild creature addicted to sudden crabwise movements as he shied at the slightest excuse. But after a few hundred yards Hatfield saw that Corey was a first-class rider. He handled the ticklish black with a master hand. Blackie, Addison called the horse, which wore a Square L brand.

The ranchers had taken the main trail southeast from the Lipan village. Addison cut straight south, over broken country, and pushed on as rapidly as the ground would permit.

"Ain't but an hour or two more light, Jim," he remarked. "We'll have to work fast."

"We can camp overnight," replied the Ranger. "I want to see everything straight, Corey. Yuh'll be mighty handy to me in pointin' out the lay of the land."

The sun was enlarging, a huge red disc whose base kissed the mountains on the west. Buttes of red-gray rock sent long, needle-shaped shadows across their path, and the dry dust beat up under the hoofs of the two geldings. Vision was cut off by sharp ridges and dips. Mesquite and other thorny growth clung to the hills. It was wild country, thought the Ranger.

"Here's the wash where Johnny Teale was hit," said Corey Addison, after an hour's run. "I was below, on the south branch, see, and heard the shootin'. I rushed over fast as I could—the broken country slowed me up—but when I got there Teale was dead. I seen a couple of Lipans, and they fired on me and cut my left arm."

He held up his brawny, bare forearm and Hatfield could see the healing scar.

"Yuh shore they were Lipans?" he asked.

Corey Addison shrugged. "They wore Lipan paint and feathers, from what I seen of 'em. And there ain't any other Indians around here." Honestly, Addison added, "'Course I was het-up, and I had only glimpses, Jim. But I was right shore they was Lipans."

"Huh! Yuh s'pose some of Much Feathers' young men been sneakin' out on raids at night?"

"That's what we figgered. Fuller's stood between us and the Lipans but yuh can't expect us to take killin's lyin' down. Lord's sort of held us back."

Hatfield nodded. "I savvy he has. Another man with not so much good sense would've started a bloody war long ago."

Addison was pleased at the compliment to his boss.

"Yeah, the boss has plenty of savvy. He's a good man to work for . . . Look! This is the place where Teale got hit."

They dismounted and slid down into the wash, leaving the horses with dropped reins on the brink. Addison led the Ranger around, pointing out the evidence. The drying bones of the stolen steers lay there, picked clean by birds and preying animals.

Climbing the steep sandy bank, they saw the sun giving its last blaze of glory before disappearing behind the hills.

"S'pose we have a bite and camp for the night, Corey?" suggested the Ranger. "I'm plumb wore out from ridin' all day."

"Suits me. Where'll it be?"

"Any water nearby?"

"There's a little hole a ways south, but it's poor. However, the hosses can drink it."

"Bueno. Let's go."

Mounting, they rode along the bank of the arroyo, to cross at a narrow point of which Addison knew. Hatfield's sharp eye caught a sudden glint of sunlight on something, in the distance. It came from the crazy jumble of rocks, woods and hills ahead of them.

"Did yuh see that, Jim?" asked Corey, turning to Hatfield. "Looked like light flashin' on a gun barrel!"

"More like on glass, Corey," the Ranger quietly replied. "It's a bit different. Glass gives a sharper, cleaner flash."

"You're right!" agreed Corey admiringly. "I reckon yuh savvy yore business, Jim."

They watched the hills but saw nothing more.

"Mebbe some Indian playin' with a lookin'-glass," grunted Addison.

Hatfield didn't reply. They crossed the wash, and the night fell suddenly upon them. The aspect of the range had changed. In the starlight and under the slice of silver moon low in the sky, it was mysterious, threatening. The brush and buttes cast dense black shapes across their path.

But Addison knew the way, and after half an hour they pulled up beside a shallow water-hole. They rubbed down their horses after unsaddling, watered them sparingly, and picketed them in coarse bunch grass growing near the spring.

Then they could see to themselves. They had a cold snack from their saddle-bags, and some tepid water from canteens. Rolling quirlies, they smoked and talked for a time, then rolled in their blankets, heads on their saddles.

Hatfield was worn out from the long run to the far-off country. He fell asleep as soon as his head hit the leather . . .

When he jumped awake, he realized it was hours later. He felt completely refreshed, and the moon had climbed high in the sky. The shadows were dense, but in bare spots he could make out shapes of rocks.

Even snoring came from the spot where Corey Addison slept. Evidently he had not been startled by whatever had brought Hatfield to a sitting position, grasping the big Colt which was never far from his hand, even when he slept.

Thud—thud!

It was the sound of a horse's hoofs, close to him, and then he caught the anxious sniffing of Goldy, on a picket rope in the hollow below.

He rose, gun in hand, moved silently to his mount. Addison's black was grazing, head down, fifty yards away. The golden sorrel nuzzled his rider's soothing hand.

"What's wrong, boy?" whispered Hatfield, his ear close to Goldy's muzzle.

The sorrel jerked his head up. He sniffed at the warm wind which intermittently blew from the west, and his hide shivered. He pawed the earth once more.

Hatfield swung, staring that way, trying to pierce the pied patterns of shadow and light. He held the sorrel's reins in his left hand, his Colt in his right, as he froze there. Addison was still up the slope, snoring. Between the bivouac and the nearest patch of broken rocks was a clear

space of perhaps a hundred yards, a barren, shale-strewn stretch.

And suddenly the Ranger saw a gigantic, definite shape rise up and flit across the bare spot.

A second, then a third followed the first. Feathers pointed the tops of the dark heads. They were afoot, stalking their prey. The sorrel's warning had come in the nick of time, and the Ranger's senses, alert even when he was sleeping, had saved him.

But he had Corey Addison to think about. He couldn't mount and ride off. He was even now moving in, swiftly, and as he saw the clear space black with moving shadows, he threw up his Colt and opened fire, at the same time shouting a warning to Addison.

On the sorrel, the Ranger rushed up. His Colt, blaring yellow-red flashes of death in the night, sprayed lead at the massing attackers. They began shrieking—blood-thirsty Indian warwhoops—and rifles blared back at the moving officer.

"Get yore hoss, pronto, Corey!" he bellowed, over the rising din. "This way! Injuns!"

Addison, awakened in the swift alarm of the night rush, came stumbling toward him, calling him.

"Jim! Jim!"

Swift-running Indians, shadowy killers in the night, were almost at his heels as the Ranger reached the young cowboy. His guns blasted them and several dropped behind rocks or squatted low as his bullets whistled too close for comfort. Addison had dashed past, to reach Blackie, and the Ranger, moving all the time, kept his Colts talking to slow them.

Addison's black gelding was maddened by the terrific hubbub of the night fight. He whirled and snorted, jerking back on the picket-rope. Suddenly he hit it just right and the stake snapped from the ground. Corey made a flying jump forward to seize the end of the lariat as the big black turned and started away from there.

To give the cowboy time to mount, the Ranger galloped around a thick bush and streaked back, the picket lariat forming a trip rope, caught in the bush at one end and gripped in his hand at the other. Running figures of the enemy, several of them, hit the stretched rope in the blackness. Hatfield saw lithe bodies trip and roll, coming up on their feet. Then the end of the rope around the bush pulled loose. His hand was burned but he kept his grip and rode free.

"I'm all right," yelled Corey Addison. "Come on!"

Pulling up hand over hand on the picket-rope, Addison had sprung to the black's back, his strong legs clinching on Blackie's ribs.

Hatfield, too, was riding without leather, for there had been no time to saddle up. The faint light from the moon and stars helped them as they retreated. Addison guided the black with the rope halter. Hatfield kept shooting, skillfully. He knew he had hit two or three Indians, and the rest didn't like rushing his guns.

They were all around, creeping up from rock to rock, and a slug whistled within an inch of the Ranger's ear, from the left. He knew that quickly they would be circled, and he whirled the beautiful sorrel, Goldy responding with perfect coordination. Addison was shooting at the attackers.

"Wah-tah-me!" a furious, high-pitched voice shrieked, or so it sounded to the two whites.

Evidently this was the order to mount, for lithe, dark shapes moved off, and holders galloped in with bunches of ropes in hand to pass the mustangs to others.

"Let's get while the gettin's good, Corey!" ordered Hatfield.

"Second the motion," said Corey. He was breathing hard, but it was from exertion and not fear.

"Worth savin'!" thought the Ranger.

He had liked Addison from the start and now that he had found the young cowboy was a good man in a fight, it cinched the matter.

They pulled their horses around hard, and flew off at a tangent, northeastward. It was the easiest route out. The Indians showed no disposition to let them escape, but swung on their trail. Bullets were shrieking after the two zigzagging fugitives as they dashed on through the night.

"Lead the way, Corey!" called Hatfield.

"Where to?"

"What's the nearest ranch?"

"The Square L, my outfit."

"Let's go."

They came up out of the little depression in which the water-hole stood, and broke from the brush onto a rocky flat. Ahead were more rocks and some scrub pines, making a dark patch in the night. At full-tilt they tore over the flat, aware that they would make good targets in the clear.

Addison's big black was wild with alarm. He was snorting, his eyes rolling red, and his shod hoofs struck sparks from the rocks. There was ever the chance of sinking in a gopher hole or a stumble, which would mean death.

The Indians stayed with them, and as Addison reached the dark stretches, Hatfield turned and saw the hard-riding horsemen break out onto the clear. Whoops and a volley of pistol and carbine shots told that the pursuers had sighted him. The slugs clipped the brush or spattered in the sandy earth, but then the Ranger was out of their view, snaking after Addison on a goat trail through the mesquite.

"Addison's a help in the dark," thought the big Ranger.

His chin-strap was taut around his set jaw, his Colt was hot in his hand.

Having just arrived in the section, as yet he knew nothing whatever of the devious animal trails and natural obstacles of the region. But Addison had chased steers through the wilds and had also done some hunting in the hills.

The extra speed of Goldy, and of Corey's fast black, kept them out ahead. Good as the Indian mustangs were, they couldn't compare with the carefully cared-for, power-

ful mounts of Hatfield and Addison, who lavished much time on their horses.

They picked up yard after yard, and Hatfield, at the rear, looked back to see the red men coming, thick as a skirmish line in battle, across the flat.

Addison kept going northeast. Hatfield pulled up nearer to him.

"Ain't yore spread more easterly, Corey?" he asked.

"Yeah, but I figger we'll make better time bearin' north to skip the hills between here and there. You all right, Jim?"

"Shore. Nothin' but scratches. And you?"

"Horseshoe in my pocket, I reckon. That was mighty close."

Comparatively they were safe, on the backs of their strong horses. The Indians stayed with them for over an hour, perhaps swelling the trail by the dust risen under the hoofs of the two geldings. Then the Ranger began to slow, glancing back at moonlit stretches of country.

"They've handed in their resignations, Corey," he said. "We're clear."

"Bueno. Let's have a quirly."

Addison mopped sweat from his brow and dust from his eyes. He handed Hatfield the "makin's," and they enjoyed a smoke, driving at an easier pace. Both horses were lathered, and still breathing heavily from the night run.

"Ain't long till dawn," remarked the Ranger. "S'pose we head straight for the Square L."

They turned southward, where the trail led through low, rolling hills, and paused at a small creek coming from the heights, and fed by springs, for water and to rest the horses. Riding on, the range was better, with more grass and less mesquite, and once a bunch of steers lifted their tails and galloped out of their path.

"It ain't far now," said Addison, with a sweeping motion of his long arm.

Passing through a gap, they came out on a wide plain,

with good grass. The creek had widened, and trees grew along its uneven line.

"Just around the bend—" began Corey, and stopped short.

"What's that?" broke in the Ranger.

On the right he caught the sounds of horses splashing in the water, and in the faint light he sighted a number of riders who had crossed the creek and were close upon them.

"Injuns!" he warned. "Looks like the same gang, Corey!"

The enemy hadn't yet sighted them. The horsemen were heading across their path.

"They'll hit the ranch in a few minutes!" Corey whispered anxiously. "Yuh s'pose—?"

"We better ride for it and give warnin'," said Hatfield. "There's sixty or seventy of 'em!"

CHAPTER VII

The Square L Is Hit

On the left, the sky had turned faintly gray, heralding the dawn. It was still night but the new day was close. As the two white riders speeded up their horses, the Indians sighted them and warning cries ran along the line as the van dug in the spurs that were tied on their bare or moccasined feet, and drove toward them.

It was clear riding, however, and the two whites flew at mad speed down the line, passing the danger point, in the lead. The foe pounded after them. Up over a rise, and before them the Ranger saw the black shapes of buildings.

"There she is!" called Addison.

Hatfield fired his Colt, three quick ones, not wasting the lead, as it was aimed back at his pursuers, but giving

warning. They flashed through a gate, with Addison in front. The Ranger turned, guiding the sorrel with his knees and pumping slugs at the ragged line of Indians.

"Lipans—Injuns!" bellowed Addison, in the ranch yard. "All out!"

The house was low and rambling, but large. There was a bunkhouse at the rear, as well as stables and smaller structures, like corn-cribs and tool-sheds. Hatfield and Addison pulled up at the front stoop and threw themselves from their mounts, sending the two geldings off around the house, out of range.

With a fresh-loaded Colt in one hand, Hatfield vaulted up behind the thick railing, and crouched there, shooting at the attackers.

They were dashing in, straight at the Square L. Answering yells had come to Addison, as he shouted the alarm. Big Ken Lord ran out, a heavy rifle in one hand and a belt of cartridges in the other. Cowboys, roused in the bunkhouse, were snatching up weapons for the defense.

The Indians split, wildly dashing this way and that to circle the ranch. They had pitch brands, and began tossing them into the wooden buildings.

"Looks like they were comin' here to hit the place," decided the Ranger.

The eerie light of pre-dawn was upon the scene. Ken Lord knelt beside Hatfield, pumping bullets into his gun, and resting the long barrel on the rail. The rifle roared, and a horse took it, the rider hitting the ground and running on to jump up behind a comrade. Wild warwhoops rang above the din, as the battle was joined.

Square L cowboys were dashing in, their guns spouting lead. The raging circle of Indians felt the slugs, and the radius widened. Bullets slapped into wooden walls, or hunted through the windows. A dozen little blazes were being fought by the defenders.

"Yuh all right, Lord?" a voice called loudly.

"Yeah, Roberts," called back the owner of the Square L. "Here I am, on the front porch!"

Tim Roberts, owner of the neighboring Circle 5, had spent the night at the Square L. The elderly, saturnine-faced rancher joined the defense, his short-barreled .30-.30 rifle taking toll of the foe.

"Them Lipans fight good, Ken," he remarked. "Young fellers, I reckon. Much Feathers couldn't ride thataway any more."

Given warning by Hatfield and Addison, the big Square L was fully on the prod. Waddies were taking vantage points and from them picking off the crazy Indian riders. It was not the sort of fight that the savages liked, and when the fires failed to take hold, and seeing that the defenders were alert, the Indians turned and rode off, full-tilt, in retreat.

"There they go!" shouted Hatfield.

"They was on their way here, boss," said Corey Addison, mopping dirt and sweat from his young face, "when they stumbled over Hayes and me out on the reservation. We got away, but run into 'em again as they started in to hit the ranch!"

"Cuss 'em!" growled Lord. "That proves it, don't it, Hayes? I held the boys in from attackin' the Lipans, 'cause I hoped to settle it peaceable. Figgered if we done some threatenin' that Much Feathers'd try to hold in his young braves. But by gravy, this is too much! It ain't twenty-four hours since we let Fuller and you talk us out of punishin' them Lipans, Hayes, and here they try for me! They're askin' for it."

"Boss," broke in Addison, "Jim saved my hide tonight, and his warnin' just now no doubt kept 'em from sweepin' the ranch. He's the best fightin' man yuh ever see, and he's a top-hand in every way."

Ken Lord stared at the tall man.

"Yeah," he admitted, "I can see that. Yuh fight just as good as yuh talk, Hayes. I'm willin' to work with yuh as

far as possible. But yuh see for yoreself we can't stand any more such attacks."

"No, yuh can't," agreed Hatfield. "On the other hand, Lord, I heard and seen some things tonight that are mighty interestin'. Yuh gave me three days and I still claim 'em. Soon as it's light, I'm goin' out trackin'."

"The sign'll lead straight to the Lipans," Lord said confidently.

Two men had been wounded, two waddies of Lord's string. They were not serious hurts, however. Hatfield, led by Corey Addison, went to the large kitchen at the back of the house, and here he found a motherly woman, Ken Lord's wife Ella, and a girl whose beauty made him blink. They were bandaging up the wounded punchers. One had a hole in his right upper arm; the second had had a chunk of flesh cut from his cheek by an Indian bullet.

A lamp burned on the kitchen table at the center of the room. But the dawn was coming up, bathing the range in new light.

"Corey!" the girl exclaimed when she saw the waddy. "You're all right, aren't you?"

"Yes'm, Jenny, I'm fine," he said. "But I can thank Jim Hayes here for that. The Lipans near got us both tonight."

Hatfield could see that Addison and Jenny had eyes only for one another, and they were well matched. Addison was decidedly handsome, and any man would have been attracted to Jenny Lord. Her golden hair, which had been hastily piled on her head in the alarm, sheened in the light. Her large dark-brown eyes were appealing.

"You boys must be starved," said Mrs. Lord, as she finished bandaging the waddy's injured cheek.

Jenny had already done up the hurt arm of the other, and the two men, after thanking them, went out.

"Well I, for one, could eat a hoss," declared Addison. "Never had so much exercise in one night since the big stampede. This here's Jim Hayes, the range detective, Miz Lord. Mebbe the boss told you about him. He saved my hide more'n once tonight."

Swiftly, Corey described the night fight, the chase, and then how they had stumbled over the Indians as the red men were closing in on the Square L.

"Don't know how they smelt us out at the water-hole," he said, "but they knowed we was there and come for us."

"Happy to know you, ladies," said the Ranger, in his soft drawl.

He was a splendid looking specimen of manhood, and the women watched him admiringly.

"Corey," he said soberly, "them Injuns didn't run on us by luck at the water-hole tonight. They knowed our position."

"Yeah? How so?"

"Remember that flash we seen, on our way over? Somebody was watchin' us with fieldglasses from the hills. Whoever it was placed us and so they was able to creep in on our campin' spot."

"Yuh're right agin, Jim!"

Mrs. Lord was cooking breakfast, aided by her pretty daughter. Jenny smiled on the stalwart young fellows, as she served them with coffee, fried beef and potatoes, and warm bread.

When he had eaten a big meal, Jim Hatfield went out to smoke. Corey Addison found him, later, as the sun came up, placing a borrowed saddle on the golden gelding.

"Where to now, Jim?" he asked.

"I'm goin' back and look over that water-hole and the ground about it, Corey."

Addison whistled. "Yuh mean yuh ain't shore yet? That head-dress on the Injuns was Lipan. It was a gang of Much Feathers' young braves that have gone loco. It's happened before."

Hatfield shook his head. "There's a few things puzzle me, Corey, and I got to clear 'em up. The spyglass, for instance. Besides, I know a little Lipan. You heard that hombre yell for 'em to get their mustangs? It didn't sound jest like Lipan talk."

"Huh." Addison shrugged. "Can I tag along, Jim?"

"I'd rather go by myself," Hatfield said. "Stay here and rest yore feet. I want to pick up my saddle—it's a good one. I'll get yores at the same time." The Ranger wished now to work alone for a time.

He took his leave of the Square L for the time being, riding westward for the Lipan Reservation and the water-hole where Addison and he had been attacked the night before. The range was bathed in golden sunlight. Bunches of cows and mustangs grazed over it. The creek ran peacefully in its winding bed, and birds and butterflies flitted in the warmth. It did not seem possible that violent death could strike over such a peaceful land.

The sun was high when he hit the backtrack, and watched the trail, which Goldy, Blackie and the pursuing Indian horses had made in the sandy earth. The savages rode unshod animals, some of the many wild mustangs which ran on the range and were hard to track.

Checking up, making certain no enemies were near at hand, the Ranger slowly approached the water-hole near which he and Addison had slept last night. Dismounting, he found their saddles, untouched, as they had left them in the alarm. He cast about, looking at sign. Here and there he found the partial imprint of a bare savage foot or a knee, with slithering trails in sand where lithe bodies had crept up on the sleeping prey.

His eyes seldom missed anything, and they did not fail him now. Tiny objects caught his attention. He stooped, picking up one such object between his thumb and forefinger. It was a little red bead. Nearby was a black one, and a couple more red ones farther on.

"By juniper!" he muttered.

He looked around. There was the bush, with its branches awry, some broken, which he had used as a post to hold one end of his lariat when he had tripped some of them in the night to give Addison a minute or two in which to escape. He found a dozen of the little beads close to where his line had stretched.

"Stumbled over the rope, and it tore more loose!" he decided.

More! The beads were identical with those which he had ripped loose from Ab Murphy's moccasin, in the Culver saloon.

"I'll hunt up Murphy," mused the Ranger. "'Course, there may be other beads like the ones on his moccasins, but his havin' that busted string and all—" The clue was too good for him to pass up, and he decided that he would check up on the man as soon as possible. "I'll want to know more about him," he thought. "Meanwhile, I'll see where their backtrail goes to."

He left the saddles and began backtracking on the Indians. The sand had sifted over some of the moccasin tracks, but he was able to move slowly westward, casting about from time to time as he lost the sign. Soon he came upon unshod mustang impressions, as the savages had ridden near to their bivouac, before dismounting and starting their slow death-stalk in the darkness.

After a mile, ever west, the main trail broke up into several different tracks, like irregular spokes of a wheel that had come together at a rendezvous.

"Met here," Hatfield muttered.

He raised his eyes from the dry arroyo through which he was moving. Ahead, jagged mountains reared, covered with stub pines and brush, and with bare, high rock slides gleaming in the sunlight. It was a trail-less welter of wilderness, apparently impassable to horses.

He managed to stay on one of the mustang tracks for some miles but it was hard going, for he lost it again and again on shale.

It turned northwest, bearing toward Much Feathers' village. He reached a height, and could see the Lipans' homes across a wide depression. Dropping down, forced to lead the golden sorrel on the rocky slope, he reached the bottom flats. Skirting up and down its south rim, he ran on several mustang hoof impressions. They seemed to

converge in the direction of the Lipan settlement.

But just as he thought he might succeed in tracking them to the end, he found that the wide flat was floored with a shale which held no identifiable impressions.

"Hid mighty clever," he grunted. "Points to the Lipans. And yet—"

He shook his head, and rode to the left, bearing west, hunting some sign. But the tracks never materialized for him again.

Patiently, realizing that the direct trailing was useless, the Ranger turned Goldy and rode back to the little water-hole. He picked up the saddles and headed for the Square L. He had spent most of the day in a wild-goose chase in the wilderness. The Indians had cunningly concealed their sign.

CHAPTER VIII

Manhunt

Hatfield dumped the two saddles at the ranch, the one he had borrowed and the one belonging to Corey Addison. He had put his own saddle on Goldy as soon as he had found it. The sun was dropping as he consulted with Ken Lord in the corral yard.

"Any luck, Hayes?" demanded the rancher leader.

"A little, mebbe. That's tough country to the west of Much Feathers' village, ain't it?"

"Yes, suh! Few men been through. You got to do most of it afoot. Full of deep canyons and snakes. Grizzlies in there, too, they say."

Hatfield consulted the tall cool glass which had been given him by the smiling Jenny.

"Ever hear of an hombre named Ab Murphy, Lord?" he asked. "I run into him at Culver on my way here."

"Yuh mean the trapper?" asked Lord.

"I reckon so. Brown as an Injun, with dark hair and greenish eyes. Dresses in buckskin. Sort of a joker at times."

"Shore, I savvy him. He's shot or pizened mountain lions and other varmints for me and other ranchers. He's a hunter and wild-mustang man. They say he can walk a wild hoss down."

"He trap in them mountains over there?" asked Hatfield.

"Yeah, so I understand," said Lord, then asked curiously, "what's Murph got to do with the Lipans botherin' us?"

Hatfield shook his head. "I got interested in him the other day, that's all." He turned aside Lord's curiosity. "I fetched in Addison's hull and the one yuh lent me this mornin'. If I can have a bite, I'll be ridin' agin."

Ken Lord blinked at him. "Ain't yuh done enough for the day? Can't do much at night, can yuh?"

"That depends on the night," Hatfield smiled.

"Well, suit yoreself. Supper's nigh ready."

After a full, satisfying meal, the Ranger saddled up and took the road to Culver. The moon came up, and he moved at a fast clip toward the little town. It was around nine o'clock when he saw the lights of the settlement in the creek valley and, dropping down, forded the stream. He rode into town and across the plaza.

Leaving the gelding waiting in the shadows near the corner, he stepped up on the porch of the Carousel, which was wide open and livening up. Drinkers ranged the bar and there were some games on in the rear. Shining oil lamps, hanging on gilt chains from the rafters, lighted the scene. He glanced over the batwings on the chance that Murphy might be in the place, but did not see his man.

Pinky, the barkeeper, was up front, and Hatfield pushed through and nodded to him.

"Howdy, Pinky."

The bartender's round face brightened and his red-rimmed eyes widened in recognition.

"Why, it's that dog-fightin' range detective!" he exclaimed. "Evenin', Hayes. Have one on the house."

He poured a drink for Hatfield, who leaned on the bar.

"How yuh doin', Hayes?" asked Pinky.

"Bueno. Got a job, for three days anyways. Have yuh seen Murph around? I'd like to buy him a snort and let bygones be bygones."

Pinky's round face went grave, and he leaned close to Hatfield.

"He ain't been in today, Hayes," he said confidentially, "but take my advice and keep away from that feller. When he's drinkin' he's the meanest hombre alive and when he's sober he's worse. If he goes up one road, you go up the other. Yuh was lucky the other day and yuh're mighty quick, but Murph's enemies got a way of bein' found lyin' bloated in the mesquite in the mornin's or mebbe their gun went off accidental-like. Now don't give me away. I wouldn't talk like that but I like yore looks, savvy?"

"I savvy, and gracias. I'll be seein' yuh."

Hatfield went outside. There was a light burning at the rear of Paul Fuller's office, down the way.

"Mebbe he can tell me more about Murphy," he decided. "He must savvy him."

Murphy had said he had once worked for the Lipan agent. Anyhow, Fuller would undoubtedly be acquainted with such a trapper and mountainman.

The office was dark and the front door locked. Hatfield went around to the side, and knocked on the door there. The way was through a narrow aisle between the agency and the next building. Fuller's voice answered him.

"Yes—who's there?" Fuller called.

"It's Jim Hayes, Fuller. I'd like a word with yuh."

Hatfield could hear the agent moving about inside. After a minute the door was unbolted and the big man stood there, looking into his eyes.

"Good evening, Hayes. I was just getting ready to go to bed."

Fuller was in his shirt sleeves and stockinged feet.

The square living room was furnished in good taste, with comfortable chairs, tables, a mat on the floor, and a bookcase. From their titles, Hatfield saw these chiefly had to do with Indian lore of the Southwest. There was a blue-covered couch along the rear wall, and bric-a-brac—Indian hatchets and knives, beadwork and trinkets—on the shelves and walls. The door at the back was closed.

"I won't keep yuh long, Fuller," Hatfield said.

"That's all right. Sit down and have a cigar."

"Gracias." Hatfield took an easy chair and lighted a smoke.

"Have you anything to report yet?" inquired the agent anxiously. "Lord gave you three days. I hope you can turn them aside, keep them from attacking my Lipans. They're hot-headed and unjust, the cowmen, and I'm pinning my faith on you, Hayes."

Fuller twirled his heavy signet ring on his finger. The ring had drawn Hatfield's attention before. It was large, of thick beaten gold, with three concentric circles of black jade standing out in relief.

"While Corey Addison and me were camped at a water-hole not far from the Lipan village," replied Hatfield, "we were hit and near kilt. And Injuns made a mass attack on the Square L."

Fuller's split lip trembled and the ring whirled faster on his long middle finger.

"I heard," he admitted. "I couldn't believe it. I don't understand how it happened. I've stood between my Lipans and the ranchers, and I'll stay with them even if it means my death. On the other hand, just between you and me, Hayes, do you think some of the young Lipan braves my be slipping out nights to commit these atrocities?"

"I ain't got that far yet." Hatfield shook his head. "One thing I do know: we got to keep this war from really star-

tin' or there's no sayin' how many good folks'll die, white and red alike. In spite of how it looks, Ken Lord has held his men in check from makin' a mass attack on yore Injuns. But after that affair last night, he ain't likely to hold back any more, unless we show him proper that the Lipans are innocent."

"But—how can we do that?"

"By trappin' the ones that's guilty," Hatfield said firmly.

"You mean you don't believe it's the Lipans?" Fuller seemed astonished.

"I can't swear to anything yet. But if some Lipan braves are in on it, they must be arrested and punished."

"I see."

Hatfield was interested in Fuller. The agent had an intense way of speaking, and of acting. He was obviously well-educated, from his aspect and speech.

"That's a mighty queer ring yuh got on yore finger, Fuller," he commented. "Is it Indian?"

"Yes—yes. It's a relic, I've had it for years. Got it in Mexico."

Fuller slipped the big ring off and Hatfield took it, turning it over curiously. It was hand-made, beaten, virgin gold. Skillful native artisans had fashioned those three black jade circles on the broadened flat face, concentric in design. These black rings stood out from the yellow round moats of the gold ring proper.

"It's a mystic Indian design," explained the agent. "The core is the soul, the second ring protecting it the body, the third the brain or mind which throws a circle about the body, defending it from its enemies. That's the gist of it, anyway."

Hatfield admired the ring, then handed it back to the agent, who slipped it on the middle finger of his left hand.

"By the way," asked the Ranger casually, "yuh savvy an hombre known as Ab Murphy?"

"You mean the trapper?"

"Yeah, the trapper."

"Of course. Everybody does. But I don't know him

well. He's done a job or two for us, that's all. I see him when he comes to town, which isn't often."

"What kind of work did he do for yuh?" asked Hatfield.

"There were several big cougars and grizzlies annoying the Lipan goat herds last spring," Fuller explained. "I paid Murphy to poison and shoot them . . . Why? Are you interested in him? Has he anything to do with all this trouble?"

Fuller's burning eyes fixed the Ranger's gray-green, steady gaze.

"Well—I'd like to locate him, that's all," Hatfield said. "He must savvy that mountain country on the west better'n most men. Has he got any special place he hangs out, or a home in these parts. How do yuh find him when yuh want him?"

"He has no regular place, or anything like that," said Fuller. "Usually, if he's in town, you'll find him at the Carousel or some other saloon. He drinks heavily when he's on a spree. But no one can say where he is when he's not in sight."

"All right." The big Ranger rose, nodding to the Indian agent. Fuller's lip twitched as he showed his white teeth. "I'll let yuh turn in, then. I'll report again before long."

"If I see Murphy, I'll let you know," Fuller promised. "Where'll I find you if I want you, Hayes?"

"If I ain't in town, send word to the Square L. I'm like Murph. Nobody can say where I am when I ain't in sight."

Hatfield grinned, and waved as he went out the side door.

He had hoped to shortcut to the heart of the range mystery by breaking Ab Murphy, had he been able to prove what he suspected, which was that Murphy was leading the Indian raiders.

When Hatfield was gone, Paul Fuller drew in a deep breath. His fists were clenched tight and a scowl spread over his face. It was like the lowering of storm clouds across a bright blue sky, so radical was the change in the

agent's aspect. He swung with a low curse, and turned down the oil lamp on the center table until it was nearly out.

In the dimness he glided to the back and opened the door into the rear room.

"Has he gone?" someone whispered.

"I think so. He's hunting you, Murph."

"I heard some of the sidewinder's blowin'," said Ab Murphy angrily. "I'll kill that son, first chance I see. I would've shot him just now if I was shore I could've jumped in and got the drop."

"He's got to die," Fuller said coldly, "and so must others, but foremost of all you must keep me screened and clear, Murph. Hayes, or whatever his handle is, has come too close for comfort. Maybe he just blundered into it, but I don't like the way he's jumped in. To cover us, I sent a complaint to the Texas Rangers when Ken Lord did. This man may be one."

"A Ranger?" barked Murphy.

"Yes. He claims to be a range detective but it's too pat, pulling in as he did."

"By hook, yuh've hit the nail on the head!" declared Murphy. "I was tight as an owl the first time I seen the polecat, but I didn't cotton to him at all. I'll kill him tonight!"

"Take it easy!" advised Fuller. "I'd like to see him toes up, and we will. But I can't afford any slips, Murph. I can't afford to lose you and I must keep my own nose clean, savvy? If anything went sour and he beat you to the shot. . . . Well, you get out of town now, at once. Go to the mountain hideout. Rodriguez can always reach you there if I need you quick.

"Here's your new orders. Drive in with all you've got and kill as many of the ranchers as you can—without showing in the open, of course. Hayes isn't dumb. He was right when he said that Ken Lord has held back his friends from hitting the Lipans. I did all I could to force the at-

tack, without saying so openly. Hoped it would be between the Lipans and the cowmen, with me keeping myself clear. Too much of a war might bring Federal interference, which wouldn't do at all. But now we must risk it. Go to it, turn your men loose and kill!"

CHAPTER IX

Wounded

Faint light reached through, touching Paul Fuller's strange face. His eyes glowed like redhot coals and he breathed heavily from distended nostrils. He was showing his true colors now, for behind a clean, respectable front, the Indian agent was a scheming, bloodthirsty killer. The pity and care that he pretended for his red charges and for humanity was all simulated.

Ab Murphy stared up at his chief with something of amazement. Murphy was tough, but this man beat him. Ab Murphy had brains, also, but he used them in carrying out the schemes Fuller thought up—big matters—content to be Fuller's general in the field. Fuller's genius for evolving criminal plots was tremendous, and Murphy carried out his ideas. And because of these two men, whole death and destruction now threatened the range.

"Get goin', Murph," ordered Fuller. "Pick up your horse, and keep to the back roads on your way out."

He slapped his ally on the back. Softly opening a back door into Tin Can Alley, he peered up and down, seeing that the way was clear. Light shafts came from the back windows of saloons, shining on piles of tin cans thrown out of the kitchens. Music and the sounds of revelry mingled with the piping of tree toads in the dark patches of thorny growth in the fields between the streets.

Ab Murphy slipped in the shadows to the rear of the

little stable where his gray mustang waited. His moccasins made no sound on the packed dirt as he moved with the sinuous motions of a big snake. A mountain man, whose house was the wilderness, he was like one of the animals that made their lair where he dwelt. He was as strong as an Indian and his eyes glowed in the darkness like an animal's.

Fuller's door softly closed, as Murphy turned the corner of the stable out of the agent's sight.

Murphy put a hand on his gray's neck, soothingly. He had tied a bandanna around the mount's muzzle so that the horse wouldn't whinny as he waited. A blanket was strapped on the gray, and it was the only saddle required or desired by Murphy, whose ways and instincts were savage.

"Cuss that Hayes hombre," he thought furiously, hating Hatfield with all his burning strength. "I could have finished up my spree tonight if it wasn't for that sidewinder!"

For Fuller's hurry call, to hit the Square L and kill Hatfield and Corey Addison en route, had come in the middle of Murphy's periodical drinking bout. He had just got warmed up when he had fought Hatfield at the Carousel, and he craved more whisky.

He turned, looking longingly back at the saloons, with their rear doors invitingly open.

Except when Ab Murphy's senses were numbed by large quantities of alcohol, life was a sombre, almost torturesome thing to him. In his twisted soul he hated his fellowmen. The sufferings of others often amused him.

At an early age he had been carried off by Comanche Indians and had been adopted into the tribe and lived the life of the redmen. The streak in him that made him enjoy torturing anyone opposed to him was deeper than any that could have been caused by his early environment, however. It had been born in him.

"By hook, I'll get a couple of bottles and drink 'em on my way out," he decided, smacking his lips. "And if that

big Hayes skunk bumps into me, I'll down him!"

Fuller wouldn't like his taking the chance, but Murphy wanted the liquor. He left the mustang's reins on the ground, and slipped around the other side of the stable, making sure that Paul Fuller was not still at his back door. The agent's house was now dark.

It was a simple matter for the lithe, silent Murphy to move up a few doors until he was opposite the rear entrance to the Carousel, the big saloon which he favored when in Culver. Sounds of a violin and tinny piano, and the babble of voices came from the front. The back rooms were lighted by oil lamps, and there were some big card games going on inside, with the players intent only on the turn of fortune.

But the rear door was open, and it made a deep shadow on one side. The coast was clear, and Murphy slipped over and waited. After a few minutes, a waiter in a white apron, carrying a tray of whiskys and beers, came swiftly down the hall, entered one of the private rooms, and soon started back.

"Hey, Butch!" Murphy softly hailed the waiter. The man paused, turned and came to him. "Fetch me two bottles of Redwing, and make it pronto." He pressed money into the man's hand. "See anything of that big jigger that calls hisself Hayes?"

"He was in talkin' to Pinky a while ago, but he went off down the plaza," replied Butch.

"Huh! Well, keep yore trap shut, and bring the likker."

He leaned against the side of the building, watching the alley from both directions. Noises from the street and the saloons were in his acute ears. After a short time, the sound of steps came from the corridor, and he peeked through the crack to see Butch, the waiter, coming with his gliding step, carrying bottles of whisky in his hands.

"Good boy," said Murphy, tipping him a silver dollar. "See yuh soon, Butch."

"Bueno. Take care of yoreself, Murph."

Ab Murphy swung, with his bottles in hand. He crossed the alley and cut around the far side of the stable toward his mustang. As he reached the next alley, a tall figure stepped from the shadows.

"Good evenin', Murph," a soft voice said. "Goin' some place?"

Murphy drew in a hard breath. He had his bottles in his hands and since he hadn't been expecting any trouble he had relaxed after getting away from the Carousel apparently without being seen.

In the faint light, he saw who spoke. The man was Jim Hayes, the tall fellow who was hunting him.

Ab Murphy thought swiftly, in the flash of a moment. He was at a great disadvantage with the bottles in his hands, and he knew the big man's power and speed. Paul Fuller's door was but a short distance away from where they faced one another, and Murphy said quickly, in a loud voice, as might anybody innocently startled:

"Why, it's Jim Hayes!" He put some ironic humor into his tone, adding, "Polecats and sidewinders like the night best, though, don't they?"

"Yeah, in huntin' 'em yuh have to do a lot of night work," Hatfield said easily. He was leaning with his left shoulder against the side of the stable, and his gray-green eyes were fixed on Murphy. "Was sorta lookin' for yuh, Murph," he continued, in the same soft drawl. "I was standin' on the Carousel porch and heard the waiter ask for a couple bottles hooch. Just on a hunch I come down the side alley and spotted you."

"I savvy." Hayes was sharp Murphy thought. Fuller had said so. Now he knew it himself. "What can I do for yuh, Jim? Hope there ain't no hard feelin's over the little fracas the other day. I was purty full."

Murphy kept his voice down carefully, pushing back the vitriolic hatred he felt for this man, trying to lull him into security until he made a false move. It was hard, but he did his best. He wanted to get his gun out and pour lead

into the snooping range detective or whoever he was, and have it over with.

"No. I sort of enjoyed it, after I thought it over," answered Hatfield, still softly.

"Well—nice to have seen yuh, Jim."

Murphy turned as though the interview were over.

"Just a minute, Murph," Hatfield said. "Let's go into the back room of the Carousel and drink cozy-like. It's a lot more comfortable than hittin' the bottle all alone."

Murphy hesitated. Then he said, clearing his throat loudly:

"Well, all right, Jim, all right. Come on."

Hatfield was standing there, his face pale in the moonlight against the dark wall of the stable. His long hands hung easily at his sides, close to the heavy Colts. Murphy knew that he was ready to whip-draw and shoot, and he was biding his time, waiting for the Ranger to make a little mistake. He swung past Hatfield and walked noisily as he could to Tin Can Alley, aware that his enemy was a few feet behind him.

Murphy crossed through the light shafts of the back windows, whistling a little tune. He entered the Carousel, turning to wait, in the frame of the lighted doorway, for Hatfield, who was a little behind him.

"There's a room on the left that ain't bein' used, Murph," said Hatfield.

Murphy nodded and strolled in. Carefully he set his two bottles of whisky on the round table. The room was about ten-feet square, with the table, half a dozen chairs, a bar-like counter and some pictures of girls in scanty attire tacked to the wooden walls. There were two windows, one giving onto Tin Can Alley, the other onto the narrow alley between the Carousel and the next house, both open in the warm night. A single-wicked oil lamp burned low in the middle of the table.

"Turn up the light a bit, Murph," suggested Hatfield.

Murphy did. The tall man stood slouched at one side of

the door, just inside the room, watching him. As the lamp came up, until it nearly smoked, Murphy turned to find that Hayes was looking at his feet.

He wondered why. His buckskin pants were tucked into the high sides of the deerskin moccasins, beautiful, expensively worked footgear made by expert squaws. They came above his ankles and were laced with heavy rawhide. Most intricate designs had been sewed on by the skillful hands of the artist, Indian designs with symbolic meanings.

"Why's he lookin' at my feet?" thought Murphy again.

A queer panic welled inside him. It was as close to fear as he could come, with his strange, brutal nature. But that big fellow was almost sinister, with his smooth, yet deadly ways.

Somewhere Murphy had torn the beadwork on the moccasin covering his right foot. He had attempted to make a patch job of fixing it, but once such strings began going loose they were hard to stop. He had lost a number of the little red and black beads from that side.

The gray-green eyes of the big man at the door rose slowly to fix Ab Murphy's. Murphy saw their hue darken to the icy bleakness of an Arctic sea.

"Who are the Injuns yuh're leadin' ag'in the ranchers, Murph?" asked his captor easily.

Despite his quick mind and his fighting strength, Murphy nearly gasped. It was impossible not to show a bit of perturbation at the suddenness of it.

"What yuh mean?" he growled. "What Injuns? I don't lead anybody ag'in anything, mister."

If he could have drawn and shot then, Murphy would have done so. But the long hands of the man near the door were too close to the butts of the Colts.

"Yuh was with a gang of braves that hit Corey Addison and me at the water-hole, Murphy. That was you with the spyglass, makin' shore of our position before the sun went down. I heard yuh give an order to yore men in a strange tongue. It wasn't Lipan, was it? And it was yore gang which attacked the Square L before dawn the same night."

Ab Murphy felt his head swimming as he sought for a way out. The man was a devil. Somehow he had got on the right track, and now Murphy was his prisoner.

"Yuh're talkin' foolishness, Jim," he muttered.

He wanted a drink but did not dare move his hands. Hayes might misinterpret it and shoot him. Fury burned inside him. He loathed this enemy with a furious hatred that was all-consuming.

The action broke with such suddenness that even the catlike Murphy was not quite up to it—but the big man was. In astenishment, Murphy saw Jim Hayes throw himself down and around. At the same time, a slim hand flashed with the speed of legerdemain to the Colt in the right-hand holster.

"Don't shoot!" shouted Murphy, thinking Hatfield was going to kill him.

His voice was drowned in the roar of a shotgun. Buckshot whirled in a bunch, close to Murphy, spreading. It patterned out into nine dangerous slugs across the room. The man at the door was hit, whipped half around as a chunk of lead cut into his side and poured blood on his hand. His Colt belched fire and death as he slumped down against the counter, and his bullets streaked through the window giving onto the narrow alley on the side of the Carousel.

Ab Murphy went for his gun. He saw his foe down, half out of the room. Blood was spurting from under his shirt. Murphy was grinning in murderous joy as he felt his Colt grip in his hands, the familiar stock that he knew so well. His gun cleared leather and started up.

"Hold it!"

Murphy whirled, ducking, his lips snarling his vitriolic hate. Hatfield's pistol roared again, and Murphy was whirled back, on his side, his head bumping hard on the wooden floor. Men were shouting from the saloon, alarmed by the sudden battle and the roar of guns.

Murphy's kicking legs hit the table, tipped it over. He

did it with intent, cursing shrilly. The lamp went out, and then the shotgun roared a second barrel, the scattering buckshot tearing into the wall close to the Ranger.

Ab Murphy was already crawling. He knew he was hit, in the right shoulder, and the shock of it had taken away his breath. But he had a savage's endurance and he fought against the pain and the numbing sensations. The window was close, and he got up and threw his body through the opening.

He half expected more bullets from his enemy but none came and in a second he was rolling away, on the ground.

Paul Fuller seized his injured arm and it took all Murphy's stoic endurance to keep from crying out. Fuller was a powerful man, physically. He lifted the bleeding man and ran with him, across the back alley and around the stable. Yelling went on in the Carousel, as they investigated the source of the noises.

Fuller threw Murphy onto the back of the gray mustang.

"You fool!" he snarled, and though he kept his voice down, it was filled with rage. "Didn't I tell you to get out of town?" Fuller was furious, and for once Murphy didn't have an answer. The tall agent slapped the drooping man in the face. "Wake up, and get goin'! Hustle! I heard you, and managed to snatch you out! Pronto, now! Move!"

Snatching the reins, Fuller thrust them into Murphy's hands.

"I—I got hit, but I can ride," muttered Murphy. "You—winged that skunk Hayes, Boss. Go on back and finish him off. For me."

"Get going." Fuller slapped the mustang's haunch, and Murphy, his strong legs gripping the barrel ribs, rode off, along a little lane which quickly took him away from Culver.

He glanced back, at the yellow-lighted settlement. "Cuss Hayes," he muttered savagely. "I hope Fuller finishes him tonight!"

CHAPTER X

Bad News

Stretching his strong young limbs and yawning, Corey Addison awoke to a new day. The early morning sunlight streamed across the Square L yard and penetrated the open door of the bunkhouse, where Addison and others of Ken Lord's waddies slept.

It was a beautiful day, with a cloudless blue sky and the aromatic scent of mesquite in the air; it would get hot later, but the inhabitants of Culberson County were used to that.

"Rise and shine!" howled Addison, merrily, as he hit the floor and pulled on his big boots.

The slight wound in his arm, which he had taken the day his partner Johnny Teale had died, was healed enough so that it no longer needed a bandage. There was a jagged scar that itched now and then, but it didn't pain him any more. A night's sleep had quickly restored his youthful power, the resiliency of his years making all the difference.

He ate breakfast with his fellows, rough, smiling cow-boys whose talk was chiefly jests and good-natured teasing.

"Wonder how Jim's makin' out?" thought Addison. He had been greatly attracted to Hatfield, the big man who had suddenly appeared in his life.

After his meal, he spoke briefly with Jenny Lord, who was helping her mother in the kitchen. He always made it a point to see her before starting out for the day.

Jenny had many admirers. Men rode a couple of hundred miles to visit the Square L and usually it was to call on Jenny, the belle of the county. There was a lot of competition, and Corey Addison had been pretty anxious at

times, wondering if, with all the assorted ranchers, cowboys and townsmen who courted Jenny, he could win her.

When he had spoken with Jenny and her mother, Addison strode out behind the big stable and stood at the corral fence. There stood the creature next in his affections. He whistled and called:

"Til-ly! Til-ly!"

There were many horses in the big east corral. One heard him, and separated from a group over the rise, covered with nipped bush, and came galloping to him, mane streaming. It was Tilly, his own mount, a strawberry mare he had bought as a colt and trained. She did not wear the Square L brand, as did Blackie. Like most cowboys, Addison had a string of mustangs, for the various forms of work necessary on the range.

Tilly was beautiful. She had a fine reddish mane and a sweeping, thick tail. Her muzzle was white-and-pink, and she was strong, able to carry a man for many miles without tiring. Between Addison and his mare was a strong bond. They understood each other, and the strawberry mare nuzzled his hand and shoved her sniffing muzzle against his lips, kissing him as he had taught her to do.

"Yuh all right, girl?" asked Corey softly, stroking her lovingly.

He brought out a lump of sugar, as Tilly was nosing at his pockets. She knew he had brought her a treat, as he always did.

Addison let her out of the big pasture, not bothering to put a rope halter on her, for Tilly followed after him like a dog. He led her to a smaller circular ring, an exercise corral, in a field on the south of the ranch. There was a shed nearby, and combs and brushes were hanging on pegs in it. Addison began grooming Tilly, getting burrs and dirt from her soft coat and brushing her tail.

He was at this work, engrossed in prettying up his pet, when Dave Vernon, one of the Square L wranglers, sang out to him from behind the stable.

"Oh, Corey! The boss wants yuh."

Addison put down his brushes and strolled back toward the big house. On the front porch stood Ken Lord, Tim Roberts of the Circle 5, next to the Square L, big Ole Larsen, the tow-headed Swede, and Drew Hagen of the Triangle H, the farthest spread east toward Culver.

Their faces were grave, and Addison nodded to them and turned to Lord.

"Yuh want me, Boss?"

"Yeah, Corey. This is the third day that Jim Hayes asked us for, ain't it?"

"Uh-huh. But we ought to give him a chance to report, Boss." Addison tried to defend the man he instinctively liked and looked up to.

"He won't be able to," growled Drew Hagen, a stout, dark-haired Texan with keen blue eyes. "Bucky Harlon, one of my punchers was in town last night on an errand, Corey. He came back at dawn and reported there was a big gunfight at the Carousel. This Jim Hayes hombre got his."

Addison drew in his breath sharply.

"Yuh-yuh don't mean it!" It was a great shock to him. Hayes had seemed so strong, so comfortingly permanent. "He's—dead?"

"Bucky says they don't know. He got hit and looked in a bad way. Pinky, one of the bartenders at the Carousel, put him to bed and kept him quiet. Wouldn't let anybody but the sawbones see him. Buck left near dawn and they say Hayes was close to death."

"Huh! Who done it?"

"They think it was Ab Murphy, the trapper. Hayes was askin' about Murphy, but Jim was sort of close-mouthed over such affairs and I ain't shore what the game was. Murphy got away."

"Huh!" repeated Corey Addison. "Boss, can I ride to Culver and see how Jim's doin'? I feel mighty bad over this."

Ken Lord shook his head. "I'll send one of the wranglers, Corey. Reason is I may need yuh here. Don't ride

out with the men, savvy? Hang around till I call yuh. We're havin' a meetin' later."

Within the next two hours, Frank Wells of the 1-2, George Goffe of the Double G, and several other ranchers rode into the Square L yard. They held a meeting in the ranchhouse living room, with Addison listening to the talk. Faces fell when Lord announced to them that Jim Hayes had been shot up by Ab Murphy in a saloon brawl. They had been pinning their hopes on the range detective.

"Reckon it's up to us, with Hayes down and out," said Ken Lord. "The sooner we finish, the better. The three days we give Jim are nearly up. We'll spend the rest of the time in lookin' over the situation. We'll send in another petition to the Government, signed by all cowmen in these parts, that the Lipans be shifted to a new reservation. We're losin' time and cattle, to say nothin' of our lives, fightin' Injuns.

"I, for one, am slippin', because my men stand guard nights and what with one thing and another excitin', they lose time. Long as the Lipans behaved, it was all right to have 'em as neighbors. But now we'll get rid of 'em one way or another."

Everybody was in agreement.

"Let's take over the range when they're gone," suggested Goffe.

"We aim to." Lord nodded. "Figger on dammin' Smoky Crik north of here in the heights and runnin' some of the water into the dry parts. It'll be a community job, with all sharin' alike. All in favor say 'aye.' "

All were in favor. Once the Lipans were out, the reservation could be opened to white settlement, and the Culberson ranchers meant to see that they controlled the neighboring range.

"We can't stand any more night attacks," Lord went on gravely. "The Injuns come close to wipin' out my spread that time. Addison and Hayes runnin' on 'em to give us

warnin' saved us from a beatin'. Now, we want a man for a dangerous job."

He stared straight at young Addison, who blinked and reddened, embarrassed at so much attention.

"If yuh mean me, I'll go," Corey said quickly.

"I want to put a man over near the Lipan reservation, a spy to watch 'em," said Lord. "In case they start this way, we'll get a warnin', and then we'll have shore-fire evidence agin the Lipans if Addison sees 'em start out on a raid. I got a hunch we'll be hit soon agin. Corey, pick yore hoss and take plenty grub along so's yuh can stay out three, four days if need be. I'll lend yuh my spy-glass. Go over by a roundabout way, hide on a height not too far from Much Feathers' village, and just watch."

"Yes, suh. Shall I start now?"

"Better take a little rest first and figger to hit the Injun range near dark so's yuh won't be spotted."

Corey left, and went to his bunk. He took a nap, and got up a couple of hours later. The ranchers were eating a meal prepared by Mrs. Lord and Jenny. In the kitchen, Corey was given a full plate of dinner by Jenny, who smiled on him.

"You be careful now, Corey," she admonished. "Father says he's sending you over there again. I told him I didn't like it. You were nearly killed twice by the Lipans."

"I'll do better this time," promised Corey, but he was pleased that Jenny was worried about him. He wanted to hold her hand and perhaps try to kiss her, but her mother was in and out of the kitchen.

He was nearly through his meal when a rider came into the yard. Addison saw him as he approached the ranch by the long lane to the road.

"Here comes Paul Fuller, the Lipan agent!" he sang out.

Fuller dismounted at the front, and was met by big Ken Lord on the porch. Hospitality was Lord's strong point. He led the agent into the room where the ranchers were

eating and insisted he sit down. Fuller's face was anxious, drawn. He accepted some food and a cup of coffee—Jenny had got up and gone to serve her father's guest—and Addison watched through the open doors. He saw Jenny smiling down at the seated Fuller, and the Indian agent beamed back, his usually severe, earnest face breaking into a wide smile at the pretty girl.

"Dog her, she's a heart-breaker," thought Addison.

He tried to stifle his jealousy but it was difficult. Paul Fuller was an educated man, and well-off, compared to a cowboy. He could see Fuller talking to Jenny, looking up at her over his shoulder. He was flattering her, and the girl smiled and flushed a little.

In something of a pet, at Jenny's mild flirtation, he rose and started out. Then he heard Lord asking about Jim Hayes.

"I don't know how bad off he is," replied Fuller. "The doctor wouldn't let anybody in to see him. They're taking care of him at the Carousel. I thought I'd best get out to the Lipans, gents."

Fuller paused meaningly, his eyes running the gauntlet of sober rancher faces.

"Good idea," said Lord. "Mebbe yuh can keep 'em from hittin' us agin. We're wirin' another strong petition to the Government to shift them pesky Lipans from our midst, and open their range to white settlement. I just had word from our senator it's bein' took up and will prob'ly go through. We mean to see we ain't bothered from that direction in the future, once the Lipans go. We're goin' to homestead that range and hold it."

Fuller frowned, cleared his throat.

"Homestead it? How do you intend to go about that, Lord?"

"Our cowboys'll each file on a section apiece, ranchin' homesteads. That way it'll be a community affair and we'll control it."

"Why bother to file legally? The range is so arid that no one will dispute your use of it."

"Not when we get through," Lord said confidently. "We're goin' to irrigate it some. We're puttin' our cards on the table like honest men."

Corey Addison turned and went out. He picked up his guns and checked them, packed some strips of dried beef, a little coffee and sugar and hardtack, making up his kit for the trip.

"Ready to go, Tilly?" he asked his mount.

The beautiful strawberry mare was ready. Corey saddled her, and rode from the Square L. He hit the dirt road, which ran east and west along its course. He stayed on this for a time, then cut onto the open range, keeping low hills between himself and the Lipan village. The sun was beginning to drop when he reached the edge of the reservation and he rode slowly through an arroyo, screened from distant observation.

Picketing Tilly in a draw, Corey Addison slept on a ridge top that night. He ate early the next morning, and settled himself with his rifle and spy-glass and canteens at a vantage point.

It was scarcely light when he took up his vigil. Several miles northwest stood the Lipan village, while straight west was the swelter of brush-covered mountains, a thorny chaparral wilderness shunned by whites and Indians alike. There was nothing much in there save dry rocks, and terrible masses of thorned undergrowth.

He placed the spy-glass to his eyes and adjusted the focus, watching the point where the Lipan village stood. A little smoke came up. The Indians were cooking breakfast. He slowly moved the glasses with his head as he swept the horizon.

"Who in tarnation's that!" he muttered.

Miles south of Much Feathers' village he saw a horse moving slowly over a field of broken rock shale. The animal seemed to be wandering, but then Addison realized there was a man on its back, lying flat, clinging to the beast's mane and trying to direct it. He was headed west, toward the wild mountains.

Soon the gray mustang stopped and put down its head to graze. The rider seemed to fall off, and lay for a time without moving, but he had a tight grip on the reins, for the horse didn't stray from him. There was something familiar about the brown-clad figure, but the distance was rather long to make out details.

However, Addison's curiosity was aroused. He hurried down, saddled up Tilly, and rode along a drywash toward the strange horseman. Some intervening ridges now cut off the view of the Lipan village. Checking to see how close he was, Addison found that the man had recovered enough to mount the gray and start slowly on westward again.

He was closer now and there was good sunlight behind Addison. He crouched by a big reddish boulder, and put the spy-glass to his eyes, adjusting it. As he watched, the man on the gray turned slowly, as though to check his back trail, and Addison swore in astonishment.

"Ab Murphy! It's him! And he's hurt!"

CHAPTER XI

Haunted Canyon

Electrified by the sight of Ab Murphy, the man who had downed his friend, Jim Hayes, Corey Addison got back into the saddle, and pushed swiftly on, trailing Murphy.

"Reckon he didn't get off scot free, in that fight with Jim," he thought. Jim Hayes, he knew, had suspected Murphy, though he didn't know why.

Cutting over behind a rise in the rocky range, he cut Murphy's recent trail. On a flat, smooth stone he saw two or three drops of dark, drying blood. He left Tilly again, and carefully checked on Murphy. The man had reached the impenetrable-looking wall of rock and dense brush,

with the Lipan village miles north and hidden among the hills.

Then Ab Murphy plunged through, into the mesquite and thorned growth, and was out of his sight.

Excited, Addison decided to follow. He did not worry about the Lipans, for they were a good many miles off. He thought that he had only the gunman to deal with.

"He's makin' for some mountain hideout he's got," he thought. "Mebbe he hooks up with Much Feathers' young braves from there, though. I better move careful."

By a round about way, keeping hidden from view in the many dry washes that radiated from the foot of the mountains there, or screened by jagged, high ridges that thrust from the shale-covered floor, he finally reached the wall of brush and rock. There were precipitous cliffs, with dangerous rock slides gleaming in the hot sunlight.

A drop or two of blood, with his memory of the point at which Murphy had entered, made it possible for him to find the spot. The ground left no imprints, but the wounded man had been careless and had broken a couple of branches when he had shoved past a high mesquite shrub. Inside, Addison, leading Tilly, picked up a faint trail, a blind one which led back into the mountains.

It was slow going. He kept losing the way, with little sign to help him. The slope grew steep, once he had skirted the first peak, in dense brush. He came up against a high wall of reddish rock, two miles in from the open range, where the shale kept down the bush growth.

The trail ended there. He cast about afoot, seeking to pick it up, always on the alert and ready. The wilderness was quiet save for the chirp of birds and their faint rustles in the leaves.

"Shucks," he muttered, staring up at the unscalable wall of rock. "He couldn't have climbed that. And it's solid."

He had left Tilly standing a hundred yards down, with her reins up. There was no need to drop them, for she loved him and would come to him like a pet dog. She was

watching him now, as he climbed a big red boulder, one of the many spewed down from the crumbling cliffs.

"Well, I'll be—"

There was a hole, half-screened by brush. The big boulders hid it from view. He slid down to investigate. A drop of blood showed on the shale. Murphy had come up to the cliff wall, turned along it sharply, and gone through the ten-foot high narrow gap, with room enough there for a horse.

Addison glanced up. The passage was roofed by natural rock. He did not pick up Tilly, but instead started through afoot. Soon the passage turned, and it was almost dark. He paused to listen after a hundred yards, squatting low to the ground. A dull roaring sound came to his sharp ears.

The floor sloped down, as he went on, making a couple more turns. He was excited. Ahead was Murphy and he didn't know what else.

At last he reached the western terminus of the underground passage. He could see the light, with long streaks of sunlight coming from above. The roaring was louder. It sounded like water now. High brush, more boulders jumbled about cut off his direct vision ahead. He crept cautiously forward, to see what lay before him.

Walls of red rock opened out on either side of him, but the hidden canyon was deep and narrow. It was screened by higher peaks, and looked entirely wild, deserted. But Addison kept going.

Suddenly he stopped short. He sniffed, caught the scent of wood smoke. It came from around a bend as the canyon narrowed until a man could almost have jumped across it, at the top. As he paused, a faint sound behind him, just the brush of something soft on rock, caused him to whirl, his gun rising.

But he never had a chance. Tall, sinewy Indians were upon him, leaping from every side, coming from behind.

Addison gave a sharp cry. He pulled his trigger and his Colt banged, the echoes loud in the canyon, but his slug only hit the ground. The Indians were armed with guns

and more primitive weapons. Addison had an impression of fierce, sharp faces, and almost naked, bronzed bodies, rangy and strong, lean, first-class fighting men, closing in on him. They came silently, their glittering black eyes fixed like those of striking rattlers.

Wiry fingers were striking, snatching at him. They had his gun arm and then his Colt. He struck with his other hand, lashing out, fighting desperately. A stone hatchet hit him a glancing blow on the side of his head, half-stunning him. He went down to his knees, cursing them, seeking to fight to the last.

Big bodies fell on him, overwhelmed him. He was almost unconscious, but aware that he was seized by his wrists and ankles, and rushed into the depths of the canyon.

When he shook his head, coming back to life, he found he was lying on broken shale. All about him were the fierce Indian warriors, big, dark-skinned men with sharp features, fierce eyes. Crude shelters lined the undercut cliffs.

A heavy stream of clear water gushed from under the rock, crossing the canyon and then dropping out of sight again under the mountain on the east. Wild brush fringed the hidden hideout. Some squaws were up the line, squatting near cook fires where strips of beef were broiling on forked sticks. Under the overhang of the cliff were stores, some covered with tarpaulins.

Several of the big Indians stood over Addison, watching him with scowling, ferocious faces.

"Yuh ain't Lipans, are yuh?" he asked, still weak from the beating he had received.

"Karankawa," one grunted.

"Karankawa?" inquired Corey. "What's that mean?"

Another one—he wore a Lipan head-dress but didn't look like one of Much Feathers' men—kicked him sharply in the stomach, which Addison took to mean he was to keep quiet.

He lay there, a trickle of blood on his cheek from his

split scalp. His head ached frightfully, and he wanted a drink. The exertions he had been through had sweated all the moisture from his body.

"Water!" he said, pointing to the brook.

One Indian sniffed, but none of them paid any attention to his request. A call came up the line, and four of them seized him again, by ankles and wrists, and roughly ran him up. Just around the bulge of red rock was a deep cave, fifty feet wide, in the east wall. It was cool and the sun never entered its recesses. They took him inside, and dumped him unceremoniously down before a man lying on a rough blanket bed at the side of the cave.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, Addison recognized Ab Murphy, the buckskin-clad trapper.

"Howdy, Murph!" he said. "Are these hombres yore pards?"

"Yeah," grunted Murphy.

His lips and face were drained of color and his face showed he was suffering. He lay on his left side, for his right shoulder had been punctured by Hatfield's bullet at the Carousel. He had lost a great deal of blood, and it had been a terrible ride for him, to reach his haven. He had been forced to stop and hide, to rest, again and again, during the journey, and he had taken few of the usual precautions in reaching the hidden canyon.

"I was huntin' deer, Murph," lied Addison, "and come through a gap I found. Suddenly these fellers jumped me. How about tellin' 'em to let me loose, if yuh got the power to do it?"

Murphy was scowling at him. The look in the trapper's eyes was furious, filled with hate. Addison knew he could expect no help from his fellow white.

"Yuh dirty spy," snarled Murphy, his vitriolic soul escaping in his voice. "Yuh trailed me here. Yuh been workin' with Jim Hayes or whatever the skunk's handle is. I hope the Chief finished the cuss off. He shore give me a nasty time of it."

Corey Addison braced himself. The fierce Indians were behind him, silently watching. There was no escape for him, and he realized that Murphy meant to kill him.

The Indians jumped to action at Murphy's orders, given in a strange tongue. They seized Addison roughly. One raised a knife with a thin blade ten inches long. A single word from the wounded, infuriated Murphy, however, stopped the death blow.

Murphy spoke again, the Indian language flowing easily on his tongue.

Addison was kicked and slapped until he was dizzy, unable to resist. Ab Murphy watched, a grin on his pain-racked face. Then he gave further commands, and Addison was picked up and hurled from the cave.

Merciful blackness hit him after a time as the Indians continued to beat him. The squaws joined in, hitting him with wooden sticks. Knife points were stuck into his flesh.

When he came back to life once more, he was close to the cool, running stream. His tongue was swollen and his mouth flannel-dry for a drink. But he found that he was tied, hand and foot. By straining to the full extent of his strength, he reached within a few inches of the water. On his stomach, he stuck out his tongue, hoping to lick at the liquid, but couldn't make it.

The big Indians were watching, their eyes intense, and from Murphy's cave, right behind him, came a satisfied chuckle.

"Only thing missin'," called Murphy, "is Jim Hayes. If he was tied by yuh Addison, I'd shore feel good!"

Addison realized he was being made a show of. Murphy and the Indians were enjoying his torture, his attempts to reach the water. He fought back the terrible thirst, stoically accepting his fate.

Murphy was saving him, either for the purposes of torture, which gave his red friends and himself pleasure, or with some other design. But death lay close ahead.

CHAPTER XII .

Indian Village

Jim Hatfield swung his long legs around and stood up, testing his weight. Though he had been in the barkeeper's bunk for only twenty-four hours, his feet felt a bit unsteady.

"Stay another day, Jim," begged Pinky, putting out a hand to steady him.

"I'm all right, Pinky," Hatfield insisted.

They were in Pinky's little room, off at the side of the Carousel. Somebody, an ally of Ab Murphy's had fired on Hatfield during the scrap, with a shotgun. The Ranger, through his quickness of perception and his swift muscular coordination, had nearly managed to get clear, but one of the spreading charge of buckshot had cut the flesh over his left ribs. It had shocked him and ripped the muscles, bruised his ribs.

In the minute or two he had needed in which to recover his breath during the blind battle, Murphy had made his escape.

To gain time in which to think, Hatfield had feigned a worse hurt than he had received. Pinky, the Carousel bartender, had helped him, carried him into his own bunk and fetched the doctor. There had been enough blood spurting from the wound to prove anything, and Pinky had obeyed him and spread the story that he was in a bad way, and might die from his hurts. Hatfield desired to lull his foes into a false security, while he thought over his course.

The doctor had come and looked over the wound. It was a flesh injury, and no ribs were cracked. Bandaged,

the bleeding had been checked, and Hatfield had stayed locked in the bartender's room for the rest of that night, recovering.

A sleep, warm food and drink, and rest through the next day, had given him back his power. Hatfield's splendid physical condition and endurance had come to his aid.

Now he was determined to move on Ab Murphy's trail, sure that he had ferreted out a vital connection in the range problem. Ken Lord and his ranchers were in mortal danger, that was obvious. He must act as swiftly and unerringly as possible to save them.

"Yuh been mighty good, Pinky, I won't forget it," said Hatfield.

"Glad to help yuh, Jim. But don't say I didn't warn yuh to stay away from that Murphy snake. He's a tough one." Pinky grinned.

Hatfield nodded. "I'd like to know who his pard was, that turned loose on me from the side alley."

"There's no tellin'. Mebbe some hombre who come to town with him, mebbe some friend here. Most everybody savvies Murph."

"I'll pull out now, Pinky," said Hatfield. "Make shore the coast is clear, will yuh, and fetch my sorrel behind the barn for me."

"Right."

The Ranger slipped out, after Pinky had brought up Goldy and saddled the gelding. No one saw him go, and Pinky relocked his door. He promised Hatfield to tell no one that the wounded man had gone.

Hatfield led Goldy down a dirt lane, to the edge of town. Mounting, he moved slowly toward the westward trail. As he picked up speed, he gritted his teeth, for the jolting of the horse sent little stabs of pain through the lacerated flesh of the buckshot wound. The bandage felt bulky, clumsy.

By the first gray touch of the new day, the Ranger had

passed the Square L and knew he was on Lipan land. The time which he had asked for, when he had posed as Jim Hayes, wandering range detective, was up. The three days had gone by, and while he had a lead which he was certain was vital, he still had to prove it to both sides—to Ken Lord's faction and to the Lipans, with Paul Fuller as their spokesman.

"Murphy's the answer," he mused. "I didn't want to kill him, if I could help it. Once he talks, I'll know everything."

He stopped, after scouting the little waterhole at which Corey Addison and he had been attacked, had a cold snack and a rest, allowing Goldy to graze and drink. He had a hunch that Murphy would make for the mountain fastnesses. Having lost the strange trapper, and thus missed the shortcut he had hoped for, he was back again, attempting to smell out the mystery of the Lipan range.

With the fresh new light, he began moving in a zigzag fashion, back and forth, eyes always on the trail ahead, hunting new sign. He was slowly edging toward the Lipan village and the frowning hills on the west.

Dust in the sky, rapidly rolling up from the south, forced him to take cover. He concealed the sorrel and, reaching a little height, watched a band of thirty whites approach and start past. It was Ken Lord and his waddies, with two of his rancher friends, Ole Larsen and Drew Hagen, riding with some of their men. Purposefully they were headed toward Much Feathers' village.

"Dog it," concluded the Ranger, "they've give me my three days and now they've busted the halter and are goin' to hit."

All the cowmen were not in the party, but perhaps other bands were closing in from different directions on the Indians.

He whistled shrilly, and Ken Lord and friends assumed an attitude of defense, their carbines and pistols coming up.

Hatfield hurried down the slope, and mounted, riding out with his hands raised to greet them. Lord was astonished to see him.

"Why, we done heard yuh was close to crowbait, Jim!" Lord exclaimed. "Paul Fuller told us and so'd one of our boys, that yuh was bad hit in a fight with Ab Murphy."

"I was. But I feel better now."

The big man sat facing the group, one long leg hooked around the saddle-horn.

"I got onto somethin' important, Lord," he said, "that I figger'll give us the answer to yore troubles. Murphy's the key. I tried to capture him and I had him, but somebody gunned him out of it. Yuh on yore way to the Lipans?"

Lord scowled, "We shore are."

"Yuh're goin' to attack?"

The rancher chief shrugged. "Mebbe so, mebbe not. Yore three days was up last night, Hayes."

"Yuh're makin' a big mistake," insisted Hatfield. "The Lipans ain't responsible for yore troubles."

Ken Lord started. "What makes yuh say that?"

"Little signs I've run on. Murphy rides with them raiders. When they hit Addison and me out here at the water-hole, Murphy gave 'em an order which we overheard. It wasn't in Lipan. Mebbe they wear Lipan head-dresses and getup, but I don't believe they're Much Feathers' men at all."

Hatfield was striking boldly if somewhat blindly at a solution. He wished to hold back Lord from a bloody battle, which would cost white and red lives.

"It sounds queer." Lord's face was sour. "Anyways, we're goin' to ask Much Feathers to hand over Corey Addison. The waddy's been snatched up, mebbe killed."

It was the Ranger's turn to be surprised, unpleasantly so. He had grown fond of Addison.

"What happened?" he asked.

Lord told him how he had sent Corey out to act as a lookout. Then his girl, Jenny, had grown worried about

Addison. She had made Lord send a couple of Square L cowboys out to help him and relieve him. They had come back to report that they had lost Corey's trail and that he was nowhere to be seen, but they had spied Tilly, Corey's strawberry mare, running near the mountains. Her saddle was on but she was riderless.

"We figger the Lipans got him," Lord said grimly. "The boys found some dried blood spots here and there. If Corey ain't dead, we mean to get him back."

"I'll go with yuh," Hatfield said promptly. "Is Paul Fuller around?"

"He done rode out to Much Feathers' village. Stopped at the ranch on his way."

Hatfield swung into line and they made good time toward the Lipan settlement. Watchers from the heights saw them and sang out warnings and by the time the cowmen had reached the little valley, the Indians were armed and ready behind Chief Much Feathers.

Rodriguez, the breed who assisted Paul Fuller, hurried out to meet them, a familiar figure to Jim Hatfield now, in his velvet outfit, short vest, silk shirt, and tight-fitting pants. His sombrero was pushed back on his narrow, dark head and his black eyes were anxious.

"What ees, Senor Lord?" he demanded, looking up at the rancher's stern face.

"Where's Paul Fuller?" growled Lord. "I'll talk to him, Rodriguez."

"Senor Full-er ees not here. He ees out—huntin'."

"All right," growled Lord. "I'll have to talk to you, but it's no pleasure. Tell Much Feathers to hand over Corey Addison or what's left of him."

"Addison?"

"Si. Go on, pronto. I ain't got time to waste."

Lord disliked the breed. Rodriguez hesitated, then turned and slowly went back to Much Feathers. He spoke to the stout old Lipan leader, and returned to Lord.

"Much Feathers says he doesn't savvy anyting about Addison," he said. "Haven't seen heem."

"Shucks, that won't do."

Impatiently, Lord pushed past the breed, shoving Rodriguez out of his way. His men started after him, and Much Feathers grunted a command to his fighting men, who raised their guns.

"Let's talk to the chief ourselves, Lord," suggested Hatfield. "Leave yore men here."

"All right. Come on."

Lord had no fear in him. He ordered his followers to stay where they were, and with Hatfield at his side, rode up to the spot where Much Feathers stood on his heavy legs. The lined brown face of the old Indian chief turned up to the horsemen.

"Much Feathers," Lord said, "Corey Addison's been snatched off'n the range. I want him, dead or alive. If yore men killed him, you must savvy it."

Much Feathers spoke little English. He hardly understood Lord's rapid sentences and looked blank. Hatfield was acquainted with several of the Texas tribes' dialects, among them the Lipan, although he was none too fluent in the language. There were too many various tongues. Each tribe had a number of branches with as many languages.

Rodriguez had hurried up, like a flustered chicken. He translated Lord's words for Much Feathers. The chief shook his head.

"Hand him over, cuss yuh!" roared Lord. "If yuh don't give him up and the men who snatched him, we'll open fire!"

"Wait!" ordered the Ranger. To Much Feathers, he spoke in slow Lipan: "Let us look through your village, Much Feathers—just Lord and I."

The black, intense eyes of Much Feathers sought the tall man's bronzed, rugged face. Once before, this stranger had come and held back the angry cowmen. White men

and red took confidence in Jim Hatfield, trusted him. Much Feathers nodded.

"Come on, Lord," said Hatfield. "The chief says we can hunt through his village for Corey."

Dismounting, then accompanied by the waddling Much Feathers and the flea-like, worried Rodriguez, the Ranger and Lord strode through the Lipan village. They were watched by hundreds of Indian eyes, but Much Feathers held his braves in with an iron hand. Children and mongrel dogs scampered from the white men's path. Squaws watched from a safe distance, as the white men looked into the hogans and tepees on the hillside.

"Any of yore men missin'?" inquired Hatfield of the old Indian chief.

"No." Much Feathers was positive. He held sway over his braves, strong, lithe fellows in deerskin pants, moccasins and feather head-dress. Some wore mixed dress, white man's trousers or a favorite red shirt picked up in town.

When they had finished their tour of the village, Hatfield led Ken Lord aside.

"This bears out what I said, Lord," he told the rancher, "that the Lipans are innocent. For a while, I figgered a bunch of Much Feathers' braves was raidin', prob'ly without the chief's knowledge. But now I'm plumb shore there's another bunch of Injuns in it that the Lipans don't even savvy. Yuh can see that Much Feathers controls his men and the village."

"But we got to find Corey." Lord was let down. His broad face was drawn with anxiety. "Jenny'll never forgive me if I don't, and I love that waddy like he was my own son."

"Come on, then," said Hatfield. "We'll spread out near where yore men seen Tilly, Corey's strawberry mare."

CHAPTER XIII

The Search

Lord went back, growling under his breath; he got on his big horse, and rode to his men. They headed back, south, skirting the ragged line of the mountains, the thick brush which fringed the toes of the hills.

Hatfield took command, backed by his natural ability and the strength that was his.

"Shorty" Mullen and "Graveyard" Lewis were the Square L cowboys who had gone to search for Addison. Shorty was broad and squat, a smiling young fellow in wide brown Stetson and leather chaps worn as protection against the thorns. Graveyard had a deep, sad voice. He was thinner than Shorty, and sad-looking. Hatfield knew both, having met them at the Square L.

Some miles south of the Lipan village, Shorty and Graveyard showed Hatfield the spot where they had last spied Tilly.

"She wouldn't let us catch her," reported Graveyard. "Every time we'd get close, she turned and run further on."

"Yeah?" said Hatfield. "Yuh should have follered her, boys. Mebbe she was tryin' to lead yuh to Addison."

"Mebbe. But we figgered we better get back and report."

The strawberry mare was not in sight now, however. At Hatfield's suggestion, Lord ordered his men to spread out, through the wild rocks and mesquite, to search for the mare. With Shorty in tow, Hatfield pushed on south, his gray-green eyes searching the high wall of brush, split by reddish cliffs.

They had gone about two miles, and were out of sight

of the others in the party when Shorty exclaimed:

"By hook, there she is, Jim!"

Hatfield had seen the stir of brush ahead. Tilly slowly emerged from the brush, and stood there, whisking her beautiful tail and watching them. Her ears were alert, and the saddle had been brushed down to one side during her wild running in the woods.

"Take it easy, now, Shorty," Hatfield cautioned. "Let's see where she'll lead us."

Tilly let them get within ten yards, just short of the usual lasso length, then she turned and trotted off. But she looked back. Hatfield let the sorrel trot, keeping the pace down to satisfy Tilly, who moved on and on. For a mile, this kept up. Then the strawberry mare swung out of sight into the woods fringing the toes of the hills.

It was easy enough to pick up the trail she made, and they heard her soft whinny. The mare came into sight again as she started up a steep slope that took them on a diagonal climb of the mountainside. Shorty fell behind. The Ranger and the Square L waddy had to dismount and lead their animals.

They were all puffing when they reached the top. Hatfield pushed on, following Tilly through thick, thorned brush which caught at the flesh of men and horses. The strawberry mare kept on, however, and perhaps a mile in from the top of the mountain she stopped and stood there, looking at them.

"Hold the hosses, Shorty," ordered the Ranger. "Don't look like anything much but Tilly's got somethin' on her mind."

He moved carefully forward. The mare walked away a bit, but didn't seem disposed to leave the vicinity. Hatfield stopped, trying to get a vista of the land ahead, but the wild jumble of rocks, pine forests and dense thorned bush cut off all forward view.

The warm wind puffed, rustling the dry pods of the

growth. Suddenly the Ranger, his nostrils wide, sniffed wood smoke.

It was around noon, the time most men ate. A wall of thorny brush blocked him, but he got down on hands and knees, and carefully forced his way through it. After a few yards, clutched at by long, murderous points, he stopped short. He had nearly gone over the edge of a deep, narrow canyon.

The wood smoke was sifting up from it. He flattened out, inching to the brink. But it was difficult to see anything, for the wall was undercut. The dull roaring in his ears was not blood. It was water, he decided, far below.

Hatfield swung, inching back to the point where he had left Shorty.

"There's a canyon ahead, Shorty," he said. "From the way Tilly acts, I believe Addison's down there. Mebbe he was taken in, mebbe he fell in, somehow. I'm goin' down in. Let's have yore rope. You can stand by and gimme a hand if I need it."

"All right." Shorty nodded.

"Let's make it quiet, though. If Corey's a prisoner, we don't want to give warnin'. There's a big stream of water down in there that drowns out sounds that ain't too loud."

Hatfield tied his own rope and Shorty's together. With the squat puncher in tow, he moved parallel to the uneven edge of the deep canyon, figuring that any Indians or men camped below would be near the water. When he could no longer hear the flow plainly, he began cutting and pushing through the thorny brush, Shorty bringing the rope after him.

He found a thick, stumpy but well-rooted pine just back from the brink, and fastened one end of the rope to it. Shorty squatted, ready to pay out the strong lariats, a round stick helping to keep the cord from fraying on the rock.

The Ranger, his Colts checked and ready, let himself over the brink and started into the canyon.

After thirty feet, he found himself swinging in mid-air, with one booted foot in the loop. The undercut red wall was right before him and he stared at the patterns of the stone as he went on. Below was a roof of thick brush. There was a turn in the canyon to his left, toward the stream he had heard, and no shots came at him. He saw no men below.

The rope was near its end when his feet touched the ledges at the bottom, and he crouched, turning to see what lay before him.

Hatfield proceeded with his usual caution. He was not yet fully aware of what he had run upon, but he sensed danger. Pausing to listen now and then, as he flitted from rock to rock, he found that his hearing was confused by the noise of the stream beyond.

"It's a strong one," he thought, his gray-green eyes staring at the sharp turn in the wall just ahead. "Don't come out from the hills, either, not on Lipan ground, anyways."

He froze, as a giant Indian with a fierce, sharp face and a six-foot-six, rangy bronzed body suddenly appeared at the turn and stared at the broken reddish rocks behind which Hatfield was concealed.

Some scrub bushes hid the Ranger, and he did not move a muscle, as the hawk-nosed savage looked up the shadowed canyon.

"That's no Lipan!" thought Hatfield, excited by the confirmation of his deductions.

The Indian's skin was dark. He had savage features, deep-set eyes, and sharp, high cheek-bones. His hair was shoulder length and straight, and without his war paint and feathers, the expert Ranger could at least say he was not of the Lipan tribe.

The Indian turned and melted back. Hatfield made sure that his Colts were loose for a draw from their oiled hol-

sters. He crawled a few yards, pausing once more to check behind the bulge of the red side wall.

Streaks of green ran in the cliff, but he had no time to check this. He must get on with his job.

The sound of the stream hid any slight noises he made in coming to the bend in the high wall. Peeking around, he saw the glint of the rushing water. And a hundred yards beyond, near the smoking, sheltered cookfire under the jutting cliff which broke up the column of the smoke, he saw a number of the big savages. They were eating strips of beef, with their gleaming white teeth tearing at the meat, using their fingers as forks. Several squaws in buckskin skirts and blouses were serving their lords and masters.

"There's Murphy!" Hatfield gloated mentally as he found Ab Murphy in there, with the strange tribe. "Now I got it! He's been leadin' 'em, and blamin' the jobs on the Lipans!"

Checking the ground, his eyes came to rest on something quivering close to the stream, which broke into the light as it crossed the deep-cut canyon. Swarms of flies and mosquitoes were about the thing. It was several moments before he realized it was a man in ripped clothing, crusted with dried blood, and staked just out of reach of the water.

Something about the shape of the head, the hair, told him who it was.

"Addison!" he muttered.

He did not know whether his young friend was alive or beyond redemption. But now was the moment to find out. The savages and Murphy were busy gorging themselves, and he had but a short time in which to make his try. Drawing back, he hurried to the point where Shorty waited, and signaled the Square L waddy. Shorty slid down beside him, and Hatfield gave his orders.

"We got to take him out of here," the Ranger declared.

Shorty trailed him to the turn. Hatfield braced himself for the ordeal, drawing a Colt and loosening the hunting-knife at his hip. A peek told him that Murphy and the Indians were still feasting. Bottles containing whisky were being tipped up, catching the rays of the sun which penetrated the narrow canyon at the noon hours.

Around the bend, the Ranger crept, keeping flat while protuberances of the rock wall could hide him. He got within twenty yards of the staked Addison, and then he knew he must make a dash for it. Leaping up, gun in hand he raced to the bank of the stream.

A squaw sighted him first and set up an excited, shrill jabbering, pointing. Hatfield was already cutting the buck-skin cords which held Corey Addison to the stakes. He threw the limp figure over his left shoulder, and splashed into the cool waters of the stream.

Swinging, he saw the big Indians were up from the ground, some running with the speed of deer toward him, while others were snatching the rifles and pistols near at hand. Ab Murphy was on his feet, but he stood there, a revolver rising. He swayed a little, for he was still weak from the wound Hatfield had dealt him in Culver. He took aim at the zigzagging Ranger, and fired.

Hatfield heard the whistle of the bullet by his ear. His Colt was snapping back at them, and one of the Indians fell. Murphy dropped, taking cover behind a rock close at hand. He was shrieking his commands in the strange tongue.

The guns echoed wildly in the steep-walled canyon, banging back and forth so that one shot seemed to be a dozen. Ears rang with the explosions. Hatfield's fire rattled Murphy and his men for the few needed seconds, in which the big Ranger covered the distance to the bend. Shorty, crouched there, was also shooting at the approaching savages.

"Take him, Shorty—and get goin'!" gasped Hatfield.

He transferred the unconscious victim to Shorty's broad back.

Turning, the Ranger took his stand at the rock bulge, both guns in hand.

Shorty was hurrying at the best speed he could make to the dangling lariat. He would hoist Addison up, with Tilly's or his own horse's strength to help pull the rope.

CHAPTER XIV

Echoing Guns

Ranger pistols were blaring. Two big Indians, across the stream and dashing up, took lead. One crashed and lay still. The other, hit in the thigh, shrieked as he hopped off to the side rocks.

Bullets cut back at Hatfield. Shale rained on him, and bits of lead from shattering slugs scratched his flesh. Ab Murphy was urging his killers on, his strong voice bellowing in the canyon as he chattered their guttural, blunt language.

Hatfield couldn't see Shorty down the line, for the turns in the uneven reddish cliffs prevented that. The enemy was piling up, taking some cover, as they realized the deadliness of the guns which denied them the narrow pass. Shoving fresh shells into his warming cylinders, Hatfield held them for a minute, for a second space that dragged with interminable clicks of time.

The fierce Indians suddenly rose, and rushed once more, under Murphy's urgings. Hatfield's guns chattered with a speed that joined the echoing explosions into one deadly roar. The warwhoops of the infuriated enemy rose with the banging of the pistols and carbines.

They could not stand against such fire, could not advance. A second time the attackers broke, unable to come through the narrow gap that was held by the Texas Ranger. They jumped to the sides, crouching down behind rocks or the bulge of the great cliffs.

Hatfield seized the breathing spell in which to make his run. He ran as he had never run before, head down, for the next turn. He had a hundred yards before the savages realized that he had left his post at the bend. He swung around the bulge of the red cliff, with the lariat dangling empty before him.

With relief, he knew that Shorty had made it, had hoisted up Addison after shinnying to the top himself.

The Ranger was on the rope, his great muscles pulling him up with the speed of desperation. Knowing he had but seconds in which to get out before they would pin him in the air with their bullets, he swarmed to the top of the cliff.

As his clawing hands gripped the top ledge, and he pulled himself up, his breath rasping in his great lungs, the savages rushed around the final turn, saw him, and hurriedly opened fire. Their bullets clipped at the lip of the cliff, but the Ranger was rolling over, out of their sight, the stone protecting him.

He came up on his knees, whistling for Goldy. The sorrel was waiting. Tilly, Shorty and his horse, and Corey Addison, were gone.

Jim Hatfield overtook them a couple of hundred yards on the back-trail. Shorty was ahead, leading Tilly, on whose saddled back rode Corey Addison, as limp as a bag of oats. Shorty had taken a few turns of cord, in his haste, to hold Addison on, and was making the best time he could on the run.

"I'll stick back a little in case they come out after us, Shorty," Hatfield called. "Keep on this trail we made comin' in, and when you get down, fire yore Colt so's Lord and the others'll hear."

"Bueno, Jim," Shorty said soberly. "Corey looks done for."

"He's dead?"

"Well, he's nigh it. He grunted a litle. His tongue's swollen out of his mouth. I poured some water over his head from my canteen."

Hatfield moved up beside Addison's hanging head. Bitten to a frazzle, Addison's face was badly swollen. His parched tongue showed between his puffy lips. Hatfield gave him a little more water and doused his head, but Addison's eyelids only flickered, the whites rolling.

"Don't seem to have any mortal wound," observed the Ranger. "We'll have to look him over careful when we get down."

He glanced back, watchful of pursuit, though he knew the Indians and Ab Murphy couldn't get horses up the cliffs. He had taken care to pull up the lariats after him.

"Must be other ways in and out of that canyon," he mused.

They went down faster than they had pushed up. The way was broken and they could ride a good deal more. They burst out onto the arid, shale-strewn flats, and Shorty fired his Colt three times, signaling Ken Lord and his men. In the distance they heard a reply, and as they rode eastward, Lord and half a dozen of his waddies showed, coming over a rise on the south. Soon they made contact.

"Some more of yore boys over there?" asked the Ranger, pointing up the line of brush, northward.

Ken Lord, cursing at sight of Corey Addison's terrible state, stared that way. "Heck, no, Jim! All my men are south or east of here!"

"They're Injuns!" cried Hatfield, a moment later. "We better get into them rocks, Lord! We can't move fast enough with Addison to make it to the ranch. Start one of yore best-mounted waddies back for help—plenty of it!"

He was sure that the approaching gang must be the ter-

rible savages from the canyon, come out through one of their hidden passages.

A Square L waddy, on a powerful black stallion, was started east at full-tilt. Hatfield got the ranchers and their men onto a height, where broken boulders and spires of rock offered shelters for men and horses. Quickly they made themselves ready. Corey Addison was laid out on a blanket in the shade. Shorty squatted beside him, pouring sips of water into his open mouth and bathing his face and wrists.

"They're comin' hell-for-leather, Jim!" exclaimed Ken Lord.

The attackers, outnumbering them more than two to one, rode in a wide line, spread across the rocky flat. They were low over their swift mustangs, which they rode with just a piece of blanket for a saddle, hanging on by mane and a rope strip. Black hair streamed back in the wind, and wild, strange shrieks came from savage throats.

"There's Ab Murphy in the rear, directin' 'em!" growled the Ranger. "See for yoreself now, Lord. They ain't Lipans. They been ridin' with Lipan disguises but this time they was rushed and they savvy the jig's up."

"By Jupe, yuh're right, Jim!" roared Lord. "They're tough lookin' hombres, too! All got carbines and Colts. That snake Murphy ought to be skinned alive for what he's done!"

"And just look at him!" said Hatfield. "Did yuh ever see a man anywheres that had more meanness in him than he's got right now? He'd kill every one of us singlehanded if he could. Wonder what he's sayin' to them murderin' savages."

It was not the savages that Ab Murphy was speaking to just then. It was to himself, and he was swearing with murderous hate as he saw the position of the cowmen.

He had hoped to overtake the big man who had snatched Corey Addison from him, and probed the secret

of the hidden canyon. His teeth were gritted, partially with pain, for his wound still hurt and the jolt of the mustang under him was torture. He had not fully regained his strength yet, but needed a further rest.

"Cuss that Jim Hayes devil!" he muttered, slitted eyes hunting a weak point as his fighters whooped and fired up at the rocks. "He's made it!"

A volley from the rocks told him there were twenty-five or thirty men to deal with. The tall man's strategy was flawless.

Streaking around, not too close for the defenders' rifles to pick them off easily, the savages made the circuit of the rise. From all sides, carbines and Colts snarled at them. Murphy, staying well back out of range, was pale with rage and he felt the ooze of blood as the jolting broke open the healing wound.

It had been a move of desperation which had forced him to bring his killers out in the open, in broad daylight. Aware that his arch-foe, Jim Hayes, had discovered the secret hideout in the canyon, that even Corey Addison might live to talk and testify against him, he had made his decision quickly, trying to right his errors and trump Hatfield's plays by this bold stroke. If he could have overtaken them in the open, he could have wiped them out and remained hidden, safe.

One of his men flew off his punctured mustang. The mount screamed in agony as it crashed on the shale, and the lithe savage landed running and leaped up behind one of his mates. They were gradually closing their circle, riding like fiends, shooting into the rocks. They had a primitive joy in battle, a quenchless thirst for blood.

Murphy quickly took in the situation. The whites in the rocks could never be driven out except by a siege. Even though he outnumbered them, with sixty-eight Indians against Lord and Hayes and their thirty, he could not hope to get them in time.

An overeager Indian rode in, showing off to his fellows and challenging the whites. A rifle cracked from the rocks, and Murphy, glimpsing the hated head and shoulders of Jim Hayes saw his man fall dead, only a hundred yards from the rise.

The Indians always picked up their dead and seriously wounded. So now a bunch galloped in, and snatched up their dead comrade. But the guns of the whites got two more, and one fell off to the side as the savages were carrying away their fallen.

At that moment, the infuriated, cursing Murphy looked round. One of his subchiefs was howling and pointing, in the din, to the northwest. A large body of men was approaching, mounted men with the dust rolling swiftly into the sky as they bore in.

"The jig's up!" swore Murphy.

He turned his mustang, shrieking orders to his followers, signaling them with his flailing arms. He had trained them to obey, and now they reluctantly pulled out of the fight. But they had left a man on the field, and Murphy led the retreat, full-tilt for the screening mountains. He looked back, as his ferocious fighting men galloped with him. The band which had come down to join the whites was, as he had guessed, a party of Lipans from Much Feathers' village. No doubt the heavy gunfire had attracted them.

"Yeah, the jig's up for shore," Murphy gritted. "Wonder what Fuller'll say and what he'll do about it."

He found out, when they had returned to the hidden canyon. Several men were wounded, and squaws began wailing for the three dead brought in.

Paul Fuller was waiting for them. He had just arrived, having come in by a roundabout way from the western hills.

Panting, Ab Murphy slid off his sweated mustang, flecked with blood. He sank to the rocks, as Fuller seized his arm.

"What have you done?" demanded Fuller angrily. "Where's Addison?"

"The—the game's finished, Boss," gasped Murphy. "That Jim Hayes hombre rescued Addison. We—had to foller. When we got out on the trail, Lord and Hayes was in the rocks with plenty men. Much Feathers and his Lipans come along and we run for it."

Fuller was furious. His eyes flashed with his anger.

"You fool! You mean you didn't kill Addison?"

"Well, we come near to it," growled Murphy.

Fuller pulled himself together, taking in a deep breath of the warm air. The Indians watched him, aware of his godlike power. Murphy was their field chief, Fuller the higher-up whose being was as sacred to them as any human might be.

"We've got to think this out," Fuller said grimly. "Rodriguez came back with your note, Murph, and I thought I'd best get over here quickly. You said you were too weak to ride for a couple of days."

"I am. I could hardly make the ride back, Boss."

Murphy staggered into the cave and picked up a bottle with which to fortify himself. He sat down, leaning against the clay wall, and Fuller followed him up, squatting beside him, his left to the brown side of the cavern. As he listened to Murphy's full report on the fight, he jabbed nervously at the wall with his left hand.

When Murphy had finished, the agent said: "That means we must leave here at once, for they'll come here with strong forces."

He swore angrily. He twirled his signet ring, or pushed his doubled fist against the clay as he spoke, with his nervous habit of always keeping his hands going.

"It's ironical the canyon should be discovered just at this point," he complained. "The plan has borne fruit, for the Government will move the Lipans soon. However, Lord and his friends mean to file on the reservation as soon as it's opened to settlement. I didn't figure they'd bother with such a dry range, that they'd actually go to the trouble of claiming it legally."

"Shucks," groaned Murphy. "That'll wreck our play."

"If they beat us out. But I won't allow it, Murphy! We've come too far to quit, and there's too much in sight. We'll hit Lord and his gang so hard they'll forget everything else. Beat them to the punch. I'd like to add the Circle Five and the Square L to the Lipan lands if possible. With Lord, Roberts and a few more key men dead and the rest smarting from a good licking, the cowmen won't take any action on the new range until we've got it sewed up. We'll have Rodriguez bring in the peon laborers, file a section for each worker, and then give them a dollar to sign over to you and me."

"S'pose them Mexicans refuse to turn the land over?"

"They won't refuse. In the first place they won't savvy what it's all about. In the second, with our Indians keeping them in line, they'll do what they're told."

"It'll be a day or two before I can ride, Boss," said Murphy.

"That may be too late," Fuller said promptly. "We must strike hard, at once. There's no telling how much Hayes has learned now. I'll take command of our men myself. We're forced to make a quick stab before everything's in the open."

Fuller was cool as he planned his moves. Forced on by Hatfield's probings and the fighting Ranger's play, the agent would kill wholesale, with the desperate strength of his red allies, to win what he coveted.

CHAPTER XV

Tragedy

Much Feathers stared at the cruel, sharp features of the dead Indian who had been left on the battlefield. He stared for a long time, and at last he looked at Hatfield, with as much surprise as an Indian could show.

"Karankawa!" he grunted.

"That's it!" cried Hatfield. "I thought so! You shore, Chief?"

With sign language and the Lipan words he knew, he made his meaning clear to Much Feathers.

"What's Karankawa?" demanded Ken Lord curiously.

"It's the name of a very fierce tribe of Texas Indians," explained the Ranger. "They used to live on the East Coast and they were pirates as well as land raiders, but they fought so much with the whites they were cleaned out a few years back."

"How'd they get here?"

Rodriguez, the breed who acted as Fuller's assistant among the Lipans, had listened to the talk.

"He ees loco, the Chief," he exclaimed excitedly. "The Karankawas were wipe' out long ago!"

He jumped up and down and Hatfield stared at him, wondering at the fellow's emotion.

But Much Feathers was sure. He began a long story, complete with gestures, describing how in his youth the Lipans had once had a terrible fight with Karankawas, in central Texas. All the Indians, even the Apaches were afraid of the tribe, for they loved bloodshed and were the fiercest and cruelest of the Southwest savages. Even among Indians they were noted for bestiality and fighting power.

"There was a rumor about a big bunch of Karankawas," said Hatfield, when the chief had finished his tale, "escapin' across the Rio Grande and makin' for the Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico. Mebbe this is the bunch. It's only a few years since they were said to be cleaned up. Somebody, mebbe Ab Murphy, brought 'em over here and has been usin' 'em to raid yore ranches, Lord. For some reason, it's to this person's advantage to blame it on the Lipans."

He broke off, turning it over in his swift mind.

"S'pose," he thought, keeping his deduction to himself,

"Murphy wanted the Lipan range. That underground river'd make a lot of it worth while, if used to irrigate."

His expert eye, taking in the contours of the land, told him that no doubt the big stream had at a previous time run through the dry wastes. The many arroyos showed him that a large watercourse had once come through. There were signs which proved that they had been made by more than rain running off the mountains at infrequent periods.

He shook his head. The water might be it, but it was a terrible toll which the enemy had taken, just to gain some land.

Rodriguez was tugging at his sleeve.

"Senor! The Lipans mus' go back to zeir vill-age. Zey may fight zese vaqueros."

Hatfield frowned. The breed was agitated. He kept pushing in, interrupting Hatfield.

"No need to worry about that now," he announced. "Lord, you got to admit you were wrong in blamin' the killin's and raids on the Lipans. The Karankawas done it, disguised as Much Feathers' braves. How about shakin' hands with the Chief to show the feud's over?"

"I'm game, if Much Feathers is. Yuh've showed us, Jim."

Much Feathers was glad to shake hands with the leader of the cowmen. He had held his braves in, seeking a peaceful solution, and was obviously relieved that the fight was over.

"What say we go after them Karankawa devils and that renegade Murphy, Jim?" suggested Lord.

"That's my idea," said the Ranger. "We'll need more men, though, before we lock horns with 'em in that canyon."

"Our reinforcements'll be here in a few hours."

"Yeah, but they'll be gone by that time."

Hatfield swung to Much Feathers, speaking to him in

Lipan and sign language. He had suggested that the Lipans ride with the cowmen in pursuit of the Karankawas and their white chief.

The Chief nodded. But Rodriguez jumped up and down in anger.

"No, no!" he shouted. "You cannot mak' ze Lipans to fight for you!"

"Shut up, Rodriguez," ordered the Ranger. "Yuh're worse'n a sand flea."

Shorty and two men were left to care for the still unconscious Addison. The Ranger got his forces together. Lord led the contingent of cowmen, while the stout Much Feathers brought his braves along. They headed toward the mountains, on the trail of the Karankawas.

Hatfield did not know about the screened passage through which Corey Addison had gone. But he had watched the retreat of the foe, and he was certain there must be other entrances to the hidden canyon. The enemy had left some sign as they made straight for the passage, instead of taking their usual roundabout route to lose their tracks near the Lipan village. Murphy had been in a hurry.

With Hatfield and Lipan scouts ahead, they moved quickly in. Trained, keen eyes picked out the drops of dried blood which had led Corey Addison on. After they had reached the seemingly impenetrable wall of rock, Hatfield found a fresh little drop, perhaps from the same source.

"Murph's wound opened in the fight," he thought, "or it might be a wounded Karankawa or hoss left it!"

The Lipans seemed to know about the narrow pass, although it was not until Hatfield discovered it for himself that they admitted it.

"They went through here, boys. Let's go."

But Much Feathers shook his venerable head. The Lipans stood behind their chief, unmoving.

"See, zey weel not go!" cried Rodriguez triumphantly. "Zat ees haunted canyon. A Lipan who goes een, nevair come out!"

"Haunted by Karankawas," growled Hatfield. He recalled the roaring of the underground stream. Perhaps that, too, would keep the superstitious savages from the canyon, even before the Karankawas had been there. "Reckon that's why he chose it to hide 'em in," he mused.

"Wait here, then," said Hatfield to Much Feathers. "I'm goin' to scout through."

Carefully, followed by picked cowmen with ready guns, the big Ranger made his way afoot through the tunnel. He expected a shot at any moment, and was ready to drop back to his allies, but no attack came, and he penetrated on and on until he came into the Haunted Canyon.

"They've flown the coop, Lord," he told the rancher, as they surveyed the deserted rocks and the leavings of the foe.

The day was running out. The cowmen were worn to a frazzle from many hours of riding, hunting Corey Addison. More important, their horses must have rest. Food and drink, and sleep were imperative.

Hatfield moved down the canyon, checking the fact that the Karankawas were gone. Then he left the narrow passage, and found that the enemy had fled west into the mountain fastnesses. When he returned to Lord and the ranchers, they were lounging at the cave, some bathing in the cool waters of the underground river, others dozing or eating.

The Ranger restlessly hunted about the spot. He went into the cavern, and with a piece of candle he found stuck to the wall, found the bed where Ab Murphy must have lain when he was wounded. The floor and the walls were of reddish clay, a matrix holding veins of darker materials.

Curiously, the Ranger examined the bare, uneven substrata. Near Murphy's bed, with some dried bloodstains on

the clay, was an empty whisky bottle. He squatted near the wall, the flickering yellow flame of the candle sending eerie stabs of light about him.

As he looked further at the wall, his alert eyes noted some queer marks, perhaps a half inch across, sunk in the clay.

"What do yuh make of this, Lord?" he asked the big rancher, as the chief of the cowmen came in, stooping with his height.

"Huh! Looks like little targets, don't they?"

They were, indeed, like miniature targets, with the rings and center sunk in the clay.

The puzzled the Ranger. He went out, and in the dying light, moved down the Haunted Canyon, examining the walls, thinking, always thinking.

"We'll go after 'em at dawn," he muttered.

Tired out, the men all agreed to the Ranger's suggestion, and rode away, scattering to their own ranches. . . .

It was close to dawn when Tim Roberts, owner of the Circle 5 and Ken Lord's lifelong friend and range comrade, started awake.

Years of living on the Frontier, usually in danger, had sharpened Roberts' senses and he always slept on a hair-trigger. His eyes were wide in the faint stream of moonlight coming in his open windows. He lay there, listening, his wife gently sleeping at his side.

Ranch tasks had kept Roberts from riding out with Ken Lord. He had been out on his range when the message had come, but he intended to join his neighbor later this morning. He was well along in years, and must rest. He turned his lean body over, so that he could get his better ear up and identify the sounds which had startled him.

"Hosses in the yard!" he muttered, and quietly got out of bed, and tiptoed over to the side window.

Vague shapes showed there, against the moon sky. Horsemen were swinging a circle about his home. He

didn't make out any feathers but the light glinted on bare torsos, oiled with bear grease.

"Injuns!" he thought, and leaped to his guns, shouting the alarm.

Those outside heard him and jumping from their mustangs, dashed to the house. Burning brands flamed, and as Roberts turned to blast at them with his double-barreled shotgun, the red light came up and his wife screamed in alarm.

A giant figure with a face darkly stained and painted in fierce lines, and with his long legs covered by buckskin leggins and moccasins, tore through in the wake of a horde of sharp-faced, howling red killers. Carbine in hand, he poured slugs into the moving, shifting Roberts, driven back against the wall.

Strange orders were bellowed from the big leader's taut lips. With Roberts falling, riddled, dead, he turned and rushed out, followed by his men.

Some of the torches that had been flung against the wooden walls were taking hold. From the bunkhouse came Roberts' cowboys, with pistols and shotguns, to defend the ranch. In the confusion, they opened fire, and the Indians replied. Horseholders dashed up, leading the mustangs to their Indian riders. The Karankawas leaped on their steeds and dashed off into the night in the trail of their giant chief.

Behind they left Tim Roberts, dead, a wounded waddy, and the burning house, in which the stricken widow wailed her grief. . . .

News of the tragedy caught up with Ken Lord and Jim Hatfield as they realized that the Karankawas and their white boss had doubled back south through the hills. A messenger found them at noon the following day.

The Ranger's strong face was dark with the blood of anger.

"They're strikin' in spite of everything, Lord!" he

shouted. "We better git back before more of yore friends die!"

Lord was stricken at the loss of Roberts, his old trail-mate and range partner.

Much Feathers and his Lipans, avoiding Haunted Canyon, had come with them, helping to trail the Karankawas. Now they swung and cut back for the range.

"I don't like this, Lord," growled the Ranger. "I can't read it all straight yet. But I got a hunch. Best thing we can do is collect everybody at the Square L, and set a big guard till we catch up with Murphy and his Karankawas. Otherwise they'll pick yuh off one at a time."

"You're right, Jim! This is awful! Pore Tim. Pore Molly." Lord was broken up at the death of his best friend. His face was lined with anguish.

"Looks like they're goin' after certain men, now," went on Hatfield gravely. "We got to save as many lives as we can, Lord. When we are on the home stretch we'll send messengers to every ranch roundabouts, tellin' 'em to fetch their women and kids to yore home."

CHAPTER XVI

Siege

Dark had fallen when the weary riders who had gone in search of Corey Addison and had found tragedy reached the big Square L. Lights burned in the living-room. Lord had despatched a number of his waddies in various directions, to direct the other ranchers to hurry at once to the Square L. It was still early in the evening, and Hatfield, after caring for Goldy, went inside and found that Corey Addison had been brought in and was being nursed by Jenny and her mother.

"Is he conscious?" asked Hatfield, looking down into the girl's pretty, worried eyes.

Jenny nodded. "Yes, he's spoken to us, Jim. But he's awfully weak. He's been terribly beaten."

The Ranger strode over to the semi-darkened bedroom at the east side of the ambling adobe house. Addison lay there, on his back. Hatfield bent over him, seeing Corey's lips move.

"They—they say you got me out, Jim! I'll—never forget—"

"Save yore breath, feller," said Hatfield. "Yuh'd have done the same for me. Yuh got any serious hurts?"

"I—don't think so," whispered Addison. "They—tortured me—Ab Murphy and some strange Injuns. Karan—somethin' that sounded like that—"

"Karankawas." The Ranger nodded. "Murphy imported 'em from across the Rio Grande, I believe. They laid it on the Lipans, after attackin' the ranches."

He touched Addison's hand, and left him to Jenny's ministrations. Mrs. Lord was sure that Corey would quickly recover, that rest, food, and care would soon bring back his youthful strength. He had no mortal wound. Ab Murphy and his Karankawas had enjoyed watching him die slowly, of thirst and exposure.

Hatfield needed warm food and rest himself. The wound he had taken in Culver, at the Carousel when he had sought to arrest Murphy, was healing, but it was stiff and hurt at times. It had drained some of his reserve though it was but a flesh injury.

After he had eaten and was on the front porch, smoking, Lord's rancher neighbors began pulling in with their families, most of them in buckboards, a few on horseback. Ole Larsen and Drew Hagen had been out with Lord, but their folks were brought in by aides. Frank Wells of the 1-2, the Browns of the BB, and the rest arrived, with only one family missing.

"Where's the Inces?" growled Lord, after checking up around ten P.M.

The Ince ranch was farthest off, on the northeast corner of the big range. Lord thought they should be at the Square L by that time. It was half an hour later that gunfire was heard in the darkness, out from the Square L. Hatfield and thirty riders mounted and sped forth, over the rolling range toward the hubbub.

A quarter mile out they saw a wagon coming, drawn by two fast grays, ghostly in the moonlight. It was moving at careening speed over the bumpy stretch toward Lord's. The driver was whipping the horses to their utmost burst of speed, and as they sighted the vehicle with its human freight, someone fired a revolver three times into the air.

"I believe that's Mill Ince and his wife and kids!" cried Ken Lord, who had insisted on coming out with the scouting party.

He roared to his rancher neighbor, and they galloped to meet the wagon.

Miller Ince, a tall fellow with a gray mustache and deep-set eyes, was breathing hard from the terrific exertion he had been through. Sweat poured off his bronzed face.

"Injuns!" he panted. "They're out, Lord! I got yore message and we started. Luckily I seen 'em comin' over the north ridge. Looked like a hundred of 'em! We done hid and they swept past, headin' for my place, I reckon. I whipped up and figgered we was safe, but Becky seen 'em comin', when we was almost in! Couple of their scouts come up with us, but we fit 'em off. They laid back to report and bring up their main gang."

"And here they come!" cried Hatfield, unshipping his Colt. "Get goin', Ince. Make for the ranch!"

They lined out. Dark figures of swiftly riding savages broke over the eastern rise, tearing at them. Lord opened fire, and the Ranger's Colt began to roar. The cowboys

shot at the attackers, falling back as they made sure Ince was on his way.

The Karankawas drove them all the way to the Square L yard. They circled, their wild warwhoops ringing in the night.

Hatfield was all ready for them. He had collected a large force at the Square L, and their volleys sang thick as wasps at the circling, hard-riding Karankawas. Seeing this strength, the Indians did not remain. With a burst of bullets, they streaked off into the darkness, headed west.

The ordinary cowpony could not keep up with such mustangs and with such riders. In the night it would have been foolhardy to expend energy and lives in pursuit. The Ranger held back the men who wished to start after the Karankawas.

"Lucky for us they had to rest their horses and themselves, after the chase we give 'em and hittin' Roberts' Circle Five," he told Lord. "That give us time to bring yore neighbors in to safety. They must be hidin' in a new spot, prob'ly close enough to strike after it gets dark on the range. They won't go back to Haunted Canyon."

He set sentinels for the night, and then turned in, with the bulk of the fugitives gathered at the Square L.

"They'll have to chew this over and decide what to do next," he thought, as he rolled over in his bunk to sleep. "It's their move. . . ."

Hatfield awoke in the morning, rested, refreshed. His wound felt better, and after a big, hot breakfast served him in the kitchen by Jenny's pretty hands, he went in to look at Corey Addison.

Care and sleep had done wonders for Addison, too. His face and arms and legs were still swollen and scarred from insect bites and the pricking knife points of the Karankawas, who had enjoyed the sport of seeing him quiver.

"I'll be up in a day or two, Jim," promised Addison, "and we'll go get them redskins. And Ab Murphy, too, cuss him." His voice was stronger and there was ginger in his young eyes.

"Did yuh see anybody else, 'sides Murph and the Karankawas?" inquired Hatfield, "while yuh was at the canyon?"

Addison shook his head. "Wait—I didn't see nobody, Jim, although come to think of it, Murphy said somethin' about his 'chief,' finishin' you off. He mentioned yuh. He shore hates yore insides."

"I see."

That bore out Hatfield's ideas. He had collected evidence. There was someone in Culver who had jumped to Murphy's assistance at the Carousel. The report from the Roberts' tragedy had come in full to him, and he had heard of the giant Karankawa chief who had led that horrible raid. There were other things, too, which he had stored in his quick brain, and which he was holding for the proper moment.

Through Lord and his rancher friends, the Ranger sent out scouting cowboys to patrol the range for some miles around the Square L houses during the daylight hours. He ordered that any sign picked up be transmitted to him at once.

The Indians had hidden their trail well. He was able to follow it for a time, checking the fact that it turned north eventually, but then he lost it. He returned to the Square L after noon, and ate there. Corey Addison was sitting up, and his appetite had returned.

About three o'clock, one of the Square L waddies rode in, dusty from his long miles of patrol. He reported to Ken Lord and Hatfield, who were in the main room of the big house, surrounded by the ranch families. Children played outside in the yard, and there were plenty of feminine hands to do the baking and housework necessary for such a large gathering.

"Boss," reported the cowboy, "I didn't see no Injuns, but I come on four skinned beefs. The best cuts of meat was gone. They was dumped into a bush-covered draw, but the coyotes and buzzards was so thick I smelt the remains out. They was our cows."

"How long dead?" asked the Ranger.

"Oh, since dawn, mebbe."

"Bueno." Hatfield was pleased. "The Karankawas have to eat, like everybody else. Tell me just where yuh found the hides."

It was five or six miles north of the Square L buildings. The Ranger inquired about water.

"The crik comes through some rocky hills up there," Lord informed him. "Yeah, there's sev'ral small canyons in there where they could hide."

"Fine," said Hatfield. "We'll start before it's light in the mornin'. We'll hide our main forces, scout out the Karankawas, and then hit."

The rest of the day was spent in furbishing guns and equipment. The Ranger, aware that the Karankawas had to eat and drink like all men, had been sure they would betray their whereabouts.

"Murph's waitin' for orders from his chief," he mused. "It's sort of stumped 'em, us all bein' together here."

After dark, he despatched a messenger to Chief Much Feathers. The Lipans hated Karankawas. Without exposing his plan, the Ranger told Much Feathers to be on hand with his fighting braves, connecting with the cowmen near the rocky little hills through which the creek had cut its bed.

"It'll give Much Feathers time to make the rendezvous," he thought, "without givin' anybody a chance to warn the Karankawas."

They turned in early, to be ready for the search and fray.

At three A.M., they were up, the fighting men of the range, ready to be led by their general, Jim Hatfield, the Texas Ranger. After they had eaten, he spoke to them briefly, as they gathered before him in the big living-room.

In the candlelight, they saw the glint of the silver star, set on the silver circle, the famous emblem of the great Texas Rangers.

"Yuh're a Ranger, then!" cried Lord.

"Yes, suh. My right handle is Jim Hatfield, gents, and I'm from Austin headquarters. Cap'n Bill McDowell sent me here to look into the trouble."

"Jim Hatfield!" exclaimed Ken Lord. "Why, I should've knowed it or guessed it! Yuh're too dogged good for a run-of-the-mill range detective! We've all heard tell of yuh, Hatfield."

"Thanks. Usually I like to work quiet-like, without shootin' off my mouth, till things are lined up. That's why I give a false handle."

He did not add that it was his custom to keep his identity from the public until he had sewed up his case.

"We're goin' out, boys," he went on, "and try to capture them Karankawas and their white leaders. Murphy's one of 'em. We'll give him a chance to surrender, before we open fire—that's the Ranger way. Remember to obey yore orders. Don't make any unnecessary noise and when the light comes up, make shore all equipment that might shine is covered as yuh move."

He had to leave a guard at the Square L, to protect the women and children. With sixty cowboys, and their rancher bosses, Hatfield rode north from the Square L on his mission. Men who knew every square inch of the terrain, from chasing steers across it and hunting them in the chaparral, led the way to the draws and hills near the spot where the Square L waddy had found the remains of the beef cows taken by the Karankawas.

Here they hid, waiting for the first rays of dawn. The sky was just graying when Hatfield sighted a band of Indians approaching from the west. He rode out to greet Chief Much Feathers with forty of his Lipan braves behind him.

Speaking with the chief, now their ally, Hatfield learned that his messenger had arrived at midnight. Much Feathers had come, on his own authority, to help his white allies. Neither Paul Fuller, the Lipan agent, nor Rodriguez, his aide, had been at the Lipan village.

By sign language and the Lipan that he knew, Hatfield explained the situation, and Much Feathers nodded vigorously.

"Karankawas no good," grunted the Chief. "Lipans help."

Much Feathers picked out, at Hatfield's request, half a dozen of his best scouts, lithe young braves who would smell out the foe. The new dawn was at hand, lighting the tense faces of the cowmen and their red allies.

"Well, dang my hide!" exclaimed Ken Lord. "How'd you git here!"

It was Corey Addison to whom he was speaking. The young man grinned. He was looking better, and the swellings on his face and limbs had reduced. With the connivance of some of his waddy pals, Corey had sneaked out the window and ridden along with the fighting party.

"I didn't mean to miss the fun, Boss," he declared. "I'm all right. I can fight and ride. I was scared yuh'd say no if I asked, so I just came along."

"All right," growled Lord. "But see yuh don't get that handsome hide of yores punctured. Jenny and her ma have made my ears ring ever since I sent yuh out alone on that trip."

Hatfield grinned at Addison, and started off with his Indian scouts, afoot, into the hills.

CHAPTER XVII

Karankawas

Keeping off the skyline as the sun came up, for two hours the Lipans moved like dogs hunting a scent. The party crept up the slopes, over shale and through thorned bush.

But though the country was rough here, it was nothing like the swale of the huge mountain fastnesses in which

the Haunted Canyon stood. The Ranger knew that the Karankawas would have difficulty in staying hidden for long, with such scouts after them. He thought they must move, perhaps every night concealing themselves in a different spot.

The Ranger had left his spurred boots and big hat back with Goldy. He wore moccasins and had tied his jet-black hair with his bandanna. His scouting was as good or better than the best the Indians offered. Beady black eyes, a grunt now and then, showed that the Lipans appreciated his skill, and the clever brain of the white man.

It was Hatfield himself who touched the sub-chief's bronzed, muscular arm. They flattened out, holding their breath as they listened and peered into the shadowy depths of a little canyon which branched off from the creek's waterway.

The Lipan brave nodded. Inching forward, Hatfield could peer through the thorny mesquite at the brink of the split. Below, he sighted a fierce-faced, tall Karankawa, chewing on a cold joint of beef. His keen ears caught the faint murmur of voices over the soft rustle of the wind and the purling of the stream beyond.

The Ranger signaled the Lipans to stay put and, silently withdrawing, hurried back to summon his forces.

"There's two ways out of that canyon," Lord informed him, when he had described the spot where he had found the Karankawas.

"Much Feathers and his Lipans can hold the upper exit," said Hatfield. "You and yore boys cover the front along the crik. I'll take a few picked men from both sides to line the brink."

An hour later they were in position. Hatfield was up on the south bank of the split. With his loaded Colts ready, he gave the signal.

Gunfire immediately opened up, and wild warwhoops, as the Karankawas sprang to arms. Hatfield slid down a steep bank, and plunged into the center of the narrow can-

yon. Several Lipans followed him, guns ready, and half a dozen cowboys came after.

The Karankawas' camp was two hundred yards below, toward the creek. Turning that way, with his Colt up, the Ranger sighted Ab Murphy, screaming commands in Karankawa, as his big fighters charged Lord and Addison and the cowmen at the widening mouth.

Heavy rifles, shotguns, carbines and pistols were bellying. Lipans were seeping down from the upper gap as Murphy shrieked to his Indians to turn and escape by the other gap. The Karankawas obeyed, breaking back under Lord's stinging fire.

Ab Murphy was in the lead. He had a pistol in one hand and had evidently recovered from the worst effects of his wound, for he moved fast. Up a little side draw were over a hundred mustangs, the mounts of the Karankawas. Hatfield, taking cover behind some big fallen boulders with his Lipans and cowboys, undertook to prevent them from reaching their horses.

"Murph!" shouted the Ranger. "Throw down and put yore paws in the air!"

Ab Murphy turned on him, then, seeing his arch-foe, the Texas Ranger. Hordes of huge Karankawa braves came behind him, and Murphy's dark eyes were filled with his burning hate. A sardonic grin lighted his lean face as he saw Hatfield with but a handful of men at his back.

He bellowed to his braves, and charged, his Colt roaring. The Ranger, having given Murphy a chance to surrender, had to open fire. A slug from Murphy's gun slapped across the rock, inches from his eyes. His first shot went wild, as he felt the stinging particles in his face.

But his brain was cool, his muscles coordinating perfectly.

Men were shooting and yelling around him, and the slugs flew thick and fast. Hatfield wanted Murphy, the white leader. He rose up, took careful aim as Murphy

tried for him again, and fired. Ab Murphy suddenly checked in his swift run up the canyon. He flexed back, his arms dropping. A bluish hole showed between the angry, burning eyes, and the curses that shrilled in his throat broke off short.

Then he went down. The Karankawas began to howl, as they saw their leader fall. Much Feathers appeared, leading his main band of Lipans. From behind the bunching Karankawas came Ken Lord and his cowmen. For moments the Karankawas sought a way out, but there was none. No longer coordinated by Murphy, they broke up into small bunches, some trying to climb the canyon wall and escape.

Discipline gone, they were swept up by the Ranger and his cohorts. Prisoners were taken, and within minutes the Karankawas were done, smashed by the strategy and tactics of Jim Hatfield.

The Ranger hunted through the fierce-eyed prisoners for the giant chief who had, as reported, led the murderous raid on the Circle 5, killing Tim Roberts. But he could locate no such savage.

He nodded, muttering to himself:

"Reckon I figgered right!"

The day was drawing to a close as Ken Lord and his rancher neighbors gathered at the Big Square L to celebrate their victory over the Karankawas, and over the solution of the range mysteries which had so troubled them.

Drinks and food were in order, and there was tall talk of the big fight at the draw, where Hatfield had trapped the Indians. Wounds had been dressed, and cowboy guards had the disarmed foe corralled nearby.

"Here's a toast to Jim Hatfield, the best Ranger of 'em all!" cried Ken Lord, raising his glass.

Hatfield stood near the open front door. Such praise was apt to embarrass him, and he blinked as the ranchers

cheered him, and glanced out the open door. The sun was low, still brilliant. The air was warm, the west wind a hot breath from the desert.

"We ain't quite finished yet, gents," he drawled.

He had seen two riders coming hell-for-leather toward the Square L, from the west. They had just splashed their horses across the creek and were galloping to the front porch. He recognized big Paul Fuller, the Lipan agent, in the lead. Coming in Fuller's wake was his Man Friday, Rodriguez.

"What yuh mean, Jim?" inquired Lord curiously.

"Well," said Hatfield, "Ab Murphy led them Karankawas most of the time, boys. He herded 'em, and spoke their tongue. But there was someone above him, a man that Murphy called his boss. When Murph was wounded and too weak to ride much, this hombre fixed hisself up as a Karankawa and killed Tim Roberts."

"Yuh savvy who he is?" growled Lord. "Yuh mean he was a white man, too."

Hatfield nodded. Fuller and Rodriguez were in the dooryard and the tall agent threw himself from his lathered horse and came up the steps in one bound. The breed dismounted more slowly. He took a black bag, which he had been carrying in front of him, and paused at the side of the steps.

Then the Ranger's attention focused on Fuller.

"What's the meaning of this?" bellowed the Lipan agent.

His face was beet-red, and he was shaking with anger. The split lip trembled and the signet ring with its jade circles twirled on his long middle finger.

"Meanin' of what, Fuller?" inquired Hatfield.

"Why, Lord, you led my Lipans into a crazy battle against some roving savages!" declared Fuller hotly. "You had no right to do such a thing."

"I done it," said Hatfield. "It was a good job, too, Fuller."

The glinting eyes of the Indian agent fixed him. They touched on the silver star and silver circle, emblem of the great Texas Rangers.

"A Ranger ought to know better than to foment such bloodthirsty doings among Indians," Fuller told him contemptuously. "So you lied to us, Hayes. You're from Austin."

"I sort of run around yuh—circles, mebbe, Fuller," drawled Hatfield.

Fuller frowned. He was in a mean mood. Hatfield took a step toward the big agent.

"Where in Hades was you, Fuller, all the time?" Lord said.

"I've been hunting in the mountains," replied the agent with dignity.

From the corner of his eye, Hatfield saw Rodriguez, the breed, slide with his sinuous gait back to the stoop. The dark-faced assistant of the Indian agent stood there, staring through the wide doorway at the gathering. He gave several loud coughs, and Fuller glanced around at him.

"There'll be trouble over this affair, Lord," insisted Fuller. "You can't get away with it. Who were the Indians you so cruelly attacked and egged Much Feathers on to strike?"

"Karankawas, Fuller," answered Lord. "A bunch of outlaw renegades who fixed themselves up like Lipans and killed my friends. Ab Murphy led 'em, dressed like one."

"Karankawas!" exclaimed Fuller. "Why, that tribe ceased to exist during the Civil War! You must be mad, Lord."

"Nope," said Lord. "This gang escaped into Mexico, and somebody fetched 'em to Haunted Canyon, where they hid, comin' out to hit us."

His attention drawn by Fuller, Hatfield felt a worried sensation in his alert mind. It was about Rodriguez, and he glanced around once more as the breed coughed meaningly at the stoop.

"What's wrong?" he wondered, his ears filled with Fuller's angry mouthings.

Suddenly he realized what it was.

"That black bag's gone!" he thought, and swinging, he hustled out to confront Rodriguez.

No, the bag which the assistant had had with him was nowhere in sight, and Rodriguez looked up into his gray-green eyes with a worried expression he was unable to conceal. He did not have the strength of Murphy or Fuller, and he was uneasy, shaking behind his mask.

"Where's that bag, Rodriguez?" demanded Hatfield, as the breed's flickering eyes dropped from his steady gaze, dropped to the Texas Ranger star pinned to the big fellow's shirt.

"Senor—bag? What bag ees eet?"

Rodriguez was a coward—that was plain. Now that he knew the truth, Hatfield remembered how Rodriguez had sought to delay them, hold back the Lipans from helping to search out the Haunted Canyon.

Hatfield's strong, slim hand snatched at the scrawny wrist of the breed.

"Pronto, now. Yuh hide it under the house?"

He guessed by the start, by the roll of the man's eyes, that he had hit it aright.

"I don't savvy—" began the breed.

"Come on," growled Hatfield. "I'm takin' yuh inside. Yuh'll sit there till yuh remember."

Rodriguez was terrified. He pulled back, digging his high heels into the dirt, and began screaming in a high-pitched voice.

"Senor Full-air! Help! Senor Full-air!"

Hatfield had him up on the veranda.

He was afraid of the big Ranger, but he feared death more. Rodriguez was as lithe as a leopard. He twisted his body down and around, and Hatfield caught the glint of the light on the thin-bladed knife the breed whipped from

under his trouser leg, starting the point up to rip the Ranger's middle.

Hatfield fell back, for his life, as the terrible point cut at his shirt and scratched his hide. Then he ripped back and up on Rodriguez's wrist, doubling the screaming breed over. There was a sharp crack, as the man's arm broke.

Rodriguez fell on his face, shrieking. The fight had gone out of him, as Hatfield stood over him, Colt drawn.

"Let him alone, Ranger!" shouted Fuller, rushing out on the porch.

The eyes of the tall officer were dark.

"Go back inside and set down, Fuller."

"I take no orders from such as you!" defied Fuller.

He broke off, biting his lip as the Ranger Colt stared at him.

"Hold him under a gun inside, Lord," commanded Hatfield. He spurred Rodriguez with his toe. "Get up, cuss you, and fetch out that bag. Pronto, now."

CHAPTER XVIII

Chief

Gripping his snapped forearm, sobbing, the broken breed got shakily to his feet, and staggered around to the side of the house. Like many Western abodes, there were sections of lattice work closing in the space under the floors. It helped keep out skunks and such pests, but the holes let the air circulate for coolness.

The Square L yard was deserted. The cowboys were out, guarding the Indian captives, or inside listening to the confab.

Rodriguez whimpered, pointing to the first section of crisscrossed wooden slats.

"Get it!" ordered Hatfield.

The breed used his uninjured hand and pulled the light wood section away. Gingerly he brought out the black bag.

"Hurry, senor," he chattered. "She go off een five minutes!"

Hatfield seized the bag from the breed's shaking hand.

"Stay out in front where I can see yuh," he growled ferociously, glaring at the breed. "If yuh try to escape I'll run yuh down even if it's all the way to the hot place!"

Hurrying to the front, he mounted Fuller's saddled, ready horse, and galloped off toward the creek. A couple of minutes later the curious ranchers saw him tearing back. And as they all watched, there was a violent explosion which threw up water, rocks and dirt high into the air.

Rodriguez cowered by the steps, and Hatfield pushed him into the main room, stood him up before the meeting. Paul Fuller, trembling with his burning rage, sat stiffly in a chair against the wall. His fingers played with his signet ring, while his split lip jumped like a rabbit's tail.

"Boys," began the Ranger, slouched by the doorway, "I've figgered most of it out. There's only a few details missin', which Rodriguez'll supply, I'm shore." His face softened a bit in humor as he stared at the trembling breed. "Yore trouble here was caused by a man who was a hog for power and money. That explosion you just heard was a dynamite bomb, which Rodriguez slipped under yore floor when he come up, the last try the hombre I'm talkin' about made for yuh. It might have worked. Most of the range owners are here, close together in this room.

"This feller, the chief of all the devilment, knew Injuns and Ab Murphy figgered out together how to win the Lipan reservation lands, and they wanted the west half of yore range as well."

"Why?" asked Ken Lord.

"'Cause there's rich copper ores all through this

section," replied the Ranger. "Enough to make a man king of the world." He saw Rodriguez start, and added, "I noted some streaks of gold in Haunted Canyon, too."

"Si," whispered the breed, his frightened eyes flicking from the Ranger to Fuller and back. "Copp-aire, and gold, si. Ees what zey weesh."

"The deposits crop up here and there, specially back in Haunted Canyon," continued the Ranger coolly. "I seen some streaks in that draw, too, where we caught up with the Karankawas. Most of the copper's in red oxide form and its hue don't show up much agin masses of native red rock in these parts. As for the gold, it's quartz veins, mixed with copper ores: Say, how'd yuh mean to use them Karankawas, once yuh got the range? Work 'em in the mines?"

He was looking at Paul Fuller when he asked the question, but it was Rodriguez who replied.

"No, Senor Rangaire. Zat was my job. Zere are plenty peons across the Rio Grande in Mexico. I would deal weeth zeir bosses and hire zem cheap. Karankawas would be zeir guards."

"Slave-drivin' eh?" grunted the Ranger. "That's been done plenty. The Lipans were peaceful. Much Feathers wouldn't let his young braves get out of hand. But the Karankawas shore filled the bill."

The picture was complete, save that he had not yet named the chief perpetrator of the outrages.

"Ab Murphy killed Johnny Teale, Addison's cowboy pard," Hatfield went on. "Murphy and his Karankawas shot Griggs, the rancher, too. They struck as ordered. But they needed a white leader with 'em, to guide 'em and see they didn't expose themselves. Murphy was usually it. When he was wounded, his boss substituted for him on the Roberts' attack. Now and then they stole steers for food off'n yore range, or a bunch of mustangs for ridin'.

"It took me a while to git on the track of the big chief.

Several clues helped. Somebody in Culver helped Murphy escape, and this party was out huntin'. Then some queer little marks I seen in that cavern at the Haunted Canyon cinched it for me! Look at him—he's always playin' with that signet ring on his left hand!"

He pointed quickly at Paul Fuller. The Indian agent glared. His body was stiff and his cheeks dark with the blood of fury.

"Fuller!" shouted Lord. "Yuh mean that Fuller's the sidewinder who sicked them Karankawas on us?"

"Yes, gents." Hatfield nodded. "He was at the Haunted Canyon, just before we come along. No doubt squattin' there, talkin' and makin' plans with Murphy, who was wounded and weak. While he spoke, Fuller kept jabbin' his ring into the clay of the wall. The ring left little target marks. I figgered what it was, after I had time to think it over.

"Fuller's yore man. He knowed that if the copper and gold was discovered on Lipan land, the stuff would go to the Indians, and some to you ranchers, as the ores crop up all through here. So he figgered on havin' the Lipans moved. A few attacks by Karankawas fixed up like Much Feathers' braves would start yuh agitin' for it, force the Government to shift the reservation. Then, when it was opened to settlement, Fuller would grab it, havin' dummies file on it for him, the usual way."

Rodriguez was staring up into the Ranger's eyes.

"You—you are a devil, senior," he gasped. "You savvy eet all!"

"Now, the Lipans'll benefit from the ore on their land," said the Ranger. "Yore range is wuth plenty, too, folks. The Lipans'll need a new agent—"

At that instant, his swollen ego unable to bear the strain of arrest and disgrace, Paul Fuller struck.

The big Indian agent gave a pent-up shriek of furious hate. Across the room stood his arch-foe, Jim Hatfield, the

Texas Ranger, who had run him to earth, ruined his nearly-won plans.

"You lying dog!" screamed Fuller.

He was swift, as he thrust a great hand inside his shirt neck and whipped out his gun. Even as he made his play he threw himself off his chair sideward. Ken Lord and the ranchers had been fascinated by Hatfield's talk, and Fuller had seized his chance.

Hatfield's slim hand moved so fast it was a blur. The blue-black Ranger Colt leaped from its supple holster, the hammer back under his thumb, cocking as it rose. Fuller's first slug tore within an inch of Hatfield's temple. The Ranger felt its wind, and heard the thud as it hit the wall.

But it did not rattle his shot. Taking the important moment needed for accurate aim, he got off his lead as Paul Fuller sought to finish him with his following bullet.

The crouched, powerful Indian agent suddenly froze where he was. A strange expression crossed his face as the heavy revolver echoed in the room. Only breaths of time had passed as the fight opened, flared and ended.

Fuller squatted where he was for an instant, then his gun arm dropped and the Colt clanked metallically on the floor. He wavered from side to side, then fell over on the right, crumpled in death.

Ken Lord bounded over, kicked the gun away from the agent's hand, and checked him.

"Right through the heart, Ranger!" he growled.

The gray-green eyes, dark as an icy sea, lightened. Jim Hatfield silently blew smoke from his Colt barrel and slowly let the big gun, emblem of Ranger might, slide back into its holster.

"Karankawas?" cried Captain Bill McDowell, astounded. "Why I fit them devils when I was a boy! That was piratin' and raidin' on the East Coast. They was s'posed to have been wiped out durin' the War Between the States."

"No, suh," replied Jim Hatfield. "A bunch got away. Reckon the war had folks too excited to keep close tabs."

He was back at Austin Headquarters, reporting on his trip to Culberson.

"This Fuller and his man Murphy are dead, Cap'n," went on Hatfield, looking down.

"Bueno. Save the State the cost of a trial. The Karanka-was'll be shipped somewheres so they can't do no more harm. And as for that copper and gold set-up, why, we'll have to see that the next Lipan agent is an honest man, Jim."

"Yes, suh. I know one who'd fill the bill. His name's Corey Addison. I told him I'd get him the job. He's hitchin' up with Ken Lord's daughter Jenny, and he could use the appointment."

"Reckon' we can fix it," promised McDowell.

It was rare for Hatfield to ask a favor, and then it was always for someone else, who deserved it.

Having heard all the details, the Ranger Captain cleared his gruff throat and rattled the report on his desk.

"There's more Injuns—white ones, this time," he remarked delicately. "Yuh want a furlough, Hatfield?"

"Yes, suh—" As McDowell blinked in surprise, he added, "I'll take it wherever that report says there's trouble brewin', Cap'n Bill."

McDowell grinned. "It's all yores. The Law of Texas is mighty majestic, Jim. But I reckon yuh'll uphold it, as always."

It wasn't long before the Big Ranger, spruced up and ready to ride, shook hands with McDowell. The Ranger chief watched the golden sorrel, with his great rider, move away from Headquarters, carrying Lone Star justice to the distant reaches of the land.

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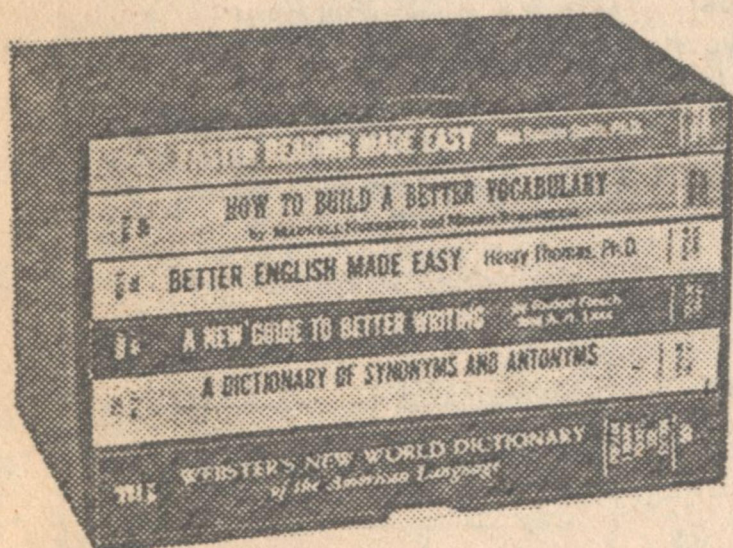
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